After I graduated from high school I enlisted in the United States Air Force on my 19th birthday. When I was sent overseas during the early part of World War II, I was based in England.

My Itinerary

Nov. 16, 1942 Enlisted

Nov. 1942 Induction, Ft Snelling, St. Paul

Dec1942 to March, 1943, Basic training, Kearns, Utah

March, to May, 1943, Mechanical Engineering training, Sheppard Field, Texas

June, July, 1943, Aerial Gunners Training, Tyndal Field, Florida

Aug. to Oct. 1943 Flight Training, Alexandria Air Base, Alexandria, LA

Nov. Dec 1943 Aircraft Crew Training, Hemelhempsted, UK.

Jan to Feb, 22, 1944 Flew Bombing missions

Feb. 22, 1944 Shot down over Denmark

Feb. 23 to 24, 1944 Train to Dulag Luft, Frankfurt Au Mein, Germany

Feb25 1944 Interrogation at Dulag Luft

Feb 25 to 28, 1944 Train to Stalag Luft 6, Heydekrug, East Prussia

Feb, 28 To July15, 1944 Stalag Luft 6

July 15 to 18, 1944 Hold Of The coal Ship Insterburg, In transit, To Stettin, Poland

July 19, 1944 Hitler Youth Train to Grosse - tychow, Poland

July 20, 1944 to Feb. 6 1945 Stalag Luft 4

Feb 6 To May 3, 1945, Death March

The above dates are approximate, to the best of my recollection

The first day of my flight training I met Lt. Lavies. He was selecting his combat crew. He called several of us aside and asked each of us many questions about the B17s performance. I answered all questions correctly while the others did not. The pilot then asked me if I wished to join his crew and I said that I did. It was then that he told me that of his ten men crew there was only one position left, that being the ball turret.

Being that I had never flown in a B-17 or ever having been in a ball turret, I did not know what I was getting into. I found that I was much too large to fit in the turret.

This is a B-17E. Photo taken while training Aug. 1943
Top Row L to R. (enlisted men)
Neil Byers, Top Turret
Lester Schrenk, Ball Turret
John Walcott, Radio operator
William Harmon, Left waist gun
Vern Swindler, Tail gun.
Peter Guastella, R. waist gun (not on photo)
Front Row (officers)
William R. Lavies, Pilot
Elijah Vaughan, Co. Pilot
Francis Peacock, Navagator
Lt. Meakin, Bombadier

Most ball turret gunners were usually quite small, I was the exception, I weighed 185 pounds at the time, and also I was 5 ft. 11. The only way I could fit into the turret was by not wearing a flak jacket (this was a forerunner of the bulletproof vest) also by not wearing my heavy sheep lined flying jacket, or my heavy suit. To offset the cold, we wore an electrically heated suit, shoes and gloves.

I loved flight training, and soon it was over. A quick trip on the Queen Mary found me in England. I was sent to the 92 Bomb Group, 327th Bomb Squadron. This was November 1, 1943.

Flight crews were a very close knit group; they never wanted to let fellow crew members down. One always felt more comfortable flying with your fellow crew members. In most cases even if you had a cold and could be excused from flying, you would continue to fly anyway. I can remember doing that myself.

Morale was very high even though losses were very heavy. At this point of the war, your goal was to fly 25 combat missions. This was the early part of the war and Germany still had control of the air and we did not have long-range fighters. So we had to fly to the target without a fighter escort; during the time I was flying I did not know of a single crew that managed to complete the 25 missions, although I'm sure that some did. Some of the men kept track of crew losses, and determined that the average missions flown at that time period was 6.3 missions before you were either killed or captured. I do not claim these to be official figures, but rather statistics figured out by fellow crew members, so I am not sure how accurate they are. And I'm sure that many men will disagree.

I faithfully wrote to my family twice a week and always assured them everything was just fine. We were not allowed to say anything about our missions. All mail was censored by the military. I was lucky as I received lots of mail from back home. This was a terrific boost in morale. Some men never got any mail.

Most airmen had a good luck charm. Some had certain routines and the like. As for myself, I believed in prayer. We were young and invincible and everyone thought that they would somehow beat the odds that were so heavily stacked against us. Everyone counted the missions they had credit for, which made them feel much closer to going home. I do not remember anyone talking of impending doom. Never did I have the least thoughts of not returning home alive.

I flew in a B-17 Bomber on combat missions over German targets during the early part of World War II from December 1943 to February 22, 1944.

We watched the bulletin board daily, to see if there was an alert for a bombing mission the next morning. If there was, we went to bed as early as possible, because we knew that at three o'clock in the morning we would have a wake-up call. A man from the orderly room would come and very quietly awaken each airman that would be needed

for a mission. At that time we would quickly get dressed in our flying gear. Now, to be awakened at 3 AM and getting dressed in a room where the fire had all but burned out did not appeal to me in the least. We dressed in almost silence and quickly made our way to the latrine to clean up. We then headed for the mess hall, which was about a three-quarter mile walk from the barracks. We each had to bring along our own knife, fork and spoon as the mess hall did not furnish them. The greeting we got when we entered the mess hall was of strong coffee and the smell of frying bacon. There was not much conversation during breakfast and most airmen would sit with their crew members. A special breakfast was always served before every mission. That was one time that we would get fresh eggs, other times we would get dehydrated eggs which didn't taste very good and always had a slightly slimy texture. We ate a very satisfying meal, because we knew that our next meal was a long way off, like 14 hours or more later.

