

Interview with John Schumacher

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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

St. Cloud State University Archives

Interviewed by David Overy

Overy ([00:00:01](#)):

Jim Gray, he does this for [inaudible 00:00:02]--

Schumacher ([00:00:02](#)):

Anything else, or are you all set there?

Overy ([00:00:02](#)):

There's, it's all ready. Mr. Schumacher, when and where were you born?

Schumacher ([00:00:14](#)):

I was born in Loretto, Minnesota, which is about 15 miles outside of Minneapolis, and my dad moved to the town of Pierz and Little Falls simultaneously in my high school years, so I called Little Falls home because I did go to Little Falls High School. He was a game warden back at that time and was just in the service, and he was stationed at Piers for one year, then Little Falls. I went through Little Falls High School and graduated, and I was too young to enter the service yet, so I was the manager of the Minneapolis Star Journal Tribune distribution point here, which back at that time, was about 1,000 papers a day, until my age and time caught up to me to go into service. It was in August of '43, and I wound up in Fort Hood, North Campwood, Texas for basic training.

Overy ([00:01:17](#)):

You were drafted?

Schumacher ([00:01:18](#)):

I was drafted. Well, there was no enlistments anymore.

Overy ([00:01:21](#)):

Oh, I thought you--

Schumacher ([00:01:22](#)):

Enlistments at that time were cut off, you could volunteer or just leave it as it goes. Wouldn't have made any difference to me if I'd have been drafted or volunteered or not, because I still would've gone at the time scheduled. I was screened as a cadet at Fort Snelling at the induction center, but somebody where the wires got crossed, I wound up in a tank destroyer unit. Talking about basic, while in basic, I asked for a transfer to the Air Force, which I did receive, and went through all the formalities of testing for what crew position I'd wind up with. I wound up as a gunner, I was about 18, 19 years old, went through gunnery training at Tyndall Field, Florida, OTU and it was overseas training, and met the crew in Mitchell Field, no, Westover Field, Massachusetts. About in August of '44, we were on our way to Europe by way of these orders, Marrakech, Africa, Tunis, [inaudible 00:02:34]. We were flying out of the 451st Bomb Group, 727 Bomb squadron, and our missions were from Greece, Romania, to Germany itself. We had been on several missions, I can't give you the chronological order of them now unless I looked it up, and we had to be taken off the plane. That's when he flew, because we didn't have enough crews to make a full group, we were on support to the invasion of southern France for about two weeks. We stripped the planes and hauled ammunition and fuel to them, and after about two weeks of that, we got our planes rearmed, and got a few replacements, were back in fighting

combat missions again. Anyway, wound up we've been on a Vienna mission a few days before it, and there was a heavy flak of several planes lost. We were standing down one, next mission to Vienna, and then the next mission, we were number two slot of the squadron. One take-up everything was fine, but we got airborne, we had a siphon leak in our left fuel tank, had to abort, come back in, and take a standby plane. The standby plane put us in tail end Charlie, that's your seventh plane of the formation, and onto target, which was Vienna. Flak was really heavy that day, we had good overcast all the way until we got the target. At the target, beautiful sunny day, and they had a range of altitude and everything else. We were hit hard, we knew we were hit hard with an aircraft, where we were watching for fighters continually because we knew they were coming next. We had a couple of direct hits right through the bomb bay with a 155 that fortunately did not explode, but went right on through and siphoned all our gas. As bomb release time came, and something happened, a number two plane, he swiveled back, dropped his bombs on number six plane, which blew everybody out of the sky.

Overy ([00:05:02](#)):

He dropped the bombs on his own aircraft.

Schumacher ([00:05:05](#)):

On our own aircraft. Of course, bombs to bombs and fuel to fuel in one big explosion. After picking ourselves up from that, why, we were still flying, but then we caught on fire, and it was no time to stay with the plane, it was time to get out. We were about 50, 60 miles out of Vienna by that time, and we bailed out, and of course we had a greeting crowd of farmers waiting for us down there, pitchforks, and never saw what a double-barreled shotgun looked like, until you see it on your nose. They marched us back to a local jail, and the local officials were quizzing us and seeing what we had illegally with us and all that. The next day, why, we almost froze to death

that night, because it was a very outside jail, those there, they didn't have jails inside where you had heat or anything else. It was an open window with bars on it, big, thick door, and it was right out in the back yard, and this was the 13th of October, and it was cold just like it is here. The next day at noon about or later, because our boys were back up bombing again, they didn't move too much around from about 11:00 to 1:00, unless they knew for sure that there were no raids coming. They picked us up and took us to a [inaudible 00:06:30], where we were incarcerated in their local thing. Then from there, we were transported on over to the airport or rail station in Vienna, and started our tour as a [krikstofagnen 00:06:45] to Frankfurt.

Overy ([00:06:49](#)):

What was the creeks--

Schumacher ([00:06:50](#)):

Krikstofagnen, that's what we were known as, we were known as krikstofagnen, because prisoner of war is krikstofagnen. When you were getting a good taste of it, they jam you into a cubicle of the European car, and you just rode and sat out period, stayed where you were, where you were told to be. They didn't give us any food, they gave the soldiers food for the tour from there to Frankfurt, which was whatever the rations were at that time, it was bread and sausage. Anyway, we stole one of them, he got a little perturbed about that, and we sold part of his, but then they gave us a little bit too. Then we got into the rail station in Nurnberg, and one of the guards was kind enough to go get us some food out of the kitchen. Boy, that tasted good, we hadn't eaten for probably three days, and all it was was potatoes, but boy did that taste good. We slept for a couple hours, and got on the next train on to Frankfurt, we were going to [inaudible 00:08:01] or something like that, where the interrogation center was is where we were headed for. Well, in this, we had to transfer another train somewhere, and I don't know where, and it was

the wee hours in the morning we got on this train. There were some elderly people who were trying to get their baskets of vegetables and apples on the train, so us young snarks grabs it, carries it on for them, and they were oh so happy, and they gave us each an apple. They were so happy, and greeting us, thanking us. The light was very dim of course because of the bombing, until daylight came, and they saw who we were.

Overy ([00:08:38](#)):

What were your guards doing at this time, when you were helping?

Schumacher ([00:08:42](#)):

They didn't bother.

Overy ([00:08:43](#)):

They didn't bother you?

Schumacher ([00:08:43](#)):

No, as long as we were doing a good turn, they didn't bother. Now remember, we were all 18, 19-year-old kids. Our skipper was an old man, he was 21, 22 years old, or I guess maybe 23, I don't know, but the skipper and the engineer were the two oldest ones, they were the old men.

Overy ([00:08:58](#)):

Let me go back just a while. How many missions did you fly before you were shot down?

Schumacher ([00:09:05](#)):

13.

Overy ([00:09:05](#)):

13?

Schumacher ([00:09:06](#)):

We were on our 13th.

Overy ([00:09:06](#)):

On your 13th mission.

Schumacher ([00:09:07](#)):

Well, it'd have been 12, 13, if we'd have made it home, we'd have had 13, and right now we had credit for 12. On the Vienna, on a long mission, we got a double credit, but on what we call milk runs just a daily mission in a small town, it was a single mission. We were replenishing behind the lines in southern France, it was only counting a half mission because we are not really engaged in combat, but the others were all combat related emissions, why, you got one or two credits, depending on the distance, how many hours in the air, and the type of target it was and so forth.

Overy ([00:09:47](#)):

Once again, when you were on your bombing, you were based where?

Schumacher ([00:09:51](#)):

In Italy, [crosstalk 00:09:52] near [Foji 00:09:55], Italy. I don't remember the name of it. Oh, [Castelliano 00:09:59] is the name of the base that we were at. Now, if that's a town or province or what, but Castelliano was the name of the base that we were at.

Overy ([00:10:12](#)):

What was your job on the aircraft?

Schumacher ([00:10:14](#)):

I was a second engineer gunner, and second engineer, you just were assistant to the pilot if you were flying as an engineer. I had enough knowledge that I could fly as engineer.

Overy ([00:10:27](#)):

What does that mean, flying as engineer, taking care of the plane?

Schumacher ([00:10:31](#)):

The trim tabs or whatever, he directed you to pull the landing gear at the right time. When the pilot and copilot are both tied up, you filled in and watched your gauges to make sure that nothing was heating up, your manifold pressure was right and all this. If you did something wrong, you tried to correct it, and any internal malfunctions that would go haywire, you'd try to repair in air, if you knew how to do it.

Overy ([00:10:56](#)):

Were you pretty well trained to do that?

Schumacher ([00:10:58](#)):

Well, it was OJT type training.

Overy ([00:11:02](#)):

There was a lot of training.

Schumacher ([00:11:03](#)):

I had a good engineer, we had a real good engineer, he'd been on the flight line for two years, and he wanted to get into combat. He volunteered for combat. I had a very good experienced mechanic to show me what to do. In fact, the first time I went down on the line, they sent you down on the line to learn a little bit about an aircraft engine, and of course these old salt mechanics, they were tired of these kids coming down there and goofing things up. I got there half asleep and I said, "Well, sarge, what do you want me to do?" He says, "Here, put these in," so I diligently put in the spark plugs. He says, "What do you do with those that are left over?" and he looked at me kind of funny like. He said, "They go in the other side of the engine," and then he showed me, and he really went through. He spent two days with him, and I learned more

about that engine in those two days than I had worked there, and it helped when we got mechanical problems.

Overy ([00:12:02](#)):

Was most of your training in the States on gunnery, was that pretty much all you did?

Schumacher ([00:12:08](#)):

That is about it. Then in overseas training, this is where you got your job assignment, and I suppose because I was personally mechanically inclined, I got the job of assistant engineer. You could take anybody off the street and make them assistant engineer, but the thing is, when the pilot said you could fly with him without the engineering aboard, why, that gave you a little more credit. Most of the time, my time was spent in the waist.

Overy ([00:12:41](#)):

As a waist gunner.

Schumacher ([00:12:42](#)):

As a waist gunner, and boy, you'd man those guns, and I'd off-spell the ball gunner. The ball gunner I changed places, [crosstalk 00:12:50] because you can't sit down there like this.

Overy ([00:12:51](#)):

Yeah, it's down on your belly.

Schumacher ([00:12:55](#)):

Belly, yeah, one hanging down underneath there. I'd spell him out, because the other waist gunner, the radio operator, he was too big to get down there. But it worked out real well, we'd spell off about every half hour down there, and it'd make a lot of different rather than sitting down there all the time. Sometimes you might run a little longer or vice-versa, but basically that was what it amounted to.

Overy ([00:13:24](#)):

Did you think your training in the states was pretty adequate to what you had to do, or were you pretty unprepared once you got into combat?

Schumacher ([00:13:32](#)):

We knew what we had to do. Just like here, we had to bail out, we never had a practice jump. We had instructions on it, we got in the sling and got on the jumping ropes to see, by people that had made jumps, by people that had experienced it there, had been back from the CVI or had their missions behind them. They gave you a lot of good insight, because they had been there, they had been in the same thing, except they made it home. This I think was probably well-briefed, and of course we tried at that time, because the big thing was to get rid of Hitler, get rid of Japan. We were doing our utmost to learn what we could and do what we could, and to get it over with as fast as we could.

Overy ([00:14:23](#)):

When you were on your missions, before you were shot down, did you encounter much, any aircraft?

Schumacher ([00:14:29](#)):

Not too many.

Overy ([00:14:30](#)):

Not too many?

Schumacher ([00:14:32](#)):

Not too many. One mission we were down on, because if you had enough crews, you didn't have to fly everyone in, and they'd take a round robin, they got hit pretty hard with about 20 Messerschmitts, and we had to be down on that. Other than that, probably about a half dozen was

the most we had encountered at a time. See, they were down in pilots and fuel and everything else at that particular time. We got to over Yugoslavia one day, our group got two you never saw or heard of, bracketed your legs when everything opened up at one time, but we got them both anyway. We don't know, because you got about 14 planes shooting at it.

Overy ([00:15:15](#)):

What's the relationship like? You were with the same crew, what, for a couple months, huh?

Schumacher ([00:15:22](#)):

Well, we were married up together, I would say, in May.

Overy ([00:15:27](#)):

'44.

