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Interview with
Carlton J. Killgo
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Oral History Collection

Carlton J. Killgo

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas Date: March 23, 1972

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Carlton J. Killgo for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 23, 1972, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Killgo in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Germans during World War II. Mr. Killgo was in the Air Corps and was shot down while on a bombing mission over Europe. Mr. Killgo, to begin this interview would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, would you just tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education, and your present occupation.

Mr. Killgo: I was born on February 12, 1922, in a little East Texas town by the name of Slocum. Well, I was raised up in and around Slocum and East Texas in the town of Jasper. My education primarily consists of high school, eleven grades. I continued my education as

far as my trade in the Air Corps. I went from high school into the Air Corps, practically. I was seventeen when I enlisted in the Air Corps.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enlist in the Air Corps?

Killgo: Well, at that time jobs for high school graduates were hard to get. As a matter of fact, they were almost non-existent, and so the only chance for an education for a farm boy more or less was to go into some organization or operation. The services at that time, you know they . . . things were building up so far as the war was concerned, and they were recruiting quite heavily, and I always liked aircraft. And so as a result I proceeded to go into the Air Corps primarily to choose an occupation. I like mechanics basically, and so I wanted to be an aircraft mechanic. And this is what led me into the Air Corps basically.

Marcello: Well, this is kind of a general answer that a lot of people give. In fact, I would say that the two reasons that people most often have given me for entering the service at that time were the fact that they couldn't find a job or the fact that they wanted to travel. And obviously in your case the country was still in the midst of the depression, really.

Killgo: Right.

Marcello: And, consequently, as you pointed out, jobs were not too plentiful. When did you enter the Air Corps?

Killgo: February 8, 1941.

Marcello: I assume that when you entered the Air Corps you had some idea that the country was drifting toward war at that date.

Killgo: I had an idea that it was, but I wasn't really convinced that we would go to war. I know that during civic classes in high school our high school teacher reminded us that quite a few of us would be fighting a war in our lifetime, and he was pretty accurate on his prediction. We didn't think so. Of course, we were young and just like people today we don't think the future was going to be as rugged as some people predicted (chuckle).

Marcello: Had you been following world events pretty closely at the time you had entered the service?

Killgo: No, I really hadn't. I wasn't concerned basically, and most of my concern was probably just like any other young fellow--girls.

Marcello: I see. Where did you take your basic training?

Killgo: In Kelly Field.

Marcello: Kelly Field. Where is that located?

Killgo: San Antonio, Texas. It was an old base, one of the older basic training sites. Well, as a matter of fact, Lindbergh took his training in Kelly Field. And so we

had a tent city--that's what we called it--at the end of the runway, and that's where I first became introduced to the airplanes. I began to feel like I'd make a mistake after they completed night flying when they were out while I was taking my basics (chuckle).

Marcello: What special training did you receive at Kelly Field?

Killgo: Primarily infantry training. They believed in the infantry-type tactics at that time, and they would let us have a little time at polishing airplanes. They introduced us to the rag and the polish. At that time they still believed in spit-and-polish as far as airplanes were concerned.

Marcello: What did you do when you got out of boot training?

Killgo: Well, I proceeded to school in Chanute Field, Illinois, located near Rantoul, Illinois. There I received what we called then an A and E course--aircraft and engine course. It's an A and P course now in the modern terminology.

Marcello: In other words, you did get into the special training that you wanted.

Killgo: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact the recruiting sergeant wanted me to join the cavalry, and I told him I didn't care for any of that. I'd had enough of the horses, and I wanted to go into the Air Corps. He said, "Well, we

don't have any openings for young fellows right now in the Air Corps." And I said, "Well, when you get an opening you just call me because I'm a ways from draft age yet." So he decided that I could go into the Air Corps. As a result I started and pursued what I intended to.

Marcello: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard the news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor?

Killgo: Yes, I sure do. I was in a bar in Taft, California (chuckle). They didn't ask me how old I was.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard about the attack?

Killgo: Well, disbelief. I didn't think they'd do it, really. Actually we were in a stepped up training program, but I didn't really think the Japanese would attack us. As a matter of fact, I hadn't even thought of the Japanese as an enemy, basically. That shows you how much attention I'd paid to the news in those times. Germany, you know, was the big thing. Of course, England was fighting Germany, well, since '39, and so we always just associated war with England.

Marcello: When did you go overseas?

Killgo: August of 1944.

Marcello: You were in the United States up until 1944.

Killgo: 1944.

Marcello: What did you do mainly during that period in the United States?

Killgo: Well, I was in the training command then. I was a flight chief, crew chief, and all right on up through on the line--what we called on the line--maintaining aircraft and training pilots.