After breakfast, we went to the enlisted men's briefing room. Security was very tight and the most time spent as briefing was spent being thoroughly checked at the door for security. We had to make positive identification of our crew before we were allowed to enter. Only after that would the briefing begin. Everyone was very quiet waiting to see where the mission would be. The briefing officer would unveil the map and a red ribbon would show the route to and from the target. The route to the target would never be in a straight line, but rather zig zagging back and forth. This was to throw the enemy off guard as to what the actual target would be. If we knew that the target was going to be a difficult one, there would be a very loud groan from the crews. Even before we started our missions one had a pretty good idea of how well the Germans would defend their city. The briefing officer would tell us what opposition we were expected to encounter, but that was all guesswork. They would always minimize the opposition. They would also tell us that we were expendable, that it was more important for us to hit the target, than to get back alive and they thoroughly meant that!! As you can see, they did not value life very much. I flew my first mission late December 1943 to bomb a Chemical plant at Ludwigshafen Germany. The 8th Air force lost 44 heavy bombers that day. Bad targets did have much intimidation, but we were young and invincible and never figured that the odds were not in our favor. As soon as briefing was finished, there were chaplains to give us our blessings. I think they did a great job and gave much confidence. I always spent time with them.

Another thing that mattered was the aircraft we would be flying. We knew which planes were fast and which were not. Some just always had some problem and some did not handle well. We all had our favorite planes. My favorite plane was "Pot O Gold," the one we were shot down in. No one wanted to fly in a plane that was marginal.

After briefing, was a Jeep ride to the supply shop. Here they would issue each of us a parachute, an electrically heated suit, shoes and gloves. They would also give each of us an escape pouch, which contained French francs, a map, a compass, a candy bar, and a pack of gum. The money was for bribery, the candy was for food to nourish us if we were

shot down. They always gave us French francs, because they said if they gave us German money then we could be accused of being a spy and shot. We were forbidden to carry any weapons, such as a pistol or knife, and we would be subject to court martial if we did.

Next, a Jeep ride to the gun shop. Here we would tell the operator what plane we were flying, and what position. Everyone had to then assemble guns in their position on the plane, then load the ammunition and make sure all was in working order. This was done in total darkness. Being a ball turret operator I had two guns to install and arm. This was always a very tricky maneuver. One could not get inside the turret while the airplane was on the ground, so part of the installation had to be done from the inside of the plane, and part from the outside.

After this was accomplished, we would sit and wait until we got word if we were actually going on the mission or if it would be scrubbed. At this point I could only hope that the mission would be scrubbed due to bad weather and that I could gain access to my bunk. If that happened I would return and sleep until 11 A.M. or so in time to get noon chow. I loved flying, but never wished to fly combat missions and was always glad when a mission was scrubbed.

My Combat Missions

Date	City	Target	Crews Lost
Dec 30, 1943	Ludwigshafen, Ger	I G Farben chemical Plant	44
Jan. 11 1944	Oschersleben, Ger	Aviation Plants	76
Jan. 29. 1944	Frankfurt Am Mein	Industrial Center	50
Jan 30, 1944	Brunswick Ger.	Aviation Plant	35
Feb. 4, 1944	Frankfurt Am Mein	Marshalling Yards	31
Feb. 5, 1944	Château dun FR.	Air base	13
Feb. 6, 1944	Nancy FR.	Air Base	14
Feb. 20, 1944	Leipzig, Ger.	Me 109, aircraft plants	29
Feb. 21, 1944	Hops ten, Ger.	Air Base	23
Feb. 22, 1944	Aalborg Denmark	Air Base	76

On the first mission we were to participate in, even after we were airborne, our plane could not keep up with the rest of the formation and we were forced to abort. This made us feel as if we had let our buddies down as this meant that there were fewer gunners to protect the formation. Unless a mission was completed, it was not counted as a mission.

There would be any number of airplanes nose to tail waiting to take off - the usual number being 21. At the time of takeoff, it still would be very early morning and totally dark. It was very hard to find the airplanes that we were supposed to form a formation with. To accomplish this each bomber group had their own marker flares. Our colors were green yellow green. We were flying completely without lights, and it was very hard to find the planes from your group. There were so many bomber groups in such a small area of Great Britain that there would be airplanes all over the sky and without the flares one would never know which plane to follow. Sometimes it would take over an hour just to form our formation. Even at this point, the mission could still be scrubbed. We flew in very tight formations, and sometimes when we were bucking a heavy wind or crosswind we would be jockeying all over the sky and collisions were not uncommon.

Once airborne, we would test fire our guns to make sure that they would fire correctly. It was so cold at the altitude we were flying at that it was necessary to have electric heaters on our guns to keep them from freezing.