Schumacher ([00:15:28](#)):

We lived together until we were shot down on the 13th. One thing in our crew that was probably unique, the skipper says, "I just want you to stay on your straight and narrow, and don't give me guff." The engineer sort of looked after the enlisted men, which I was, that was when we were 18, 19-year-old kids. He left us do what we wanted to, but when he wanted us there and he wanted us in that way, we were there. We had a very good relationship as far as officers enlisted, and sure, we had our arguments. We saw in the picture here, we got tired of the plane and his harmonica, so we filled it up with wax, that was our light lieutenant.

Overy ([00:16:16](#)):

Who was this that was playing the harmonica then?

Schumacher ([00:16:16](#)):

The nose gunner, Joe Roman. He was a nose gunner, and he liked it as he laid in his bunk. He brought it back from leave, we had a week's leave after we got through our OT training. In fact

what happened, they said, "Okay, when you finish your hours in the year," we only had like about four hours or six hours to go in this, "You're on leave until a certain date." We went up that afternoon, I flew as engineer, and we didn't get to go a minimum, because it was a touch-and-go mission deal, we had to finish up one and got our hours in. I was flying engineer, and the rest of the guys turned their gear in. When we came down, closed off our training mission, we were on leave right now, and as soon as we closed out the book, why, we were on leave.

Overy ([00:17:08](#)):

This was in Florida?

Schumacher ([00:17:09](#)):

No, this was in Westover Field, Massachusetts.

Overy ([00:17:13](#)):

Oh, Massachusetts.

Schumacher ([00:17:13](#)):

Then it was just a matter of picking up our orders, and they had to cut them. They'd cut them when you completed, not before, they'd cut them as you completed. We had to wait for our orders, and that's where everybody was. Two of the guys lived in Boston and one in Philadelphia, it didn't take them long to get home. It took me two days, I guess, to get back.

Overy ([00:17:32](#)):

What did you think about being a young buck like that and being in the army in America? Was there fun involved, besides just training in there?

Schumacher ([00:17:41](#)):

Oh, yeah, you and your comradery of one another, everybody tried to help one another. Once in a while you get a cutthroat character or somebody in there, and they'd sort of ostracize them, and

usually your lead NCO in some way got rid of them one way or another. Most of them, I don't think you'd have the problems today, you'd have the problems today that you didn't have back at that time, because a lot, about half of these kids came right off the farm.

Overy ([00:18:08](#)):

Had do you ever been away from home before, really?

Schumacher ([00:18:11](#)):

No, I think probably a couple nights, something like that.

Overy ([00:18:16](#)):

Were you scared being away from home?

Schumacher ([00:18:17](#)):

No, it didn't bother any, we knew what the end result was and what we were trying to do. About the most I ever did was go to the St. Paul, I think, to a Tribune meeting for two or three days, but there's a lot of kids that did get homesick.

Overy ([00:18:37](#)):

You didn't get homesick though.

Schumacher ([00:18:38](#)):

Pardon?

Overy ([00:18:38](#)):

You didn't get homesick.

Schumacher ([00:18:39](#)):

I just didn't bother. Well, if I was, I didn't show it or it didn't bother me, but, boy, a lot of them would just sit there and cry like babies, never been away from home in their life, lived down on the back 40 or 120 or something. There was a kid from Tennessee, he walked from Fort Hood,

North Campwood, that's Gatesville, Texas, all the way back to Tennessee, he walked that whole distance, took him like three months. The sheriff went and picked him up, and sent him right back.

Overy ([00:19:09](#)):

Well, now that's really homesick, huh?

Schumacher ([00:19:13](#)):

Now, he had a hard time wearing shoes, he would kick those boots off every chance he had. In fact, if you didn't keep your eye on him-- And he didn't stay with us too long, they moved them off to another-- I don't know what they did with him, but I'll tell you, he had been in that unit, and they brought him back into it because he went AWOL from that training unit. They left him train with us for a couple weeks, then I don't know what they did with him. Maybe he took off AWOL again, I don't know, but I never did see him. He didn't have any money left, and he owed the government, they took his paying allowances and tied it up, so we used to buy him a candy bar. Money was short those days, \$50 a month, but that wasn't much. You didn't get 50, the end result was you probably got about 30 when you got down.

Overy ([00:20:06](#)):

Did you get along pretty well with the guys from different parts of the country?

Schumacher ([00:20:10](#)):

Oh yeah. You'd get a smart butt once in a while, but everybody caught onto it right away. Most of them would try to work one to the other. [crosstalk 00:20:19] That's why you see a lot of these films, the guy helping the other one, you help him along. You'll find that in your baton story too, where one helps the other along, even if they get hit themselves. You found that a lot, and I don't know if you'd have that today, I really don't. Too much I run into is survival for me, and the heck

with you, or something like that. Back at that time, if you're like in basic, for an example, whatever you were doing, everybody was trying to help you out. We had a guy from New York City who didn't like to take a bath. The first liberty we had, but we couldn't get over to the PX beer garden, but he got a bath about 2:00 in the morning, and the sarge happened to be just gone at that time, but he took a bath every day after that.

Overy ([00:20:10](#)):

You kind of forced him to take a bath.

Schumacher ([00:21:16](#)):

After I think it was a month or six weeks, the bar of soap they gave him still had his name on it. I think we used that whole bar then, but that's what you had. Everybody ganged together on something, but if somebody got out of line, they'd try to help him back in, but you didn't have too much out of line business, everybody was trying to get the same job done, and we went in for it. Of course, one thing when you're trained, trained, trained, which they're doing today, we knew we were training and we were in combat, period, we didn't have that much time. I never really finished basic training, we got shipped out about three or four weeks before our assigned end date of tank destroyer training, and would you believe, about of 800 men, there were like about 40 of us that knew how to drive a truck.

Overy ([00:22:08](#)):

Is that right?

Schumacher ([00:22:08](#)):

In basic training at Fort Hood, Texas. They expected or they wanted us to drive ammo trucks, so we'd go out and drive ammo trucks, but then we had to catch up with basic all day long. Our training officer stepped in, he said, "No, those guys have to get the basic instructions to them, but

give them some rest." 10:00 at night, we'd be back in those ammo trucks, hauling ammo off to the ranges again. We did this for about three weeks, and you're running night and day. Of course, we had good food, eat all you want.

Overy ([00:22:41](#)):

It sounds like things weren't very well-organized, and even at that point, they weren't.

Schumacher ([00:22:44](#)):

Well, they were organized, but the people like out of New York City, they didn't know how to even start a car. We wound up as snot-nosed kids, and so we had a guy from Minneapolis who was a beer truck driver, he gave us a lot of hints about this or that when we got into trucks, because I hadn't driven much in a truck. I'd driven a little bus and a couple of little trucks, and that's about it, gas trucks, so I knew how to handle them, but that's about it. We wound up as instructors to these people from New York, so they'd know how to drive a Jeep. Of course, then you got some hot rodders there, as soon as they knew how to put it from one gear to the other, they were-- We wouldn't ride with them, that's as simple as that, and they'd pull them off on the side until they'd get somebody that would quiet them down, and drive the way they're supposed to. But [crosstalk 00:23:37]--

Overy ([00:23:37](#)):

That certainly is one difference then between people in New York and people in the Middle West. Most people in Middle West, I think there's still probably people in New York City who don't know how to drive.

Schumacher ([00:23:46](#)):

I believe it, I believe that, because they can't afford a car. Some friends of ours, her brother was in New York, and it was just too expensive to own a car, because first before you could even buy

it, you had to find a place to put it. He lived in some kind of an apartment building right downtown, and it cost as much for that car as it did for his apartment. No, I would say we had a very good comradery and helpfulness and anything like that. I remember, because it was so hot in Texas, not being used to it when we first arrived, and they didn't want us to mix northerners in the sun and all. We were out in heat, and it was hot. Oh God, it was hot, I don't know what the temperature was, and there was a wood box out in the back end, and three or four of us were sitting out there, and I just zonked out. The next thing I knew, I was over in the sick bay. Well, what did they do to you in the sick bay? They'd give you a couple of aspirin and salt pills, and it was hotter in the barracks than outside, so we went and laid on the crosswalk outside. You're not used to that, it knocks you right off your feet, and there was no air conditioner in those days.

Overy ([00:24:59](#)):

No, not at all.

Schumacher ([00:25:02](#)):

And the barracks we had were just sheet board, they weren't even wood. The floor was wood and built on stilts, but they were just assembly line building right down the line, and cover them with tar paper, and that was it, just to give you a place to put your-- And boy, they'd get hot.

Overy ([00:25:24](#)):

I'll bet you.

Schumacher ([00:25:27](#)):

And of course, we're not used to it.

Overy ([00:25:28](#)):

I've got to get a drink. You were saying, on the day you were shot down, that what, you said at 105 shell came through the plane?

Schumacher ([00:25:45](#)):

Right through the gas tanks, right through the bomb bay, right through the fuel tanks, and imagine a five-inch shell going through and the fuel going right straight out. It didn't take long, I would say, and we were soaking full of 100-octane gas, all four of us in the back end were just reeking with it, and then a fire breaking out on the outboard engine.

Overy ([00:26:06](#)):

So what happened? Does the pilot give the command to abandon ship, or what happens?

Schumacher ([00:26:12](#)):

He gives the command, but we were out of communication, but our ball gunner got down with goggles so the gas didn't come through so fast. Because we knew something was wrong, he got down with his goggles on, you could watch up there, and then he thumbs out, so out we went. [Crosstalk 00:26:28] It didn't take us long to vacate, and we all were split right down the line, right one after the other. The skipper never knew if we were all out or not, he didn't know that until after he met us the next day if we got all out. The only one who was missing was our copilot.

Overy ([00:26:44](#)):

This was near Vienna, was it?

Schumacher ([00:26:47](#)):

About 40, 50 miles southwest of Vienna.

Overy ([00:26:55](#)):

Does anything particularly go through your mind in a situation like that?

Schumacher ([00:27:00](#)):

Your whole life.

Overy ([00:27:00](#)):

Your whole life?

Schumacher ([00:27:02](#)):

Your whole life, it's just like a fast film, you've got the fast film across there, you probably had three minutes from the time we were hit bad and we knew we were going down. That's when that film went by, and your whole life you remember right on through, it shines through you so quick that it's hard to explain it. It's really hard to explain it, because you undoubtedly must be figuring this is it. That's what we did, we figured this was it.

Overy ([00:27:30](#)):

Did you have any fear about jumping out of an airplane when you'd never done it before?

Schumacher ([00:27:36](#)):

No. Well, you want to make sure your harness was on. The big question is, is that chute all right? In fact, I just got a new chute that morning, a brand new one because they repacked them after every eight missions, or sorties, whatever. I had a temporary one, and they threw me a brand new one that morning. I said, "Where's my other one? It should be back now," he says, "You won't get that back. When you come back, you can have the pieces of it." Had a piece of shrapnel going in the seam, and tore the whole thing up.

Overy ([00:28:09](#)):

And you didn't know it.

Schumacher ([00:28:09](#)):

And didn't know it.

Overy ([00:28:09](#)):

Is that right?

Schumacher ([00:28:10](#)):

It was just shreds.

Overy ([00:28:14](#)):

Which is why they check them every once and a while.

Schumacher ([00:28:15](#)):

That's why about every, I think it was either the seventh or eighth mission or sortie the equivalent, and then they'd run to the packer and drag out a brand new one that day. We had flak vests, maybe that's what helped us, I don't know. I had a flak vest, because we had flak vests on that plane, standby plane stands there idling and so it's warmed up, so all you do is get in and take right off. We were wearing ours, we had carried them on from the other plane onto that plane, so we had a double batch of flak vests, so we had them laying all over the floor and everywhere else, so maybe that helped, I don't know. I had a hole beside me bigger than that window, the whole side of the plane was gone right beside me, and where it went to, I don't know, but it was gone.

Overy ([00:29:04](#)):

Now, this was the day that you were shot down.

Schumacher ([00:29:06](#)):

When we were shot down, yeah.

Overy ([00:29:08](#)):

I noticed downstairs a purple heart. Where were you wounded?

Schumacher ([00:29:11](#)):

I got shrapnel here.

Overy ([00:29:13](#)):

On a previous mission?

Schumacher ([00:29:14](#)):

No, this mission.

Overy ([00:29:15](#)):

On the mission-

Schumacher ([00:29:16](#)):

And I got a big gash in here, nothing real bad, except this darned plexiglass and steel. I was bothered with that for years, you'd catch it on a tee shirt, it'd keep coming out, and they can't-

Overy ([00:29:32](#)):

You just had little bits of pieces inside you, is that it?