All of the windows of the plane, from the bomb bay back to the tail, were removed to give free range for firing the machine guns. Needless to say there was a very strong wind blowing throughout the airplane at all times. The temperature was anywhere from -40 to -50 degrees, the same temperature inside as outside. At that altitude we had to wear oxygen masks, and as was explained earlier, these were very uncomfortable. Most crewmen had frostbite around the edge of the oxygen mask. Because of the humidity from breathing, the oxygen masks had a tendency to freeze and thereby cutting off the oxygen, so if one didn't check his oxygen mask periodically one could die from lack of oxygen.

Bomber crews were a very tight knit group of men. Even if one was not feeling well he would go on a mission anyway. One always felt as if he were letting the rest of his crew down if he failed to go. We never wanted to be placed on another crew, as you trusted your fellow crewmen. At one point they used our bombardier as a fill in on another crew and that plane was shot down. I never saw him again. His name was Lt. Meakin.

Germany still had superiority of the sky at this stage of the war. Our fighter planes could not escort us all the way to the target as they had to turn back because they couldn't carry enough fuel. We therefore suffered huge losses. It was not unusual to see several bombers go down at one time. I even saw the Germans ram our bombers. I do not know if this was intentional. They would come so close through our formation that one could see the expression on their faces, and strangely, they would wave as they passed by. The Germans always wore full dress German Luftwaffe uniforms, and one could even see the

iron crosses some of their pilots wore. I can still see bombers explode. It was eerie to see parts of planes litter the sky. I remember a whole wing that had been blown off, and the engines were still running, it made lazy circles around the formation. When an airplane went down, if we were not busy fighting off enemy planes, I would follow the plane down to the ground, hoping to count as many parachutes as I could, but many times there were none. At times there would be all sorts of debris floating through the formation, propellers, landing gear, wings, and yes, even people being blown out with no parachutes.

I did not know of a single crew that finished the magic figure of 25 missions. If they would have completed 25 missions, they would have been sent back to the States to help sell war bonds. During the time I was flying, the highest number of missions flown by any crew that I know of was 21, and on their next mission, they received a direct hit and were all killed. That crew was in our barracks, bunked next to me. Their airplane was called "Wilder N Hell" flown by Lt. Wilder, hence its name. They were all good friends of mine. Usually we knew the crew of any airplane that went down, and if we saw no parachutes it was a very sad day. Despite this, morale was always very high. I never had any doubt that I would not survive. Even after I became a POW, I never had a doubt. It was only after the war ended that I found out how many times my life hung in the balance. Several times I was almost shot while in captivity.

I should introduce my crew members. Lt. William Lavies, our Pilot; he was killed in action. Our remaining crew members: Lt. Elijah Vaughan- Co-pilot; Lt. Francis Peacock-Navigator; Lt. Robert Schuma-our fill in Bombardier; Sgt. Neil Byers-Top turret Operator; Sgt. John Walcott- Radio Operator; Sgt. William Harmon-R. Waist Gunner; Sgt. Peter Guastella-L.-Waist Gunner; Sgt. Vern Swindler-Tail Gunner; and myself, Sgt. Lester Schrenk- Ball Turret Operator.

During each mission our pilot would periodically call each crew member, and he would tell us all to check in. That was to make certain that we were not suffocating from lack of oxygen, or from being wounded. Our pilot was the nicest man I have ever known. He always took care of his men, even when we were on the ground, or going up town on a pass. He would always make sure that we were happy and OK. He even offered money to make sure that we had a good time, and was always a father figure. I never heard an angry word or complaint from him to the day he was killed. Even when he knew that we were doomed, he kept on reassuring us that all would be OK.

Flying in the ball turret, I had a perfect view, and never a dull moment. I could see German airplanes taking off on the ground; see the flak batteries firing at us and a split second later see the burst of flak. It made a loud noise, then you could hear the shrapnel hitting the airplane, and it sounded like large hail. If the burst was near it would flip the airplane violently. One burst of flak was so severe that it flipped us over, completely tearing out engine No.2, leaving a hole about 3 feet wide. However, even with the severe damage, this plane did bring us home. I could also see the bombs dropping

towards the target and see them hit and explode. They would set off a shock wave, similar to dropping a stone in the water.

The enemy flak at and near the target was severe, and that was also the time one could expect to be attacked by enemy fighters. They would fly right through their own flak trying to knock us down before we could drop our bombs. I saw any number of them being shot down by their own AA fire. Were we scared? You're damn right we were scared. Who wouldn't be?

The Germans tried any number of defenses; one was to drop steel cable in front or our bombers so that we would become entangled. Another was to come from behind and to lob bazooka shells into the formation. It was at this time that they were trying a new jet airplane called the ME 262. The ME 262 had an extremely short range, not enough to reach our formation, so they would load the new plane piggy back on a JU 88 twin engine fighter, to gain altitude to above our formation. They would separate and the ME 262 would make one pass through the formation, firing as he passed. At the time the ME 262 was a very fast airplane, faster than any plane the Allies had. At this point the ME 262 would be out of fuel and would be forced to land. I never thought that this was very effective.

We always breathed a sigh of relief as we passed the coastlines, even more so when we were over England. Many times we were so badly shot up that we could not keep up with the formation. If you lagged behind you were very vulnerable to be attacked by German fighters, as you lacked the support that the other bombers gave you. At this time you had these options: drop down into the clouds and fly blind; if there were no clouds, the next option was to keep up with the formation as long as possible, then slow down and hope to join another group behind you and keep up with that group as long as possible; and the final option was to hit the deck and fly as low as possible, as low as 10 feet was not too uncommon.

At long last we would see our home field. What a relief to be able to take off the oxygen masks, also to get out of the turret and move about. If a crew shot a red flare, that meant they had wounded on board, giving them priority to land first and there would be an ambulance waiting for them. There would also be planes that would be badly damaged and would have to make crash landings, landing on their bellies with their wheels up.

We had 2 flight engineers on board, one was Neil Byers, the other was myself. We never trusted the landing gear to be down and locked, so either of us would hand crank the landing gear down. This was done because the mechanism could be damaged. We also helped the Pilot and Co-Pilot land the aircraft. We would constantly call off the air speed, and be ready to pull the emergency brakes in case of damage to the hydraulic system. In spite of being all shot up, our pilot always made a good landing. He was really a good pilot.

As soon as we landed we were taken to the debriefing room. Each crew would be asked many questions about the mission. They always wanted me to point out exactly where the bombs had hit. They also wanted to know what opposition we encountered, and where; also how many of our airplanes we saw go down, and did we see any parachutes.

Only after the debriefing, could we turn in our gear and then go to the mess hall. The next thing that we had to do was to walk back to the airplane, remove the guns and ammunition, take them back to the gun shop and thoroughly clean and oil the guns. Next we had to completely wipe off all traces of oil. If any oil remained, it would solidify at the low temperatures that we encountered while flying on the next mission. One never knew which airplane you would be flying your next mission. During my tenure we flew in at least 4 or 5 different aircraft due to the fact that some of the planes we returned in would be so badly shot up that they could not be repaired in time for the next mission, while others were so badly damaged that they would be scrapped and used for spare parts. Next, we would walk back to our barracks which was a walk across a very muddy field about 3/4 mile. Only then were we done for the day. This would be quite late in the evening.

There were 4 crews to each barracks. It was always very sad to return to the barracks and discover that one of the crews did not return; or to find that someone was killed or wounded. Two times there was a crew that did not make it back, then one day 2 crews did not return, which meant that half of the barracks were casualties. This happened 2 days before we did not return. The remaining crew was shot down within a week and all of their crew members were killed.

We were quite likely being called to fly again the next day. On the day we were shot down, we had flown 3 consecutive days with the same routine I described above. It was not only the lack of sleep that bothered, the lack of oxygen also is very hard on the system as it has a tendency to make one very tired in itself. The oxygen masks were so very uncomfortable that we always delayed putting them on until absolutely necessary when we felt groggy, and we also removed them much too early. We were always dog tired at the end of every mission, as it was an extremely long and stressful day.

The worst bombing mission I had during this period was on January 11, 1944. This was the bombing mission to Oschersleben, Germany. The target was to bomb a fighter assembly factory of A. O. Flugzeugwerke A/G. The reason this bombing mission was so bad, was that after we were airborne the weather turned unfavorable. The other bombing groups were called back, but our group did not receive the call back message. So, unbeknown to us, our group went on alone to bomb the target.

It was about this time that I felt a burning sensation on my leg. There was a small fire and I grabbed the area and put out the fire. It was a malfunction in my electric suit and from there

on I had no more heat, also a painful burn on my leg and the temperature was -40 degrees and still many hours to go.

During this stage of the war, as stated previously, Germany had air superiority and our fighter escort was still short-range and could only accompany us part way. Consequently, the whole German Luftwaffe bore down on us as soon as our escort had to leave. Many of our bombers were shot down. Then, shortly before bombing the target there was a terrific loud explosion, and our entire aircraft was flipped upside-down. The entire rear half of engine No. 2 was blown off, and the propeller would not feather. This produced wild vibrations, to the point where one wondered if the wing would be ripped off. We continued on to bomb the target, and shortly thereafter there was another loud explosion, although this one was not quite as severe. I didn't think too much more about it until we reached the channel, whereupon the pilot called me to come up to the cockpit to give him a hand. Both the pilot and co-pilot were gripping the control column, and struggling to keep the plane from nosediving. They both had sweat running down their forehead, even though the temperature was well below zero. They had been wrestling with the control column ever since the second explosion. The pilot ask me and the other engineer to relieve them, as the force on the control column was very great. The other engineer and I took over, during which time the pilots had time to recover. We found out later that the second explosion had ripped a hole, about three feet across, and had severred several of the control cables, and that caused some of the metal on the control surfaces to be bent so as to cause the aircraft to be in a diving mode.

We did not make it back to base that night as it was getting dark and fog was closing in. The pilot saw an airfield below, and said we would attempt a landing there. What we didn't know, was that the airfield was under construction. The pilot made a near-perfect landing, even with the damaged control surface, one engine out, and with a whirling, vibrating, unfeathered propeller.

We nearly collided with a pile of stumps that were on the runway, due to the fact that the runway was not completed. But at least we were safe on the ground. When we looked at the damage, there were 2 gaping holes, both were large enough to easily crawl through, also the whole aircraft was riddled with all sizes of holes.

My 10th and last mission, February 22, 1944, was to bomb the airfield at Aalborg Denmark. The 8th Air Force lost 76 bombers on this day.