Schumacher ([00:29:35](#)):

Yeah, and real bits, and they couldn't see the glass. They got the steel out, that was no problem, but they couldn't see the glass on the X-ray.

Overy ([00:29:44](#)):

Did it hurt you all the time with the glass?

Schumacher ([00:29:45](#)):

No, it didn't hurt at all, except when I would hook it with my shirt.

Overy ([00:29:50](#)):

Isn't that strange.

Schumacher ([00:29:52](#)):

But they're real small pieces. Even years afterwards, probably 10 or 15 years, there'd be like a blackhead that swells, and I knew right away what it was, take a tweezer and pinch it out and it'd be a little piece of glass or whatever. I don't know.

Overy ([00:30:10](#)):

It just kept working its way out.

Schumacher ([00:30:10](#)):

Working it's way out, but I don't think it was that deep. See that's where the flag suit didn't cover. And then it must've been placed in here some way, because I didn't get it my arm and I got a cut in my leg. That was the story of the purple heart. In fact, I even forgot about that, except that on the physical. "Mister where'd this come from?" "Oh, that was a piece of flak, last mission." I had a gouge and it was still festering. So the next thing I knew, it had a Purple Heart out of it. But see, this is another thing when you're a prisoner, after say three months, you cut yourself, you wouldn't heal. He didn't have the-- Whatever something was missing in your system. And it just sit there and fester, like if you scratch yourself or some minor injury. Like I say here, probably a two-inch slit in my leg. This here would get flustered. My buddy has his elbow blown up here on the knit pitcher, and we'd wrap that arm and wash out the bandages and put them back on, and it just didn't heal. It just stood still. It would be sort of reddish, Dole, reddish color, all the time. And we were always watching for infection and whatever way we could to get some hot water to have him soak that in. To keep it from an infection. And boy, a lot of times, you'd see that pus coming in there and you'd get whatever you can find. Probably an old fork or something to stick it [inaudible 00:31:50]. [crosstalk 00:31:50]

Overy ([00:30:10](#)):

Drain it out.

Schumacher ([00:31:51](#)):

Get that pus out of there so that-- It didn't have any medication. He'd go over to the first aide.

And they'd probably have a few new bandages for him and maybe it will solve for whatever they could put on it. But it was a-- This actually came from his gun, blew up. You're sitting in the nose trap like this. And that exposure from that aircraft over there blew his gun apart. Part of it was the gun part of the aircraft in is part of its shell. We don't know.

Overy ([00:32:22](#)):

So you were probably shot down by exploding pieces from your own aircraft.

Schumacher ([00:32:26](#)):

Well we've basically-- We lost one engine of our engine set. Cocked like this, and windmilling. Couldn't feather. Well, that took a drag.

Overy ([00:32:38](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Schumacher ([00:32:38](#)):

And the other one, he was having trouble with the other off-court engine and one that's really the power to the others. And of course they just got too overheated or so he knew he didn't have too much time left anyway, because of the instruments told them that. But the one that was windmilling, there's like a breakup and nothing you can do with it. It's sitting there half cocked.

Overy ([00:32:59](#)):

Is-- Did you hear quite a few stories about flying in formation and one of our plans of bombing another plane? [crosstalk 00:33:07]. That happened quite often, that you think?

Schumacher ([00:33:09](#)):

No, I wouldn't say quite often, but it happened. It happened more than our case. It happened to others.

Overy ([00:33:15](#)):

How do you know?

Schumacher ([00:33:16](#)):

The pilot could have been hit. Both of them could have been hit. Our skipper was one that, when we were slow taming here, what we call slow taming, or training timing in the states, or just rather than flying on George, he'd get one of us up there and learn how to fly that plane. In fact, we all had a point up with a landing with him. [crosstalk 00:33:37].

Overy ([00:33:16](#)):

So he trained his whole crew how to fly an airplane.

Schumacher ([00:33:38](#)):

He was training his whole crew how to fly. Of course, the first time I ever go, I'd be up like-- Keep the bubbles free, keep the bubbles free. But we got a couple hours here, a couple hours there, next one take their turn. And he'd land each one of us. So I figured we'd know enough that we could bring it in if we had to. And whether we-- Something happened, and it didn't happen to happen, but it could have happened very well. But when we lost them, we know that the copilot got out of his seat, but we lost communication. They think, the skipper thinks, that he was headed back to sea to tell us to get out. And he never arrived. Now we don't know. Maybe he got another burst of flak in there. We don't-- Maybe he got thrown out. We don't know.

Overy ([00:34:32](#)):

You never heard from him again.

Schumacher ([00:34:36](#)):

Never heard from him. And of course, the two in the military we had quite a few queries coming back and forth and nothing was ever found of him. And here just a couple years ago, we were planning a trip to Dayton, Ohio, and do a reunion. And my dad got sick, so we had to cancel out. In the meantime, I contacted his sisters in Indiana. And his dad was still living there and he wanted to be sure to stop in. He'd call back and be sure to stop in. And my dad got sick and we didn't make the trip after all. But it's--

Overy ([00:35:16](#)):

You said you came down and there were farmers waiting for you.

Schumacher ([00:35:22](#)):

You could just see them like ants coming in from all over. I landed and I had probably two or three minutes by myself before they found me. I landed in a cornfield. I crawled into a corn shock and tried to hide as much as I could. I had lost my shoes, my flying boots. I was barefoot. So, I took a pair of shoes and I tied them to my D ring. [Inaudible 00:35:47]. I got them tied up to my D ring, which is on your shoe. In case I ever did bail out that I'd have shoes to wear and I did have shoes to wear. And I was putting-- I had one shoe on, so you can see how much time I had. But boy, they were mad. They were perturbed. We had some constraints in that town three days in a row or every other day for six days. They had you sitting in there.

Overy ([00:36:11](#)):

[crosstalk 00:36:11] In their little town there, or in Vienna?

Schumacher ([00:36:13](#)):

No, in Vienna, but this ricocheted on out. But anyway, I sat there putting my shoes on. I had one on and I was just getting ready to put the other one on. Then a double barrel shotgun sat right there.

Overy ([00:36:25](#)):

Right in the middle of your nose.

Schumacher ([00:36:28](#)):

Looked like two big stool pipes. But that's when we started our tours and they marched us into the little hamlet. I don't remember the name of the hamlet. It was probably a mile away.

Overy ([00:36:45](#)):

But you weren't hurt at all by the civilians?

Schumacher ([00:36:47](#)):

No.

Overy ([00:36:48](#)):

They didn't really [crosstalk 00:36:49] [inaudible 00:36:49].

Schumacher ([00:36:49](#)):

The one did, with a shot gun. He rammed that shotgun in my back, knocked me right straight down on the face. I got up and I didn't know if I should get up and head up and he did it again. One about that time, the Vermont, that's your--

Overy ([00:36:49](#)):

Army people.

Schumacher ([00:37:02](#)):

Army people got there. They took over and that stopped it there. I don't know what would've happened if they hadn't come because, boy, I still wonder if how would that feel once in a while. With the arthritis coming in, boy, he walked out, you know what you pick? Double barrel shotgun, you rammed that into your back.

Overy ([00:37:22](#)):

Did you come down within the site of any of your buddies?

Schumacher ([00:37:27](#)):

We could see one another down the line. The skipper was the last one on of course, and he didn't know if he should go then, but he—They-- Were two of us. It was a bomb in there. He and I were in this one town and the cop was the next guy. They went to the next town. There were just two towns that we were in. And the towns, they were only three miles apart. Something like that, four miles apart. They weren't very far. Then they picked them up, they picked those up first and then picked us up on the way into the airfield at Vienna.

Overy ([00:38:04](#)):

So then they took you for interrogation. Is that right?

Schumacher ([00:38:07](#)):

Well after our trip-- I think it was the name of the town was Oberursel, it was just outside of Frankfurt. And that's where they interrogated it.

Overy ([00:38:14](#)):

How long was it between the time you were captured until you were interrogated?

Schumacher ([00:38:23](#)):

I suppose five or six days.

Overy ([00:38:24](#)):

What did you do in the meantime? Just traveling?

Schumacher ([00:38:26](#)):

Traveling.

Overy ([00:38:27](#)):

Were you fed and looked after or no?

Schumacher ([00:38:30](#)):

No, they-- We got in the-- Well, this first little jail I was in, sometime at sundown, we could see this little hand pushes two packages of grapes up. Two bunches of grapes up.

Overy ([00:38:47](#)):

You were in jail you said?

Schumacher ([00:38:47](#)):

In the jail was a little hammock, and you could see this little old wrinkled hand gave us two bunches of grapes. No, out of her garden or whatever. And that was our total source of food for that day and the next day. We got to the German airfield and I don't remember what we ate, but we ate there.

Overy ([00:39:07](#)):

How many of you were there here?

Schumacher ([00:39:09](#)):

Well, it was our crew, which are the nine. And I think there-- We picked up a couple of strays. Now, when you pick up strays, you don't know you ostracize them immediately.

Overy ([00:39:20](#)):

You don't know who they are.

Schumacher ([00:39:22](#)):

That's right. You don't know who they are, so you ostracize them right away. So that's why I can only say our nine, when we stayed right together, we did eat at that airfield. I don't know if it was that night or the next night that we got on the train to Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and this Oberursel this little town of Oberursel. In that route at Nuremberg is where the Austrian guard went and got us two buckets of Dats and sweets.

Overy ([00:39:54](#)):

It'd be like her sugar beat?

Schumacher ([00:39:56](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's the way he had about 12 of us. And like I said, anybody that was not of our cruel way, you were any-- Watching out what you said and where they could hear or anything like that.

Overy ([00:40:10](#)):

Were you put on a box car or regular passenger car?

Schumacher ([00:40:14](#)):

We were in a passenger car then. Their cubicle, Europe is cubicle.

Overy ([00:40:23](#)):

With the doors on either side?

Schumacher ([00:40:25](#)):

Yeah. They-- Well wait the one-- I don't think we had a door going outside on ours. They wouldn't give us a door on the outside. The only other door was in the hallway. Maybe there was a door there. I don't remember. But anyway, we worked, it was barred if there was a door there. And they had two guards in the room with us and then the guards in the hall. They were not to

leave that area, going to the-- What we could gather from the internal corrections sign language or whatever you want to call it. We have that all the way to Frankfurt. Then on this train we took out of Frankfurt. That's the one I was talking about, the apple business. That was sort of an open car deal. Half open part of it, just benches, like a school bus deal. We had three seating on each side. So you were kind of crammed in there. That's where we helped these people unload their apples and groceries. But then we left Oberursel to go to our stalag. We were in the same type of a car, but it was all prisoners. The whole thing was prisoners. I think they had 60 of us in there.

Overy ([00:41:40](#)):

In one big car or?

Schumacher ([00:41:42](#)):

It was a passenger car, old European passenger car. Let's put it that way. So you were crowded in there, but yeah, I don't remember what we got for food. I don't think we got anything. Other than what we got before we left Oberursel. That wasn't much. Took us two days or three days to get to, to what they call Stalag 4. He called [inaudible 00:00:42:07]. That's where I showed you on the map. It's way up in the part of which is now Poland. And then we marched from that rail station into the town. Into the camp, which is about two miles. Then of course they were well heavily guarded, all garnered all the time. But we left there when they had to evacuate ahead of the Russians, by-- They had box cars. The European box cars, if you know what a 40 and eight box car is like, they're mighty small and you got 60 or more of us in those. There was not room for everybody to sit down. They threw a few bales of straw in there while we found it to be better to keep the straw in bales. So he took blankets, our GI blanket, we were given a GI blanket, while we were prisoner, and a German blanket. When they were church, they took our GI blanket. And took our shoelaces out and made a hammock out of it.

Overy ([00:43:13](#)):

Oh yeah.

Schumacher ([00:43:15](#)):

Corner to corner. And that's where I froze my feet. I got dysentery and passed out and then they put me back up in there, and I-- Right there was a window and I froze my feet. And we rode that for 10 days. From Stalag 4 to Barth.

Overy ([00:43:34](#)):

And how long were you at Stalag 4?

Schumacher ([00:43:39](#)):

Let's see. About October 20th, I suppose. To January 15th, 20th and the Russians were making their big push.