As soon as we left the target, we headed west and over the North Sea to at least get away from the flak batteries. We were already 20 minutes from the nearest land and were over the English Channel, headed for home. The Germans were still attacking in force and a B-17 just to our right exploded and crashed into the sea. I knew right away that there would be no survivors.

About 2 minutes later there was a loud explosion in our plane and I saw a lot of fire coming out of our number 4 fuel tank. Then I heard the pilot ask the navigator (Peacock) for the nearest land, the navigator said 90 degrees dead East 20 minutes expected before land fall. I knew right then that we were on our way down. The pilot (Lavies) called the bombardier (Schuman) and told him to jettison the bombs. This was done because we had not dropped the bombs at the target area because of solid cloud cover, also it was necessary not to have bombs onboard when the plane would crash. He then said that he would lower the landing gear, a universal sign stating that we were surrendering. Some German pilots respected this, but most did not. We were fortunate on having a German pilot who did respect this and he followed us, but only following to make sure that we would not try an escape to neutral Sweden.

We were trailing a fire of about 30 feet and every few seconds there would be another explosion that would shake the whole plane. The explosions were so severe that they would completely blow out the fire, but then again would erupt into flames. This kept up for the full 20 minutes. I could see that a German JU88 was following well behind us, out of range and also slightly above us. At this time I asked the pilot to leave my turret; permission was granted so I exited the turret, located my parachute and snapped my chest pack parachute to my harness, and sat against a bulkhead waiting for what lie ahead. This saved my life; if I had been in the turret when the wing blew off, I never would have made it.

I do not remember anyone saying a word. Everything seemed routine. There was no panic and we all sat in silence just waiting for land fall. I do not remember being scared, but I must have been!! I do remember praying about the grief and agony that my poor parents would be going through. Never did I think that I would not make it through the ordeal that lay before me….I was very calm and very ready to jump just.

Just as I saw landfall approaching, I called on the intercom stating that I was bailing out and wishing everyone good luck. I did not hear anyone else doing this, nor did I receive an answer. There were 5 of the crewmen in the back of the plane that would jump out of the rear door of the plane: Swindler (tail Gun}; Walcott (Radio); Harman (Left waist gun); Guastella (Right waist gun); and myself (ball turret).

I started towards the rear exit door, but Guastella was ahead of me. He pulled the latch which jettisoned the door, but then when he stepped in the doorway, he froze and did not jump. Without hesitation, I raised my foot and gave him a boot in the rear with him flying out the door. I jumped next, waited a second to clear the plane and pulled the rip cord…..the chute did not deploy. I glanced down and found that the drogue chute had been caught in the covering and quickly pulled it out which deployed the main chute. When the main chute opened I cannot describe the violent sudden snap, but then a smooth decent thereafter. At first there was German gunfire from the ground some distance away. But this suddenly stopped. The JU88 that had been following us made several passes above us. I only saw the 5 parachutes that bailed out of the back of the plane. About this time I heard the very loud explosion where POG crashed --it appeared to be about 5 KM east of where I was. I did not see any lakes below me.

To this day I cannot imagine why the wing did not blow off sooner. If it had been even 10 seconds earlier, I would not be here today. The B-17s had a reputation of being a very tough airplane. This certainly turned out to be true with the one that we were flying. It was named "POT OF GOLD;" it was a B-17 Serial #42-31377 and this airplane most certainly saved my life. Just as we crossed the coast of Denmark there was a final explosion and the right wing blew off. We all managed to bail out successfully, except the pilot was killed when he landed in a lake. Lieutenant William Lavies was one of the best pilots I have ever known and I feel very indebted to him. The Danes tried to rescue him, but were denied by the Germans and he was left to die.

The Germans had been shooting at us from some distance away. As I neared the ground I could see German troops in the distance. I landed with such force that I was nearly stunned; it was in a field which had been plowed the fall before, frozen, but with above freezing temperature. The ground had a slightly muddy surface. The field was very rough and had pockets of muddy water. I was not badly hurt, perhaps strained muscles and numerous bumps, but luckily no broken bones or dislocated joints. I was very sore for a number of days after the fall. Lately I contacted the makers of my parachute and found that with the type parachute that I had the rate of descent would have been 13 miles per hour (22km).

I could see the Germans had formed a semi-circle around me and when I unsnapped my 'chute I deliberately stamped it into the muddy water thinking it would make it harder for the Germans to use it. The time was about 14:30 hours when we were captured. Although combat was very hard, the real trouble began upon being captured. For those who have never been a prisoner-of-war, they have no idea what it may be like.

By this time the Germans were close enough and were calling for me to raise my hands. There were dozens of guns pointing at me and as I did so they grabbed both of my arms asking if I had a pistol. I then made the mistake in answering them in German, as I thought that speaking in German would help me in some way. I told them that I did not have any. They frisked me and found that I did not have a weapon.

There was a small road nearby and a rather small car came by. They marched me to where the car was. There was a big sort of gas bag attached on the rear of the car and a German was putting what looked like wood chips in a compartment below the gas bag, then he sprinkled a white powder over the chips.

Just between the doors of the car, near the roof was an arm that lighted and said 'FORD." I believe the arm was a turn signal. They placed me in the back seat alongside a German soldier. At this point I did not see any of my crew. We started on our way and shortly came to a hill, not that steep, but the car had very little power and when we were nearly to the top of the hill, the car came to a stop. The German backed back down the hill and came to a stop. He went out and again put on more chips and more powder, waited for some time and again started up the hill. This time we just barely did clear the top of the hill. I believe that we were going in an easterly direction and, after several turns in the road, we arrived at the German Headquarters

(the Danish school house). I estimate that we had traveled perhaps 3 KM, but that is a rough guess. I remember clearly the big Swastika flag that flew on the flagpole; the first of many Swastika flags that I would see.

They took me inside and here was several of my crew; however, I do not remember how many or who they were. I do believe that there were 3 crewmembers; but not at all certain. During the next hour they brought in the rest of the crew except the pilot (Lavies) and the navigator (Peacock) so now there were 8 of our crew.

As they brought in a crew member they would take down each person's name rank and serial number. I do not recall that they asked any military questions. Also, they took one of our dog tags, leaving the other one. I remember when they brought in Swindler, the German said, 'Ja, we, too, had a man called Swindler, but last week we took him out and shot him!!!"

When they brought Byers in he told me that when he had landed there was a house nearby. Thinking that maybe the Danish underground would help him, he knocked on the door and was greeted by what appeared - a friend; she motioned for him to come in. She could not speak English, but gave him a cup of coffee. Then he saw her call on the telephone and he thought perhaps she was calling the underground for help. Instead, a few minutes later, he was picked up by either the Danish police or by a German; I do not remember which one. I do remember that he was very disgusted and wished that he had not gone to that house and he called her a Nazi collaborator.

At about this time a high ranking German officer came; he looked us over at length, but I could not understand enough of what he said as to why he was there. I thought perhaps he was the German pilot who had shot us down and I would have liked to talk with him; but, I knew that I would not be allowed to do so.

About an hour or 2 later a German came to me with what I recognized as items belonging to the pilot. One was his wrist watch; another was his crash bracelet (a personal item many servicemen bought. It was worn around the wrist and had one's name engraved into it); another was his class ring. I looked at the items and said "No sir, I do not know who they belong to." The German then shoved me very angrily out the door to where a wagon was with a covered object. He pulled down the covers exposing the head of the pilot. I quickly touched his face and found it cold to the touch, but was quickly booted away and the German said "maybe that will refresh your memory." At this point I did identify the pilot as I knew he was dead.

This bothered me greatly and when they took me back inside I broke the sad news to the rest of the crew.

We stood there in stunned silence.

About this time I decided that my escape kit would do me no good and, as the Germans still had not found it, I knew that soon they would and I did not wish for them to have it. So, I asked to

go to the latrine to relieve myself. I flushed the maps down the drain and started to flush the French Franks that were in the escape kit down the drain. I must have tried flushing too quickly and the toilet plugged up. I then had no other choice but to tear up the remainder of the money and throw the remainder in the toilet bowl and ask the guard to take me back to the rest of the crew.

Very soon I heard loud German voices really giving some German Guard holy hell for not finding the kit and allowing me destroy it. I was led to a German officer and my whole body searched. They found my wallet which contained several British pounds and also some American bank notes. The German officer took all of the money and gave the empty wallet back to me. I demanded a receipt which provoked the officer. He demanded to know why I wanted a receipt. I answered "Because we are going to win the war and I will collect the money at war's end." This really made him mad…..He then said that I was a traitor to the Fatherland and that I would be shot. He told the Guard "Get this swein hundt out of my sight. We will deal with him later." I soon learned to try to hide my German ancestry and when a German would ask how I had learned German I would always say that I had learned it in school, but only took one year of learning as I did not wish them to know that my Grand Parents mostly did speak German. The one year was to explain that I did not know German that well. I never did take German in school.

When we were with the German Luftwaffe in Denmark we were not treated badly, although a German officer told us that Germany had signed the Geneva Convention; however, he said that that did not apply to the air force personnel as we were murderers of women and children and that we would be treated as such.

The lower German enlisted men would not believe that we were American. They said that America was not at war with Germany. When we convinced them that we were indeed American, they said that we must be mercenaries (paid soldieries, paid by the British).

I asked one of the guards if he would cut off the long cord that was attached to my electrically heated suit. It was very annoying to have it always in the way. He agreed but had much difficulty cutting it and finally resorted to an ax to chop it off and I thanked him for doing so. Why the makers of the suit never had a detachable cord must have cost many airmen their lives.

We were held right in the German Barracks and many of the German soldiers were getting ready to go to town. One was telling me that he had a Danish girlfriend that he planned to see that night. Soon evening came. I do not remember having anything to eat. They had us go to bed right alongside other Germans and I did have a restful night. I had been very tired so I slept until dawn when I was awakened. Again, we did not get a breakfast, but a kindly Danish man who must have been working for the Germans gave each of us some very hard brown bread and a slice of sausage for the trip on a German train taking us first to Hamburg and then on to Dulag Luft ,which is near Frankfurt Germany. We were now in Germany not knowing what lay before us.

We arrived at Frankfort rail station, and quickly marched to Dulag Luft, just a short distance away.