Overy ([00:43:49](#)):

What was life like in that stalag?

Schumacher ([00:43:50](#)):

Well, we were pretty well left alone and we didn't have much for food. It was a pretty good camp. Well I wound up with half British in my room. He had a room with sign for 16 men. 6, 2, 4, 6, 8, 16 men. They had bunks built into the wall. Now these buildings were all prefab type buildings. Pre-built and then they just bolt it together. And they had 24 to 30 of us in one room. I think when we left there, we were about 30 in our room. Had no place else to put them, but see, only three trains came out of that camp. The other guys marched across the ice. North at 17. Marched for 100 days. Never had a place to go until they had down on moose bird. And in fact, a friend of mine lives out here by Camp Ripley. He was caught, captured in the Battle of the Bulge. Do you remember when that was?

Overy ([00:44:49](#)):

Sure.

Schumacher ([00:44:50](#)):

And he never did see a camp. They were farmhouses, farm barns or factories sometimes right out in an open field. I don't know how large his group was. It never did. But that was miserable in that box car for 10 days. And that's where I get dysentery. They gave me one--

Overy ([00:45:10](#)):

This was after you left Stalag 4?

Schumacher ([00:45:12](#)):

That's when I left Stalag 4. I was the-- I don't remember if I was the first or second train out. Why I was picked, I don't know, but they knew I was in a British compound and they were taken first. They just took the overflow out and they said, "You're just being relocated because of more room." Then we found out right after we left, that Russia-- We could hear the cannons. When we were sitting outside the steady team for seven days out in the field. And then even once a day, if you behave yourself to go and dump things, no water. And finally they-- What happened is that the rail line was blown up to steady team and Russian labors were rebuilding it. As soon as they got it put together well enough, we'd come through there with the same token, we were seeing refugee trains. And boy, those are pathetic. For women. Children. Men. Seemed like about every five minutes there'd be one dead one going by. Taking it off that train. And they came from that well, or where is your occupation was. And they had no place for to go with them.

Overy ([00:46:23](#)):

But being in the stall, people left you alone.

Schumacher ([00:46:27](#)):

And they left you alone pretty well. Except like I said before, periodically you'd have these-- They come in these and call your name and want look at you. [inaudible 00:46:42] did that in some. They had an old commandant there. He was pretty fair. It's calling for. I never did see the commandant because then he was a coordinator, American coordinator on that. But it was found out we had the [inaudible 00:46:57] was an elderly gentleman. He was quite fair.

Overy ([00:47:02](#)):

And you were there for something over two months.

Schumacher ([00:47:05](#)):

[inaudible 00:47:05].

Overy ([00:47:12](#)):

What-- In Stella Ford there was a segregation of officers enlisted, men. Was this--

Schumacher ([00:47:19](#)):

No enlisted. No officers there, period. They were all enlisted.

Overy ([00:47:23](#)):

All enlisted.

Schumacher ([00:47:23](#)):

It was definitely all enlisted. Then we moved to Stella one, which was an officer's camp.

Overy ([00:47:31](#)):

Hmm.

Schumacher ([00:47:32](#)):

Until they read, Germans started shoving the enlisted in there. We were in separate barracks. Our compound was part of north, one compound, and it was just a three-barrack unit. Then north compound three was also listed.

Overy ([00:47:54](#)):

So you went to Stalag 4 then Stalag 1.

Schumacher ([00:47:56](#)):

One, right. That's the way he flew out of back American air.

Overy ([00:48:03](#)):

I'm getting a little bit confused here. And so you went to Stalag 4 and then you went on a train.

Schumacher ([00:48:15](#)):

Yeah, we trained evacuation from the Russians got too close.

Overy ([00:48:20](#)):

Okay. Then you went to star lock one.

Schumacher ([00:48:23](#)):

Stalag 1, which is Barth.

Overy ([00:48:24](#)):

Okay. I'm just starting to get the sequence here.

Schumacher ([00:48:27](#)):

Barth and 1 are the same. And that's the common mistake. Barth and 1 are the same. And that was actually strictly an officer's knowledge. Some of the fellows I met on this trip, we were on, they were shot down. They went to the bar, they had no ill effects. For sure they were hungry a little bit, but, we got there the first day we got there, we had NES hall food, where they pulled all

the parcels and took the German food and they made some pretty good dishes out of it. And it was adequate. Like this-- Two of these guys, I got a chance to talk to quite explicitly with, they had no problems at all, because at this rate they were hungry a little bit once in a while. But they stayed on active duty. The rest of their delay retired.

Overy ([00:49:16](#)):

What were the conditions like being in Stalag 4? Let me-- I'm sorry. I'm getting all out of whack here. I remember reading your article that you were interrogated for seven days. Several days, and this was a Nuremberg.

Schumacher ([00:49:30](#)):

This is outside of Frankfurt and low tunnel, Oberursel was the interrogation center.

Overy ([00:49:34](#)):

What was that like? And what were they trying to do with you?

Schumacher ([00:49:39](#)):

Interrogation is to try and find any information they possibly could about your organization, where the troops were, who is there. Anything at all in military category. In fact they had a form letter or listing they wanted you to fill out. So he shows the form over to me and I write my name and serial number and that's it. Show it DICOM. And he said, we'll put the rest of it. I said, that's it, name, rank, and serial number. And then we had a little confrontation of words back and forth, and he says, "Well, you don't get any supper tonight if you don't fill it out." I said, "Well, I guess that's it I won't get any supper tonight." So they put me in solitary again, next morning comes up, nothing to eat. And the next morning they brought some porridge of some store. And about a half hour later, they came and got me and went back to the same interrogator. And he said, "Well, you going to fill it out or you want to go hungry again?" I said, "What I had so far, I said, it

wouldn't make much difference." The man, the interrogator was actually, had gone to in the state of Virginia grade school and high school. And he went back to Germany. Then we had started off the record a little bit quietly, and he said, "I'll pass you on." So the next day I got out of there then, and then we stay-- Were held there for about two days, but I was in and out, I think two or three times on different interrogations. They want to get all the information. Once in a while the guys are the same. They tell everything. One of the guys, they told them about a new crew. They cut into his sweater. And before, while he was interrogation, he wasn't saying anything. He said, "We got a new crew in here. Do you know him at all?" And nobody knew anything.

Overy ([00:51:27](#)):

Were there any-- Were you abused physically or verbally or anything during this interrogation?

Schumacher ([00:51:33](#)):

Not really. Like I said, this guy was educated in Virginia, and he was very, I think he was a very learning, man. I don't remember because that was just a snap. Those kids were half asleep and all the excitement of going on their own. Except the only thing I studied was him, name, rank and serial number. Just like here, name, rank and serial number. But I don't recall it unless they got that off a letter, there's my false name. They'd have to get that off a letter that I mail or else they knew it. One of the two.

Overy ([00:52:03](#)):

Were you pretty scared at this time?

Schumacher ([00:52:05](#)):

You get numb. You're just numb to it all. You just take it as it comes because you don't know what's going to happen next. You're hungry, you're tired. Just--

Overy ([00:52:12](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Schumacher ([00:52:15](#)):

Not having a shower, which you know, in your normal sequence, you had to shower every day, clean clothes. You have to hide ties to wash your clothes and all this bit while you're filthy, dirty, cold and miserable. And everything happened so fast. Quick. You just didn't-- You just took it as it came and forget about it. You didn't know what your expectancy would be. Next one could come up and boom, that's it because there was no charges like we have to our American people if they shoot somebody. What happens is a police officer shoots somebody out here in the street, he's put on furlough and, an investigation.

Overy ([00:52:55](#)):

Investigation.

Schumacher ([00:52:56](#)):

If there's no investigation then he probably gets a medal for it. [inaudible 00:53:02] jumped out of the window. It was a hop in the same camp. Saw it before. It wasn't the same barracks I was in, but it was down a ways. Happened that summer, when it was hot, had the windows wide open. Rather than walk out the door, he jumped out. The guards, boom, shot him dead right there.

Overy ([00:53:17](#)):

He was trying to escape.

Schumacher ([00:53:20](#)):

Yeah, and the guard was right back the same day, that he never even left his shift. So, life in different ways is irreverent. He didn't know. They had the upper hand on you. Regardless of what you're doing.

Overy ([00:53:38](#)):

You said at Stalag 4, you were hungry for a bit. What was daily life in that first start of that year? Not of the eating, what about sanitation. Did you have enough water? Shower? What was your general level of comfort there?

Schumacher ([00:53:58](#)):

Okay. The equipment stool, we would call it stool if there was rustic, was outside and that was the bath house out there. We had a couple of stools in the barracks and wash basin, but were not to use those, except at night. You have no hot water. Only once a week, when you get hot water, you learn how to bathe yourself out of one 14 quarter buckets of water. The way you do that is you get your two buckets for two guys. You soap up with one, you rinse with the second. And it works out.

Overy ([00:54:36](#)):

This was once a week?

Schumacher ([00:54:37](#)):

Once a week. So that was pretty good, especially he hadn't had the bath for a month.

Overy ([00:54:44](#)):

Did you guys use soap?

Schumacher ([00:54:46](#)):

It came in a red cross ditty bag through the Red Cross. There, we got T-shirt, shorts, and a couple pairs of socks. Or a pair of socks. And then what we had on that was our total clothing issue.

Overy ([00:55:02](#)):

Had your flight jacket, probably, didn't you?

Schumacher ([00:55:04](#)):

Flight jacket that we flew-- That we had, and I remember they took that away from me and gave me an overcoat or not. I don't remember now. I had an overcoat or army overcoat. I didn't-- They took my flight jacket away, because that would pertain to flying. Be easier to escape that way. So some of those had wires and that was one way of getting radio equipment in to us.

Overy ([00:55:04](#)):

I don't understand.

Schumacher ([00:55:33](#)):

They could make a radio, the old crystal radio.

Overy ([00:55:35](#)):

Sure.

Schumacher ([00:55:36](#)):

Guys were making these radios, and we had them in secret, in the barracks. One of these books have information about that. I never got involved in it. Then we could BBC, we knew what was happening because you asked the Germans, they never tell you anything. And some of these were made so small that they'd take a brick out of a wall or whatever, set it in there, that was a hiding place. So when you had to shape-

Overy ([00:56:03](#)):

Made your own crystal radio. Build it from nothing. 10 cans you've taken.

Schumacher ([00:56:09](#)):

I had a job one time and I was taking tin. The lid or a razor blade and see how far I could cut.

Just a wire out of that. Now where that went to, exactly, I don't know, but they would pass them around, and they needed this-- So many inches of this to be made into wire for these radios. And then once, twice a day, a visitor come from a different barracks. Lookouts and when lookout word came, to look out for watching if any Germans were around. Well, we didn't call them Germans. We called them goons. And then they get the news of the day. That was their news of the day. And they made it, it was some kind of a church or whatever the story is. They would stop by the gardens of the pig.

Overy ([00:56:56](#)):

So by word of mouth, you got the news.

Schumacher ([00:56:59](#)):

We got the news right up, as fast as they were getting it in England. We got it out there. And probably from the time that we received it on that little crystal radio, until we got it probably 10, 15 minutes. But they scattered different people, different ways. Each one take a different barracks or something. And I got a couple times of a day, the latest news, especially anything happening. Like the Roosevelt, the Battle of the Bulge, but that was a big, deeply [inaudible] when that Battle with the Bulge came out. And we knew they were going to be home for Christmas.

Overy ([00:57:31](#)):

Yeah.

Schumacher ([00:57:32](#)):

And then that million, that period, think that they were going good. And all of us in that.

Overy ([00:57:39](#)):

Tell me about-- Was there a kind of a resistance movement inside the cellar? With-- Some kind of organized resistance or obstruction to the Germans or?

Schumacher ([00:57:55](#)):

You were planning something, if anything was planned, you had a sequence to go through. See, we get down on a time element where we knew it was month to month. They said, don't take any chances of trying to break away or anything like that. Unless something drastically happens the other way, because it just be a matter of months. Just like they took our weapons away when we were flying. I think we only carried a 45 Showgirls, but they took those away from us about a month before we were shut down.

Overy ([00:58:25](#)):

I didn't know that.

Schumacher ([00:58:26](#)):

Because they, they were claiming they were shooting them as paratroopers because you were armed. So rather than take a chance with that, they just picked up all the weapons. So we didn't have a weapon in our camp. And we flew without sidearms for most of our missions.

Overy ([00:58:47](#)):

I didn't, I never heard that before.

Schumacher ([00:58:48](#)):

And this had to happen September or any part of September, but they actually picked them all up. So really, if you were going to try and escape or some sort or something, you had a system

digging into the command to find out. They want to know all your particulars that you just go out there harassing the Germans to make them stricter on everybody else or something like this. But then the word came down the last, I suppose in February, March, we were in Barth, especially with the news media, the way it was. That not to try anything because we were getting too close to the end and you're too weak to do anything.

Overy ([00:59:31](#)):

So this was pretty much the truth. Like the time you were put in prison camp to where they were just kind of a downplaying of any escape attempts.

Schumacher ([00:59:37](#)):

We didn't do escape attempts unless something drastically was happening, but just like here, how would you get from not being detected from way up in Barth, down to free country. The only one that no one is one that made it to Zygon which 24 escaped, and they shot 22 of them. He made it down the river.

Schumacher ([01:00:00](#)):

And that he made it down the river and into Sweden-- Or Finland. Finland it was. It's the only one they know of out of a group that escaped [inaudible 01:00:13]. And they do know he didn't make it. That's it, the others, they don't. Yeah. The story that Steve McQueen portrays-- What the heck is it?

Speaker 2 ([01:00:23](#)):

The Great Escape.

Schumacher ([01:00:23](#)):

The Great Escape. Okay. In that book, there's a picture of the monument to those guys that were shot for escaping. They turned the Geneva commissioner onto their own suiting, like Hitler did

with many things. And so consequently, it was kind of downplayed, really to try to escape in my period of time. But back when they had a lot of time to go, when they weren't even on the continent yet, guys were digging tunnels, elaborate tunnels, trying one thing or another underneath the hay racks and whatnot. And of course they were capturing them, [crosstalk 01:01:07]. They got so many days in the hole or whatever.

Overy ([01:01:09](#)):

Did you get any mail when you were in prison?

Schumacher ([01:01:10](#)):

None.

Overy ([01:01:10](#)):

Were you able to write anything out?

Schumacher ([01:01:13](#)):

We were allowed to write I think once a week. And then of course it was like a zip mail or fast mail deal where you fold it up through the Red Cross. And I guess my folks did receive some of the letters.

Overy ([01:01:28](#)):

But you never heard a word?

Schumacher ([01:01:30](#)):

No. I didn't know what was happening back then. Nobody knew what was happening. In fact, my folks got the word that I was POW about the 15th of December.

Overy ([01:01:41](#)):

Two months later?

Schumacher ([01:01:42](#)):

Over two months later, just before Christmas. I know my mother was saying it was just before Christmas that they got the word that I was-- And then I didn't call them until I got to London. We were allowed a free call through the Red Cross and I called and got them all out of bed, about four in the morning. But that was the only time you get the phone.

Overy ([01:02:06](#)):

Sure.

Schumacher ([01:02:07](#)):

You got to take your chance when you get the phone to get a line across and I called them. And then they didn't hear from me, that was in, 1st of June, I'd say, and I didn't get home until August. I got lost in London for two months. That's really what happened.

Overy ([01:02:28](#)):

You got lost for two months.

Schumacher ([01:02:30](#)):

I couldn't get transportation out. Every time they put me on a boat, it was dry dock, three of them. Got down to Barmouth, was able to get on that one. I signed up for the boat down there. It was all set to go on, and reported down, or return in and, oh that boats dry dock, got back to London and the sign up again, back in London. And I don't know where that one was at, but I went back to check in and had my grips in the bag and, all I had was just a duty bag because you didn't have nothing. And that one's canceled because that's on dry dock, finally got one out of Liverpool, about two weeks later.

Overy ([01:03:07](#)):

Where did you stay in the meantime?

Schumacher ([01:03:08](#)):

Stayed in the Red Cross Club.

Overy ([01:03:10](#)):

Hmm.

Schumacher ([01:03:11](#)):

10, 15 cents a night and stayed there.

Overy ([01:03:16](#)):

So why didn't they say you were AWOL or something?

Schumacher ([01:03:19](#)):

They couldn't, because I didn't know Oregon's main organization was in Italy. And all we had was a 5 by 8 card that we filled out ourselves. They didn't have my dog tag, one dog tag. So I didn't have that. And cause we got a whole new uniform, a whole new dress unit, extra clothes from France.

Overy ([01:03:41](#)):

And nobody goes looking for you or anything?

Schumacher ([01:03:42](#)):

No. I stayed in the-- The hotel I was in, in fact I tried to find London but I missed it. The NP station was just halfway down the block.

Overy ([01:03:51](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Schumacher ([01:03:51](#)):

I used to stop in and see the guys once in awhile, go over to eat with them or, but there was a female Red Cross hotel right behind ours, about four blocks, two blocks. And that's where we used to go over to eat all the time. They have better food than anybody else.

Overy ([01:04:08](#)):

(laughs).

Schumacher ([01:04:11](#)):

But they didn't want to pay us, and that was the hard thing, that was the hardest part is you get a couple of pounds from the Red Cross, but they wouldn't pay us because they wanted us to go home.

Overy ([01:04:11](#)):

True.

Schumacher ([01:04:24](#)):

And then when I got on a dry dock, I got a couple of pounds more because they couldn't get us out of there. But you didn't take much to live, you were just roaming London. I saw more than one of them in those days, tour up to start off the Piccadilly Circus or for Fangler and down on Buckingham palace, the whole tour around the whole countryside. The only thing I miss is going to Scotland. There was a group, we always had a group of people someplace along the line, you meet a new group. And there's a group, we went up to Scotland and they wanted me to go along and well, I'm supposed to be on the boat tomorrow, I said I better not go. That's [inaudible

01:05:09]

Overy ([01:05:10](#)):

You were talking about the Red Cross. Were they quite a bit of help in prison camp?

Schumacher ([01:05:17](#)):

Well, we never saw them, but we did get their parcels.

Overy ([01:05:20](#)):

That's what I meant.

Schumacher ([01:05:21](#)):

Then the Red Cross parcel, the blue book.

Overy ([01:05:25](#)):

I was looking at that. And that's what prompted the question that you've--

Schumacher ([01:05:29](#)):

This was a typical-- Now there were different numbers, this is parcel number 10. And that was a typical parcel. Now, we didn't get one a week, which was designed for you. You could exist, you could live very comfortably in this. We were lucky if we got a fourth, there were four people sharing one pack a week. If you got that much. And we had to-- See the great recipes we made here.

Overy ([01:06:00](#)):

Like what?

Schumacher ([01:06:01](#)):

Like chocolate pudding, out of D bars.

Overy ([01:06:06](#)):

Out of chocolate bars?

Schumacher ([01:06:12](#)):

Yeah. And the different parcels. But like I said, you didn't get all of them and then they would punch the cans before you got them to make sure you wouldn't keep it, so you'd eat it.

Overy ([01:06:23](#)):

So you'd eat it?

Schumacher ([01:06:23](#)):

So you would not save it up for trying to escape. And they saw that everything came in well punched.

Overy ([01:06:32](#)):

So that you had to eat it or it would spoil.

Schumacher ([01:06:33](#)):

Yeah. And like, a tin of Spam, same tin they got today. I'd get that. We tried to make them-- Two of us would try to make these 2-3 meals out of that. So we got potato that evening for meal. We'd take just a slice of that, put it on top of the potato and put it on the coals, and let it to get warm. And that was another thing, in the barracks, where we-- Both places, both camps-- You got two to four blocks of charcoal that are like a brick, six inches long, that was your fuel for that stove for the day. And they gave it to you by the days so you would-- Once in a while, they'd give two days ration, and boy, that wasn't much to keep that room heated, mostly, it was body heat.

Overy ([01:07:20](#)):

Would you get blankets?

Schumacher ([01:07:22](#)):

We had just two, one American and one German, and then whatever clothes you had, you wrapped up with everything. I was so cold so many times and in Stalag 4. The British were, had something else-- We'd gone double up in these bunks to, two to get the bunk. And then you'd get your blankets around, your clothes, around you. You were pretty comfortable. And your body heat from one another. You put head or toe to toe-- But they were quite long and so you had

plenty of room, so you only hit about halfway on each one. You can sleep pretty good that way. But other than that, it was so cold. And of course, you didn't have fuel burn at night. You just tried to save that for the daytime when you're up. And we wound up sleeping on the table and benches and then the floor for the first, oh golly, I don't know-- But it got so cold that we couldn't stake anywhere, we'd sit up there with all our clothes on, blankets over cause you couldn't lay down. It was just too cold to push your body against it. But then this guy from [inaudible 01:08:29], and one from Canada, they bunked together, and they'd say, you American yanks, they called us yanks, you yanks, get together up there in the rafters. And I don't know which one-- Missouri and I bunked together up there. But it was miserable.

Overy ([01:08:58](#)):

You made a comment about the British. You said you had some run ins with the British when you were in that--

Schumacher ([01:09:03](#)):

Totally different category of people. Some of them are-- Well, we had a good relation when we were in our tour or whatever. I don't know.

Overy ([01:09:12](#)):

Prison camp was bad.

Schumacher ([01:09:13](#)):

It wasn't that good.

Overy ([01:09:15](#)):

What was the problem?

Schumacher ([01:09:19](#)):

Perverts.

Overy ([01:09:19](#)):

What was that? Right?

Schumacher ([01:09:22](#)):

You run into them in the [inaudible 01:09:24] our house and whatnot. You know what I mean?

Overy ([01:09:30](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Schumacher ([01:09:30](#)):

He didn't-- He got to a point where we didn't trust any of them. Some of them are excellent men.

Like this one fellow, Doug, he was serving as a [inaudible 01:09:37]. And this one-- Another one-- He was good. He was pretty good. He was fair. And he used to [inaudible 01:09:44] a little

different, they way he did things were different. Cause something bothered him. He did was

called with him. We had this one smart Alec. I was trying to sneak something by when they call

him what he and another guy would call them the lovers right there, but wrote him in here as--

And it's called-- I'll call it what it was. We were laying on the floor and the nurse slips over and opens a window up here. We're laying on the floor in a cold air and then get cold out there. Well,

we got to have some fresh air with all these bodies in here, I was listening to, you get that thing

shut or you're going to go right out and you'll have a nation cool out there. And he closed it and

never had another problem with him again.

Overy ([01:10:32](#)):

So they were pretty-- They were homosexuals then?

Schumacher ([01:10:34](#)):

No, no. I would say, I wouldn't say, I shouldn't say a lot of them, but there were more than their share. I would say.

Overy ([01:10:44](#)):

And all living in the same, in the same--

Schumacher ([01:10:47](#)):

Environment?

Overy ([01:10:47](#)):

Environment.

Schumacher ([01:10:50](#)):

These two characters right here, that's way he wrote that.

Overy ([01:10:56](#)):

These two here?

Schumacher ([01:10:57](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's why Joel put that little-- Heroin in. And the first one offered me a place to stay and sleep in his bunk. That didn't last the night. He was a preacher, or so-called.

Pretty sure, wherever you want to refer to it as.

Overy ([01:11:19](#)):

What a disgusting thing to have in the midst of a distressing situation anyway.

Schumacher ([01:11:22](#)):

Well yeah. We had one limey there. We called them ladies right to their face when we get mad.

And I used to go to the American barracks a lot on the other side of the compound, a guy from Fergus Falls and he was content. He was thinking about all the money he was saving. He was content. He had a POW there, selling [inaudible 01:11:52]. God, you mean to tell me you'd sacrifice your freedom for all this? You know, here, I'm only an 18-year snot nose kid. This guy is probably 25, 28 years old, but I couldn't believe it. The war would carry on another two

months or whatever it was, or six months, whatever. He wanted-- He'd have so many pounds put away back in England for him. Just get me out-- (laughs)

Overy ([01:12:23](#)):

When you were in prison, were you pretty much hungry all the time?

Schumacher ([01:12:25](#)):

Well, what you do-- I learned this in the limey's-- Tea time. Have something hot. Of course, now we in the cold all the time. We got there, late October, 1st November. I would a cook a-- They get most of the hot water every hour out of the mess hall. And have a cup of coffee or tea, and they had powdered instant coffee. It's just enough to color it. So actually you were drinking hot water, is what you were. And probably you got a block of bread a day, about that big. That bread was so hard that you'd cut it with a dinner knife, not a cutting knife or bread knife, but a dinner knife. So thin, it was almost as thin as that sheet of paper. And you could put a little bit of spread or a little jelly or whatever had come in the parcel that you had. And you never put meat on that, because you'd save that for your main meal of the night, that held you pretty well for the night. But if he had about two of these till lunchtime, then lunchtime or whatever you could drive out of your parcel. You didn't get anything from the mess hall except hot water.