Dulag Luft was a most horrible place; wounded airmen crying out in pain with every sort of injuries. Many were burned very badly; many asking us for help; but, the Germans marched us right by these men and locked us in a big room. They gave each of us a slice of bread smeared with some artificial jelly. We were all very hungry.

That night I suffered through my first air raid. The English were bombing the I G Farben chemical plant nearby. Some bombs hit Dulag Luft and several POWs were killed. I had dropped bombs on the same target 2 times previously and had no idea that perhaps we were killing our own POWs.

We spent a miserable scary night, but the next day was far worse. It was time for interrogation. Imagine a large room with hundreds of POWs; in the background one could hear screaming in pain, sounds of beatings, loud cursing and every sort of scary, frightening noises. A German Guard would take one Prisoner out at a time; he never came back. Waiting was endless and fear builds up within you. You are frightened that you cannot stand up to the torture you know is coming.

I can clearly still see the Guard that came to get me. If Hollywood had picked him for the role, he would have fit perfectly. He was a short squatty man. The first thing one noticed was a huge scar on his left cheek which took out his left eye. His right arm was missing. In his left arm he held a German burp machine gun. With the barrel of the gun he would prod you in the direction to go. He ushered me into a room with a German Officer. I immediately drew to attention and gave the Officer a salute; stated my name, rank and serial number. He returned my salute and offered for me to sit. I replied "I wish to remain standing, Sir." He then offered a cigarette. I said "No thank you, Sir." He then went to a file and came back with a report and said "Ya Schrenk, we have been expecting you for some time." Then in my amazement he gave the names of my Parents, their address, that I was raised on a farm and had a brother and a sister. He then said "We know all about you, you appear not too badly wounded; I am sure that you would wish to have your loved ones know that you are OK." I said "Yes, Sir." He said "we do that through the Red Cross. Here, fill out this form," which he handed me. It had a big RED Cross across the top. I filled out the names and addresses of my parents. The rest I left blank, as they all were military questions, such as type of aircraft flown, intended target, briefings on other targets, and all sort of military information. When I handed it back, he slapped me and said, "Dumkoph, don't you think we know what type plane you were flying or what target you dropped bombs on?" He kept asking questions and I would repeat my name, rank and serial number, and that was all I would give. He would hit, kick, slap and tell me that I would be shot; at other times he would threaten me that I would be turned over to the Gestapo.

Another time he said I was a traitor, being of German descent and fighting against Germany. He said I would be treated as a traitor and be shot.

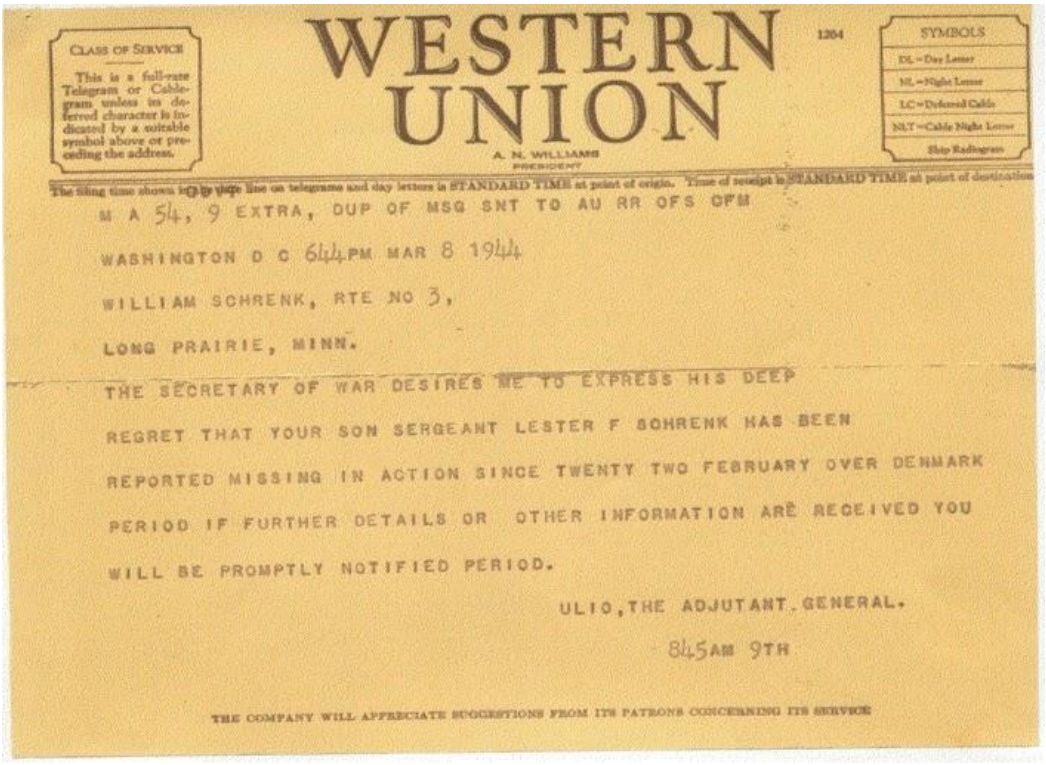
This kept on for about 20 minutes when at last the guard gave a kick to my pants and I flew out of the door. I breathed a big sigh of relief. I had stood up to the Germans and had not given in.