Overy ([01:13:34](#)):

So it wasn't really a mess hall then was it?

Schumacher ([01:13:36](#)):

There were big steam pots. And in the morning it was a jerky coffee, like an acorn coffee, if you've heard of that. Real syrupy. That was breakfast.

Overy ([01:13:53](#)):

Just a cup of that?

Schumacher ([01:13:54](#)):

Just a cup of that was all I got. We had two big pitchers, quite big pitchers, that was for our room. And then in the empty one, you take turns of course getting it and everything. When it hit back and in case there was leftovers and anything like that, when any time there was food of any sort, they head back to see if there was any leftovers and sometimes it come out pretty good on it.

Overy ([01:14:17](#)):

So is this where you got your bread rations and that's all?

Schumacher ([01:14:21](#)):

They give so many loaves to a room, I had said there was 24 of us in that room. I don't remember how many we got because then it measured out. And boy, that was a big thing to get the exact measurement.

Overy ([01:14:37](#)):

I'm sure.

Schumacher ([01:14:39](#)):

And when there's about four guys sitting there watching to see who's cutting that bread, get it exactly so. Then what you do is-- It was like cards on each piece and then deal you a down card and you match that. I don't remember exactly how-- In other words, you drew for your piece of bread for a person.

Overy ([01:15:03](#)):

To make it as fair as possible.

Schumacher ([01:15:06](#)):

Yeah. Try to get it so it's neutral. And boy that someone's going to argue with, or you know, this one that you got that little bit more, swing over a little bit to get a little bit more on this one. And you got half a dozen guys breathing down your neck, and you're trying to get a piece of bread with your dinner knife, go out on a stone and just scrape your dinner knife and get a little edge on it to cut. But then you did yourself-- You cut these little tiny, thin slices, so you program yourself about six of those a day. And that's what kept you going. I think they kept your hunger pangs down.

Overy ([01:15:44](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Schumacher ([01:15:45](#)):

You didn't want to exercise. We'd go out and walk the courtyard to keep your muscles loosened, but you walk up half a dozen times on there, you'd get too dang hungry.

Overy ([01:15:57](#)):

Sure.

Schumacher ([01:15:57](#)):

So you'd walk one or two trips around the compound and quit. Just be quiet. And usually you did that before you had a little snack, so you could have your little snack and go around again a couple hours later. So you should get at least two or three exercise periods a day.

Overy ([01:16:20](#)):

Was there always enough water to drink and get lots of good decent water?

Schumacher ([01:16:24](#)):

Well, I wouldn't say it was decent, but it was water. We had water to drink. And as far as I know it was, it didn't bother me. Maybe it did, but we didn't notice it. We were glad to have it. I don't recall any restriction on water whatsoever.

Overy ([01:16:41](#)):

You didn't have to work at all?

Schumacher ([01:16:42](#)):

No, they wouldn't even-- See we were Air Force. That's where the Luft comes in. The army side, practically all those work or some kind of work detail. We couldn't even volunteer for it. We wanted to. We were Air Force and the Air Force wanted to take care of the Air Force.

Overy ([01:17:10](#)):

Oh so you were in an air force prison camp?

Schumacher ([01:17:13](#)):

That's right. Trying to find this listing here. It's a good, maybe a better explanation than I can give you. It was a list. (silence). In fact, the air force, our American Air Force wanted to fly us back, but Eisenhower here, or whoever it was, our commander at that time, they will go by surface travel only. When actually the Air Force could have flown us all the way.

Overy ([01:18:06](#)):

Were there a lot of disagreements among the men?

Schumacher ([01:18:10](#)):

In respect to?

Overy ([01:18:12](#)):

Just generally, how did you get along together, in the park, on the British-- Did the men-- Here must have been an awful lot of tension and unhappiness in this situation.

Schumacher ([01:18:26](#)):

And there was a lot of arguments. There'd be a lot of arguments over little things. Like I said, cutting the bread would be an argument and sometimes it even comes to blows. And you know the POW magazine?

Overy ([01:18:38](#)):

Yeah, the blue one.

Schumacher ([01:18:41](#)):

It could come to blows, but most of the time to try to keep a low profile on it and take it as it comes because-- But irritation was very easy, especially when hunger was-- That can do a lot of things.

Overy ([01:19:04](#)):

Was there a prisoner board chain of command?

Schumacher ([01:19:08](#)):

Yeah. Elected.

Overy ([01:19:10](#)):

Elected?

Schumacher ([01:19:11](#)):

Elected, or the senior command. Ours was elected in solid board. Zamke, Carl Zamke, the flying ace, was the commander of Stalag 1. He was the commander there and nobody questioned him.

Overy ([01:19:28](#)):

Okay. And so that was the stalag where it was former officers camp.

Schumacher ([01:19:32](#)):

Yep.

Overy ([01:19:33](#)):

And then what about in Stalag 4?

Schumacher ([01:19:35](#)):

That was the elected sergeant.

Overy ([01:19:38](#)):

I see.

Schumacher ([01:19:40](#)):

[crosstalk 01:19:40] Senior Sergeant. And he was elected by the majority of the compound. This was all within the compound. First you get a barracks leader and then the barracks leader-- Then you work for a compound. This might explain a little bit about the-- Look, see here? Look. 1, 3, 4, 6. These are Air Force.

Overy ([01:19:59](#)):

I see. Okay.

Schumacher ([01:20:01](#)):

And then here are these others, they're Romanian. Stalag. This stalag is 17B, that would be army, mostly army. Not saying that some didn't get mixed in once in a while.

Overy ([01:20:16](#)):

I see.

Schumacher ([01:20:17](#)):

But [inaudible 01:20:18], you had both an unlisted camp and you had an officer camp back to back.

Overy ([01:20:25](#)):

(silence) What was your worst experience that you can think of as a prisoner of war? Was there something that really sticks out in your mind as really being bad? Or was it all pretty much--

Schumacher ([01:20:54](#)):

It was all pretty miserable because you live like dogs. Our dogs lived better than we did. I'm talking about an old shed I got down here and back. And that's the kind of quarters you lived in, and you kept it as clean as you could keep it for what you had. And other book, the big one-- But we had nothing to start with really. I think the thing that, probably most of all, was the fact that when I got enteric-- I was so sick and they don't care what happens. See like here, here's our-- This building, I was right in here. This is my barracks right here. I was right down in the sand. In this barracks right here. This is the part I was in.

Overy ([01:21:53](#)):

Hmm.

Schumacher ([01:21:53](#)):

I'm trying to find the room I was in. I'm not in that same room, but I was right next door to it.

Overy ([01:22:01](#)):

Where there any medical facilities for you when you have dysentery? Any treatment of any kind?

Schumacher ([01:22:05](#)):

We're in a boxcar.

Overy ([01:22:07](#)):

Oh, that's right.

Schumacher ([01:22:08](#)):

We were strictly in a box car. And if it did do and they had-- We didn't have any anyway. They just didn't have it. The way it would be, if you were-- Well, those that were shot up coming down, and they're all over the [inaudible 01:22:26] ground, they could get treatment. They'd get treatment, no problem at all. But the disease and whatnot, that's what I often wonder, it often sticks in the back of my mind or whatever happened or some contagious disease where they hit us? And it had gone through just like-- And we're all in the-- But here's the picture of dispensary surgery, south compound. Some of the guys broke a leg or arm or something playing football. They'd take them into town and fix them up and so forth.

Overy ([01:23:14](#)):

Was dysentery quite prevalent in the camp or not?

Schumacher ([01:23:22](#)):

Well, I know the guys on the road had it continually.

Overy ([01:23:25](#)):

So it must have been pretty bad when you're in close quarters?

Schumacher ([01:23:27](#)):

It was. But I know a lot of them had it and never said anything about it. They would have-- Here, this is us. This is how we lived in Stalag 1. I was in the next room to that. I'm not in that same room, but I'm in the next room. But we lived exactly the same as that is right there. I had a corner, and Joe had a corner over in the other room.

Overy ([01:23:54](#)):

Where's the stove? Or is it, is it pictured here?

Schumacher ([01:23:59](#)):

Stove's right there.

Overy ([01:24:01](#)):

That little thing?

Schumacher ([01:24:02](#)):

Yeah. Well you didn't have much of a pot in it either because you were only burning those two blocks of charcoal, or a block of charcoal at a time, you didn't want to burn too much. And anything else you'd get to burn, you'd burn. We had pictures in here. So this fallen picture, and I - The Russians came in down, they're doing something underneath the barracks, making sure there was no holes underneath there or whatnot. And they kicked the floor up and they passed a bunch of boards up. Throw them up in there. Somebody who could talk to them—Oh, Joe and I grabbed these, we made a double bed bunk out of them. I don't remember how we got the nails, if they were in the boards or what. And this one fella had a bar about that long, he, well, I don't know where it came from. We'd have a shake down. He said, what am I going to do with this bar? And he had chance to tuck it. I said, hold it in your hand. So there he's standing holding it in his hand. They searched him, puts his arm down, searched through all his bedding and everything else. They just keep on coming around. He stands with his bar in his hand. I don't know what I had in mind. I had something in mind that I wasn't supposed to have.

Overy ([01:25:16](#)):

[crosstalk 01:25:16]

Schumacher ([01:25:17](#)):

And then in fact his name was Brundage. His dad was editor of Cosmopolitan magazine at the time. There's one that-- He used to fly off the handle as well. Come on, calm down, you'll be back to daddy's hand before long. He was a gold tooth boy. Things would quiet down, but he'd get perturbed once in a while by something. But basically we would be confined in a closed area. Well you can imagine 40 guys in the room, like it shows they're living like animals.

Overy ([01:25:51](#)):

Was there anything funny that ever happened? Situations that in the horrible condition you were in, some kind of humorous thing that that really kind of helped keep you going? Did you laugh occasionally?

Schumacher ([01:26:07](#)):

Yeah. When we were in Stalag 4, had for some Canadians and English together and they believed in the Ouija board. Have you ever seen a Ouija board work?

Overy ([01:26:21](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Schumacher ([01:26:24](#)):

And I'd go in there and watch that Ouija board, only made certain people would come in to watch it. And that piece would slide over here, yeah, we're going to be out in two months. We'd go out of there hooting. But really other than that, it was more for just survival factors. And I can't think of anything except that-- They would-- We'd find anyone-- When the Germans turned over to the-- We went and broke down the fences. It was hard to understand that we were actually free. Of course, we were still in Germany, but we were not incarcerated, like we were.

Overy ([01:27:02](#)):

Tell about the liberation. What happened the day that you were free? Did you know it was coming or did it happen all of a sudden or what?

Schumacher ([01:27:11](#)):

No. Again go back to the news media-- We got that [inaudible 01:27:14] that we were moving on. We knew that we were pushed out of east Russia where we were staying. But we thought it was coming faster than what it was at that time. And I was not affiliated with the provisional headquarters. The commander was, at that point in time, but they were looking for a typist, and I could type. And that's how I got involved in the provisional headquarters. The first day that he turned it over to Colonel Zemke.

Overy ([01:27:47](#)):

I don't understand what's going on here.

Schumacher ([01:27:49](#)):

This was down in the end of it. The Germans are-- We are listening to the news media and they say it's getting closer to this and closer to that. When that Jeep arrived in our camp-- But before that, the day before that, the German commander turned the camp over to Colonel Zemke.

Overy ([01:28:05](#)):

That that was your commander?

Schumacher ([01:28:06](#)):

That was our commander, basically our commander, American commander. And the next day he wanted the staff there and he was looking for typist. I volunteered to go type cause I could do what you want. Well, there was nothing to do but that way we knew we'd be getting the inside track.

Overy ([01:28:27](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Schumacher ([01:28:29](#)):

And that was the extent of it. I think there's a picture in this book of them turning, giving the camp to the-- And some of the better guards came in and said goodbye to some of the guys that he had known, been bartering with and trading with and whatnot. And see the guys that were there longer got to know these guys. Well, we got to know a few of them, but not that well, we didn't have that much to trade. And they'd come in and say goodbye or whatever, good luck or whatever. They were, like one had an American uniform on, he was at the American lines, over his, under his German uniform. He wore the German uniform so far, then take it off and get in the American-- He wanted to be captured by Americans. And you didn't want to be caught by the Russians. So there was quite a jubilancy there. And they thought at first they were going to fight for camp and we were told for dig foxholes. They were to going to use-- When we dug the foxholes outside, one kid, in fact he's the one who took the pictures here. He wasn't digging too fast. He was laying in his bunk or on the floor there, and the Germans started blowing up their instalations. The second blow, he went out that window and he never saw a [inaudible 01:29:46]. Joe and I had made an L so if there was strafing and we could crawl from one to the other and the other group did an L the other way. So we had like an X, so if planes going, one way we could run back and forth.

Schumacher ([01:30:00](#)):

The plane's going one way. You could run back and forth.

Overy ([01:30:05](#)):

This was near Stettin? Is that--

Schumacher ([01:30:08](#)):

This is at Barth.

Overy ([01:30:09](#)):

At Barth?

Schumacher ([01:30:09](#)):

This is at Barth where we were incarcerated. Then I spent more time over at headquarters, because that's where all the information was coming from. The Russians were coming and meeting with Colonel Zemke and Zemke was trying to get-- First order the Russians did when they arrived, they told Zemke to, "Notify your people. You're moving out at 6:00 tonight to Russia." Boy, Zemke talked and talked and whatnot, and finally came into our room, he and another officer. He came in and he says, "Fellows, go on back to your barracks and get yourself ready because it looks like I'm not going to talk them out of this one." That's part of this deal right here where they used us for pawns. When they relented, the ninth hour about 5:00, we were marched out at 6:00, fall in at 6:00 that night. At 5:00, they finally amended the order because Zemke got ahold of the American, some way or other he got hold of the American people, got back into Russia, and commenced to change their order at the ninth hour. Otherwise, we'd have never made it. We wouldn't have gone 15 miles. I don't think any of us could have.

Overy ([01:31:20](#)):

Could have walked that far.

Schumacher ([01:31:22](#)):

Well, that was about-- I got to London or England a hundred pound [inaudible 01:31:28]. I got on the scale, and I think I was about 85 pounds. I was a little bit thin in that picture in that picture that you see me. How long would you last?

Overy ([01:31:40](#)):

How long were you under Russian control?

Schumacher ([01:31:43](#)):

About a week. Almost a week, and then they finally relented. In fact, Zemke or one of his crew, one of the pilots, had a Messerschmitt he wanted to fly. He wanted to fly back out and the Russians put a machine gun on it so he wouldn't fly and they-

Overy ([01:32:00](#)):

They let the Messerschmitt around?

Schumacher ([01:32:01](#)):

Yeah, it was a full-- They had it flying. They could fly it. They ran the engines up and everything else, but the Russians wouldn't even take off?

Overy ([01:32:11](#)):

How come the Germans just left it there? [crosstalk 01:32:16].

Schumacher ([01:32:16](#)):

They abandoned it. They abandoned whatever was there. This is that airfield I told you about. They took the whole building down. This was a manufacturing point or installation or something. They had slave labor, women and men, doing certain work on aircraft parts and components. What it was, I don't remember. I didn't know, but this was a huge building. They tore every bit if it down. I don't think it was Messerschmitt that owned it, that did the operation. They had several hangars, because when they came in with the aircraft to pick us up, the aircraft land, circle down, and it was just continuous, one on each side, just like this. And the guys would just-- You can imagine how fast they got on that plane. Never hardly stopped. It just stopped for a minute or two while everybody jumped on. Boy, as soon as it hit the air, we were gone.

Overy ([01:33:14](#)):

Was your experience of that week under the control of the Russians, was it much different from what it had been under the Germans just a week before?

Schumacher ([01:33:23](#)):

Well, they let us do anything. They let us do anything, but they wanted us to stay in the camp. Some of the guys took off. They wanted to head to the American lines. We don't know whatever happened to them. Some of them were brought back by the Russians.

Overy ([01:33:36](#)):

Were you fed by the Russians?

Schumacher ([01:33:37](#)):

No. We just scrounged everything. Zemke found them right away. They had Red Cross parcels stacked in this warehouse. The Germans were going out one door and we were going out the other door with them all.

Overy ([01:33:51](#)):

So you ate better.

Schumacher ([01:33:54](#)):

We ate, and they drove in a whole herd of cattle. You could have fresh milk, anything you wanted. They drove one up, the kids went out in the area and drove in cattle.

Overy ([01:34:00](#)):

You mean the prisoners did.

Schumacher ([01:34:02](#)):

Yeah. We must have had 100 and something head of cattle in the compound, in our compounds, and the guys were out there milking those poor cows all day long. We had fresh milk. You wanted fresh milk, just go up to North 1 and you could have all the fresh milk you wanted.

Overy ([01:34:02](#)):

That must have been wonderful. You had a cow to barbecue?

Schumacher ([01:34:12](#)):

A whole cow, put it on a spit and barbecued it right out in the open. Took the post where the fence was on. That was our firewood, whatever other wood they could get ahold of. We had a barbecued steer that night and all the fresh milk you could drink. Besides these Red Cross parcels, we just gorged ourselves.

Overy ([01:34:47](#)):

Did anybody get sick?

Schumacher ([01:34:48](#)):

I'm sure. You'd get sick from it, but we didn't care. We were eating high. Then the daytime we'd go to town, wander around town, do what we wanted to.

Overy ([01:35:00](#)):

Started liberating on the 13th again, wasn't it?

Schumacher ([01:35:05](#)):

We flew out on the 13th. I think we were liberated on the 1st.

Overy ([01:35:09](#)):

1st of May?

Schumacher ([01:35:10](#)):

1st of May. I think it's in that article right there. Should be the first of May, because that's when we made our pilgrimage back for the first of May. We stayed there almost two weeks. Anyway, during this barbecue meal, and of course everybody had to have a chunk of that meat and everything else, and somebody got hold of some flares. We sang the Star Spangled Banner with the flares in the air and the whole thing there, right out in the compound, 10,000 guys all circled around a great big huge bonfire, so yeah, quite a--

Overy ([01:35:42](#)):

All Americans?

Schumacher ([01:35:42](#)):

All Americans, all Americans. I don't think there was any British in that camp at all. I don't think there were any British, we had any British at all. If they were, I don't know where they were. If they were, they were mixed in wearing American uniforms.

Overy ([01:35:57](#)):

Were these all flyers in the camps?

Schumacher ([01:35:59](#)):

Yeah. There could have been a few ground force, like one guy was the truck driver, Air Force.

He just went on the mission, but he got shot down that mission.

Overy ([01:36:13](#)):

That'll teach him.

Schumacher ([01:36:16](#)):

He was the one that drove us crazy. He was in our room for a while in Stalag 4. I don't know where it came up, but he had razor blade. He had a razor blade. These guys are nuts. You can do

it here and, sure, your hospital's only around the corner. He suffered for it for a couple of days.
He was bleeding like--

Overy ([01:36:38](#)):

He did that to go to the hospital?

Schumacher ([01:36:39](#)):

No, he just did it to be smart. He was kind of a goof. That's why he was problem a truck driver because he couldn't get anything else to do. That was really quite a feat, that barbecue. They left us alone until it was time to march out for our plane [inaudible 01:37:01] and we were all set up. I went back to the headquarters. We set it up by compound and by barracks to fly out, and we wound up in some small field in France. I don't even know where it was at. We were on a 17 going out, E-17. Then we took a C-47 over to Lucky Strike. The next day or two days later, I don't remember which, we got on Lucky Strike, which was a collection of all these POWs from Europe were there. There were hundreds of them. Well, there was 145,000. They all had to go through Lucky Strike to go. First, anybody who wanted to go to London or England could go. Then they cut it down to only those who were based there. This fellow and I, because we were based in Italy, we hooked up with two guys from England, who were based in England, and they gave us enough information about their unit, what mission and we were shut down and all that. We got to go to England. We got to England and we went to London. About three days later, we started touring around. Well, after about a week we figured, well, it was time to go home, plus we kept running into difficulties getting on. They all had left. By the second try they left, but I was still there until middle of August or first part of August.

Overy ([01:38:21](#)):

What happened between the time you left Barth? When you were at Lucky Strike, you were there for awhile?

Schumacher ([01:38:31](#)):

Just a couple of days. Two or three days.

Overy ([01:38:33](#)):

I was wondering how you got your health back [inaudible 01:38:37]. Were you fed or--

Schumacher ([01:38:39](#)):

Well, Lucky Strike they had 24-hour food service. They had a kitchen set up right down [inaudible 01:38:44]. You could go in and eat, mostly chicken. They fed us a lot of chicken. Trouble is, they had to enlarge the latrines because you could be sitting there by somebody eating and you're hungry. You thought you were hungry, but your stomach was so shrunk it didn't take it. Of course, all that rich food, the guys were trying to make cakes and puddings and anything goodies, and zip, off you were, just continuous. Pretty soon you got enough of that, so you just quit, went back to just eating enough to nourish yourself, to get away from the sweet foods.

Overy ([01:39:15](#)):

Did you, what? Throw up?

Schumacher ([01:39:17](#)):

No, It'd just go right through you.

Overy ([01:39:19](#)):

Just go right through you.

Schumacher ([01:39:19](#)):

Right, diarrhea. Fruit cocktail, that never tasted so good in its life. I don't care what you say. You could take a whole can of it, but boy, you sure paid for it in that little square hole. Then after a couple of days of this continuous eating or trying to eat, you'd find you started slowing down. There again, like I said, nobody knew anything about malnutrition at that point in time. They still don't know, except what I said Stan Sommers has, and if you want to read all his Med Search articles. He has more than anybody else on the-- I don't know. We were there two or three days and we got this chance to go to England and we took it because we knew for sure that when you're waiting for boats, it'd take us a long time. I know some of the guys sat a whole month in Lucky Strike or more. That was right outside of Marseilles.

Overy ([01:40:15](#)):

They just took your word for what unit you were with and where you were from?

Schumacher ([01:40:20](#)):

They had no record. Our records were all back in St. Louis, and we filled out a five by eight card with our name, rank, and whatever, our unit, whatever information we could put on there. As much information we knew, we could put on there, and that's what we went on. Some places give you a stamp, but they were stamped by so-and-so or whatever, MP squadron or security deal. Some didn't, but the biggest thing was trying to get paid because we had no pay record, no orders, nothing. For a while you could borrow at the Red Cross, but then they wouldn't give it either. The army said no, we could go home, but if you couldn't get a boat to go home, what do you do? At that point in time they had all these aircraft out of England, which brought us out of Germany heading for the States, and Japan. Some of them were headed right on into Japan. They could have taken 10, 20 guys along on the northern flight as easy as not.

Overy ([01:41:27](#)):

Well, it sounds to me like the whole process from the time that you got out of prison camp, sounds to me like it was awfully chaotic.

Schumacher ([01:41:34](#)):

Oh, it was.

Overy ([01:41:35](#)):

Just no order to.

Schumacher ([01:41:38](#)):

150,000 guys jump on you, all that, just masses. There was no real organization in this. Here I was a-- Now, if you were in an organization, when you lined up, you lined up behind your pilot, and the pilot and his whole crew behind him. Here, you had no organization. How do you form an organization out of it unless you go out and get 100 men and say, "Here, you're going to do this." Take another 100 men and do this. There was just no organization.

Overy ([01:42:05](#)):

Guys from all different squadrons and all over everywhere just jammed together, right?

Schumacher ([01:42:10](#)):

And here in Lucky Strike, it was right down on the airfield. They had these tents, rows of tents. They came in there. I don't remember exactly where it went, but where the mess hall was, they had a sort of [inaudible 01:42:21] room or office. They tried to get some kind of control about that group, but if that group was going first, these guys were all running out the back door to get into that group to go. It was chaotic, really. That's why we got to England. We took off for England. Well, wherever we reported in England, we had no organization. We went to consulate, American consulate.

Overy ([01:42:49](#)):

Consulate, yeah.