It was February, cold and snow on the ground. The Germans took away our flight boots and made us walk to the train station in our bare feet. They said it was to prevent escape, but it was miserable to say the least along with no food or water. They put us in a very crowded box car, but at least with so many of us in the boxcar, our body heat offered some relief from the cold. We were on this train for 4 or 5 days; I cannot remember. The only food we had was some watery soup made of dried peas. We still had the same clothing we were captured in, minus our boots, and were cold and very hungry.

When we arrived at our destination, it was a very small town in East Prussia, called Heydekrug; but better known to us as Stalag Luft 6.

Here they took away all of our remaining flight gear and gave us new clothing. Some of it was used and some new. It was a mixed bag, some being English, some American, but only one pair of trousers, socks and underwear; only bare essentials; no toothbrush, towels or other things we take for granted.

I then spent nearly 15 months in most inhumane conditions in a German POW camp.



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WESTERN UNION

1204

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

SYMBOLS

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M A 54, 9 EXTRA, DUP OF MSG SNT TO AU RR OFS OFM

WASHINGTON D C 644PM MAR 8 1944

WILLIAM SCHRENK, RTE NO 3,

LONG PRAIRIE, MINN.

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP

REGRET THAT YOUR SON SERGEANT LESTER F SCHRENK HAS BEEN

REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE TWENTY TWO FEBRUARY OVER DENMARK

PERIOD IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU

WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED PERIOD.

ULIO, THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

845AM 9TH

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

No Further Information
On Sgt. Lester Schrenk

Religious Council
To Meet Tomorrow

NO INFORMATION
ON SGT. SCHRENK

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~SECRET~~

2750

Classification changed to RESTRICTED
by E. A. Aradunas, Lt. Col., AC
by F. M. [illegible], Capt., AC
Date MAR 15 1948

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12065, Sec. 3-402
NND 785072
By MMiller NARS, Date 9-14-79

WAR DEPARTMENT
HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES
WASHINGTON

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate by each Army Air Forces organization within 48 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

1. ORGANIZATION: Location AAF Station 109; Command or Air Force Eighth Air Force
   Group 92nd Bomb Gp (H); Squadron 327th Bomb Sq.; Detachment ___
2. SPECIFY: Point of Departure AAF Station 109; Course Northeasterly
   Intended Destination Allberg, Denmark; Type of Mission Objective Bombing
3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST SIGHTED Smooth, clear, undercast
4. GIVE: (a) Date 22 Feb 44; Time 1445; and Location 57°15' N 08°15' E of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.
   (b) Specify whether (x) Last Sighted; ( ) Last contacted by Radio; ( ) Forced Down; ( ) Seen to Crash; or ( ) Information not available.
5. AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF: (Check only one) (x) Enemy Aircraft; ( ) Enemy Anti-Aircraft; ( ) Other circumstances as follows: ___
6. AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series B-17G; AAF Serial Number 42-31377
7. ENGINES: Type, Model and Series R-1820-97; AAF Serial Number (a) SW-002976
   (b) SW-003181; (c) SW-003126; (d) SW-003134
8. INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number)
   (a) KHW-684256; (b) KHW-684696; (c) COLT-749508; (d) COLT-949119
   (e) KHW-684340; (f) KHW-680552; (g) KHW-685240; (h) KHW-684606
   (i) KHW-683683; (j) KHW-684049; (k) KHW-684271; (l) KHW-684260
   (m) KHW-683243; (n) ___; (o) ___; (p) ___
9. THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty x
   (b) Non-Battle Casualty 0
10. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 10; Passengers 0; Total 10
   (Starting with pilot, furnish the following particulars: If more than 10 persons were aboard aircraft, list similar particulars on separate sheet and attach original to this form).

		NAME IN FULL (LAST NAME FIRST)	RANK	SERIAL NUMBER	
Kia 1.	Pilot	LAVIES, WILLIAM R. (check gt. cond.)	2nd Lt.	0-802123	
Ev. 2.	Co-Pilot	VAUGHAN, ELIJAH C. ✓	2nd Lt.	0-808616	RTD
Ev. 3.	Navigator	PEACOCK, FRANCIS B. ✓	2nd Lt.	0-809708	RTD
Ev. 4.	Bombardier	SHUMAN, ROBERT S. ✓	2nd Lt.	0-748038	Rtd
Ev. 5.	Top Turret Gnr.	BYERS, NEIL E. ✓	S/Sgt.	17032368	RTD
Ev. 6.	Ball Turret Gnr.	SCHRENK, LESTER F.	Sgt.	17156397	RTD
Ev. 7.	R. Waist Gnr.	GUASTELLA, PETER (NMI) ✓	Sgt.	34200402	RTD
Ev. 8.	L. Waist Gnr.	HARMAN, WILLIAM E. ✓	Sgt.	35628336	RTD
Ev. 9.	Tail Gnr.	SWINDLER, VERN C. ✓	Sgt.	18045834	RTD.
Ev. 10.	Radio Opr. & Gnr.	WALCOTT, JOHN J. ✓	S/Sgt.	33232019	RTD

11. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT, AND CHECK APPROPRIATE COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

(OVER)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Ind 8'