Schumacher ([01:42:51](#)):

They had a-- I don't remember. I'm sure it was an officer or NCO would line you up for transportation back to the States, because normally you would go with the unit, but here we were total individuals. They didn't know what to do with us at first. Here they had a bunch of POWs in there. That's the--

Overy ([01:43:13](#)):

They pretty much sent you back to the States as you came up to them, huh?

Schumacher ([01:43:16](#)):

Yeah, and then when we did get on a boat to go back, it was only, I don't know, 30 of us, and we wound up at Mitchell Hill. Then they send you back from Mitchell Hill, went back to your point of induction, which was Fort Snelling. Hard telling where the others went, but I went back to Fort Snelling and so did a couple of the guys from North Dakota and one from South Dakota and Minnesota. We all went. There was about 10 of us, 10 or 12 of us.

Overy ([01:43:48](#)):

When did you get back to Minnesota?

Schumacher ([01:43:53](#)):

Oh, in August, latter part of August, I guess, late August. They gave us 90 day leave right off the bat, right out of-- Or 100 days, right out of Fort Snelling, which put me into November. I remember that. Then I wrote for an extension. Then I was assigned back to a squadron at Florida. Miami, Florida, I was supposed to report back to Florida for whatever processing would be. I asked for an extension. They sent me two. Why go down there if you're going to sit? That word,

you find out from the grapevine one way or another, but they were bogged down there trying to get the guys discharged because they didn't have the people or means to do it. That's why I was getting it. Then when I got my denial the third time around, they had changed to report to Fort San Antonio. Soon as I got to San Antonio, they put me right in the hospital. That's where I stayed for until I was discharged, stayed right in the hospital. That had to be from November, end of November, until February, but I did come home for Christmas holidays.

Overy ([01:45:11](#)):

You were out of prison camp almost four months before you say any medical people at all.

Schumacher ([01:45:17](#)):

No, none. In fact, I was on a 100 day leave. I still, when I got down to San Antonio I don't think I weighed 100 pounds yet. It was easier not to eat. You felt better. Why have cramps and dysentery and everything else if you eat, but if you eat just enough to keep the hunger pains down-- I'd go out here to the little lake. I'd go out in the morning when I got up, 10:00, whenever I got up, sit all day out there in the little lake fishing. Didn't take a lunch or nothing along. I was satisfied.

Overy ([01:45:51](#)):

When you got back home?

Schumacher ([01:45:52](#)):

Yeah, go home and have a light dinner. It was a good meal. It was a good, stable meal, but it was just problem putting it on because things didn't agree. It was easier to leave it alone than to eat it. The one thing that was the worst thing they could have given us when we got down to San Antonio, or even when you're traveling through, they wanted you to drink all the malted milk you could drink, all the milk you could drink. It was the worst thing. It gave you all the gas in

your stomach. They didn't know that in those days. They thought that would be soothing for you. I spent from middle of November, I think it was. I was [inaudible 01:46:35] to shoot a deer. I know that. I shot the deer, went back to San Antonio, and x-rays, tests, all that. They couldn't tell you anything. Dysentery is one thing that doesn't show up on x-rays, or the aftereffects.

Overy ([01:46:59](#)):

You kept having that for week after week and month after month.

Schumacher ([01:47:00](#)):

I say God sent my Lamodil.

Overy ([01:47:00](#)):

Pardon me?

Schumacher ([01:47:02](#)):

Lamodil. I've got it all over the house, all over in the cars. I've got it everywhere. You know Dramamine? Basically it's the same as Dramamine only it's more solid and condensed.

Overy ([01:47:18](#)):

How do you spell that? L-A-M-O-D-A?

Schumacher ([01:47:22](#)):

Well, that's the slang word for it. Let me see if I've got it here.

Overy ([01:47:26](#)):

But it is a kind of Dramamine?

Schumacher ([01:47:31](#)):

Yes. It's basically-- It's got basically the same ingredients, but it's more concentrated. In a half hour it's got [inaudible 01:47:42].

Overy ([01:47:41](#)):

When did you start getting this?

Schumacher ([01:47:44](#)):

Oh, about 10 years ago or 15 years ago.

Overy ([01:47:46](#)):

Is that right?

Schumacher ([01:47:50](#)):

What a godsend that stuff's been. Funny part of it is I stopped to see my skipper one time, right over here having a cup of coffee. I don't know how I got around to it. I said, "Well." He said, "How you doing?" I said, "Well, so-so." He says, "Yeah?" I says, "About the same, but thank God for Lamodil." He's a doctor. He's an obstetrician. I had to get a--

Overy ([01:48:19](#)):

It's got to be from malnutrition.

Schumacher ([01:48:20](#)):

It's got to be an aftereffect that certain foods-- Now, one time I can eat, let's just say, an apple pie. No effects at all. Six months later, I can eat the same meal, and I can taste that apple pie, and pretty soon there it comes. Now, I'm just using apple pie as an instance, but it's other food. One thing, chocolate, stay away from that. All the good things.

Overy ([01:48:45](#)):

Sure.

Schumacher ([01:48:47](#)):

Of course, as our metabolism-- I learned a lot of things from the way of hard knocks. Just like milk. I used to drink milk and, like I said, malts and everything else, trying to put on weight. All

I was doing was getting a lot of gas on my stomach and more diarrhea. I'm better off drinking Coke or something else other than that. I'm not over it. You never know when it's going to come back on you. That's the other part. Of course, you can have something that will make you a little bit touchy, and I get it right now. Of course, these flu shots are [inaudible 01:49:23] to us. I don't know what they are, but the senior flu shot--

Overy ([01:49:29](#)):

It really helps, huh?

Schumacher ([01:49:31](#)):

Well, I feel it does. In fact, Mike and I were just talking. We're due for them now. It seems like we're wearing down because every once in a while, we get a little funny feeling there on [inaudible 01:49:44].

Overy ([01:49:44](#)):

We just have a couple more questions. Looking back over your military service and certainly your captivity, do you have any resentments about your military service or resentments about what happened to you when you were in the service?

Schumacher ([01:50:15](#)):

Well, this might be a little sarcastic, but we have been dropped by our country as far as Veterans Administration is concerned.

Overy ([01:50:31](#)):

The POWs, you mean?

Schumacher ([01:50:33](#)):

Everybody, POWs in particular. In fact, the last 10 years it's gotten worse. Of course, you've got more veterans going in there. If it wouldn't be like that, I'd say no, but I am wondering has it

been worth all this, what I had to put up with over the years, to what I-- And they're turning their back on my like they have. This is the Veterans Administration.

Overy ([01:51:04](#)):

You mean providing fewer services, poorer services.

Schumacher ([01:51:06](#)):

Fewer services, poorer services. You do not have the qualified people there.

Overy ([01:51:12](#)):

You mean like in St. Cloud or--

Schumacher ([01:51:14](#)):

St. Cloud's probably one of the better ones. St. Cloud's one of the better ones, but you have Dr. [inaudible 01:51:21] at St. Cloud who turned his license into the AMA because he's a drug addict. He was prescribing drugs for all the patients there, but he also-- They overmedicate their people, for one thing. The doctors are over medicating, but--

Overy ([01:51:41](#)):

How do you feel that you particularly have been--

Schumacher ([01:51:43](#)):

Here's one thing about 10, 15 years ago, Congress passed a law, an act, giving us dental care by our own dentist, paying the bill, which is fine. I have to go once a year. Otherwise, it got ahead of me. The dentist I had all these years, he retired a year ago or two years ago, and he was fair about it as far as I was concerned and everything else. They'd send it in and they never turned it down. Well, for a long time we were only authorized certain teeth. Then they made it wide open. Now if you want dental care, you go to the hospital. Regardless of where you live, you go to the hospital to get your dental care. I've got a letter I can show you right here, denied, totally denied,

and here I received it. I just spent \$1,500 for three caps, a little over \$1,500, about \$1,700-\$1,800 for three caps that I had put on. There's something. I did not have a dental cavity in my mouth when I was shot down. There again, your malnutrition picks up, the same thing I feel because I could not keep food in me to get my nourishment. My teeth kept rotting because-- The dentist I had who came back to duty, he turned out to be a very good friend of ours. He's retired now. He says, "Come back every six month. Let's keep ahead of these." I did, and they paid the bill for those teeth, but suddenly they would not. I kept arguing that those teeth were part of the same thing, but they wouldn't see it. Well, until they passed the act that all your teeth were, and I don't remember, 10, 15 years ago, but now point blank tell you, "If you want dental care, you come to our clinic and get it." Here's a guy who lives up-- You know where Hovland is? You know where Grand Marais is?

Overy ([01:53:35](#)):

Yep.

Schumacher ([01:53:35](#)):

All right, it's 20 miles on the other side of the bay. He's got a summer home up there in Hovland. He made three trips down to Fort Snelling and back to get a bridge put in. I would not do it. I just spent, for three caps, let's see, \$600 and some apiece, so it's dang near \$1,800. It's the same thing. I don't remember who the original finder of this Lamodil was, but whoever he was that told me about it or he got hooked up on it, they'll pay for this. I just got this today, once a month. Here's a goof up. I'm supposed to get three of these a month. What do I get? One. Here's another one -- Jesus [inaudible 01:54:26]. Boy, I tell you, what a difference it makes. I've had two prostate surgeries, one hemorrhoid deal, and they still think it's all because of that, but they didn't pay--

Overy ([01:54:42](#)):

Because of your prisoner of war malnutrition?

Schumacher ([01:54:43](#)):

Yeah, a combination of one thing with the other. I use this there, too, as both my hands dry out so bad. My feet dry out because they were frozen that time. It cost me \$350 for a pair of arch supports. I still think it goes back to the frozen feet. I don't know. How do you prove it? You don't know. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. That's the part I'm bitter about. I'm very bitter, and all they've done is make more offices in that VA, more not down to the people that need the work. Why can't we go to our own local docs? Why can't we do this? Right now I'm still on a fee basis to a local doctor, but I think I lose that in 1991. If I want to go to a doctor, I've got to go down to St. Cloud or Minneapolis. That's ridiculous. I don't go that often, probably three, four times a year. What are they going to do? No doctor's going to do anything. I go to Mayo. I haven't been for two years. I went for five years straight when I got these, and then they just said, "Well, you're leveled out," two years ago, so I didn't go back. Well, now I'll find out how I'm doing when go back. My appointment's in November, so-- That's the part I'm perturbed about.

Overy ([01:56:05](#)):

The way they treated you afterwards.

Schumacher ([01:56:06](#)):

Afterwards. It's no, no, no, no. When you get a doctor, either that or you're called out for a re-examination, he looks you straight in the eye and says, "There's nothing wrong with you," not touching you, just seeing you. "There's nothing wrong with you. Here's my card." No, he asked me where I worked. I told him the state of Minnesota. "You got Blue Cross Blue Shield. Here's my card. Come to my office. I'll give you a physical." This is in a VA clinic right in Fort

Snelling. When you get that kind of-- I went to the director and I arbitrated, but I did not come back there because I said, "I'm going to lose my job." They wanted me down there every month for just vacation and the people they hired. That's the kind of people they got. That is a part that-- They don't have to build new hospitals. Just leave us go to our own doctor. Why don't they do like a Medicare policy or something like that? Other than here, you go stand in line. We're treated worse than the Indian. You know the Indian gets the regular. You know, generic medication and then you get, what do you call the other, regular? They get the regular. They will not get generic. We get generic. This is a generic. Really, there's not that much difference. My daughter is a pharmacist, so I know. In fact, she's a pharmacist at VA, but it's the way the whole thing is. In the last 18 years, they've taken so much away from us, more than they ever did before. They way I gather, they're planning on taking what they call fee basis away from going to see your own local doctor. What does that do? It puts you right back. I'm not going to get on there for like here, smashed my finger, but if I'd gone into the doctor like I should have-- I'm going into surgery tomorrow morning and have the bump taken out of there. Broke a piece of the bone off somewhere in here, and it attached onto the spur of the knuckle. This is my own doing. I'll pay for it or whatever, Medicare or whatever way it's going to get paid, but it's going to get taken care of my way. If it was not, I would expect them to go to my own doctor, own route to get it. That's my-- I didn't think too much of it over the years, but Yuri, Albert Spears-- What's the name of that story? You know how far we were from losing that war? A few months. They could have gotten all that in gear if Hitler had kept his nose out of his way from his generals. They'd have swamped us. We would have never got a foothold in England. When we were in-- Well, run through that with you.

Overy ([01:59:08](#)):

All right. You want to take that off?