Marcello: Well, up until 1944 did you actually get up into the air very much?

Killgo: No, only at intervals. We could go as much as we wanted to on what we called test hops and weather observation flights and things like that. But we were never flying as such. On later they did . . . well, whenever I got up to a staff sergeant, I was entitled to flying pay and we had to fly then--four hours a month--to draw the flying pay.

Marcello: Were you very enthusiastic about flying?

Killgo: Not really. I liked it but I mean I wasn't really excited about it. I liked to go up and enjoyed it.

Marcello: Where did you go when you went overseas?

Killgo: I landed in Liverpool, England, off the banana boat.

Marcello: You went over by boat?

Killgo: We went over by boat. The lucky fellows flew over. Some of them ditched off the Irish coast. But we thought we were unlucky by going by the banana boat. The

SS Brazil was the old boat. She'd hauled bananas between South America and the States before the war.

Marcello: Is there anything about that trip over to England that you think was perhaps out of the ordinary? Or was it a rather ordinary trip?

Killgo: It was basically an ordinary trip. I think there were about 8,000 of us. Now this is a guess, but it was quite a boatload of people. And we were lucky in that there were only eleven crews, bomber crews, and we were placed on the promenade deck up forward, and so we got the fresh air. I mean we didn't have to smell all the feet. We were really lucky that way (chuckle).

Marcello: By this time, then, you had been assigned to a bomber crew.

Killgo: I had been assigned to a bomber crew and had trained as a team. Now we took our flight training in Sioux City, Iowa. That's operational training I believe they called it at that time if I remember correctly. We formed as a crew in Lincoln, Nebraska and was given to Sioux City, Iowa, for . . . we were all basically trained. The pilots had their training in, and we had our gunnery and our mechanics in. I was what you call a flight maintenance engineer, and I had previously had all this training, and we were placed together as a crew then and trained together.

Marcello: What was your reaction upon learning that you were going to go to England? Were you looking forward to it?

Killgo: Well, yeah. I volunteered.

Marcello: Oh, it was strictly voluntary?

Killgo: All air crews were voluntary on up to pretty close to the end of the war.

Marcello: In other words, you volunteered to become part of an air crew, and in turn volunteered to go to England also.

Killgo: Well, I volunteered to become part of an air crew, and whenever I volunteered to become part of that air crew they could send me anywhere.

Marcello: And chances are when you became part of an air crew you were going to go overseas.

Killgo: Well, I anticipated that I would. See, I was what you might call fed up with the chicken over in the States, and so I wanted to get over where the action was. I had what you might call a patriotic attitude on it because I figured that every fellow ought to do his part about it. Now this may be hard for some people to understand, but I mean I did have that attitude. I figured that I might make the world a better place to live for my son whenever he came along. I was mistaken but I mean that was the attitude I really had.

Marcello: Where was your base when you got to England?

- Killgo: Initially, we were assigned for more training on what they call the "wash" at King's Lyn. I know one thing-- the chow was bad and the hours were long (chuckle).
- Marcello: What sort of a bomber was this that you had been assigned to?
- Killgo: All the bombers that flew out of England or the heavy bombers that we trained in were B-17's.
- Marcello: And this is what you flew?
- Killgo: That's what we flew. We were training in B-17's, and we were scheduled to fly B-17's in England and we did.
- Marcello: How long did you have to undergo training in England before you actually went on your first mission?
- Killgo: Well, we landed in England on August 25, and they started us training almost immediately, and we took orientation flights and did a lot of loafing up until September 17. I flew my first mission in England September 17.
- Marcello: Describe that first mission. When I say describe it, as well as you can recall, go back to the time you got up in the morning and follow the mission through to completion.
- Killgo: Well, we were scheduled for a flight. We didn't know what it was going to be at the time. We had previously been scheduled, and they scrubbed the mission--what they called scrubbed the mission--down in the southern part

of France, which was a pocket of resistance that they had just bypassed. See, this June and until August they were pushing on through Europe, and they had bypassed this section of France down in the southern part--one little pocket--and it was a harassing agent as far as anti-aircraft fire was concerned, and so they wanted to get rid of it so they'd have a little more clear space to fly over. But anyhow, we was scheduled for this mission for the 17th. We knew that we were going to make a mission, and we were informed the day before that we were going to make a mission, and we didn't know where. And really, I didn't sleep very much.

Marcello: You were continually thinking about the mission, I gather.

Killgo: Well, we were wondering . . . it was, you know, the unknown, and naturally you know how sometimes--especially whenever you're going out to get shot at--you're wondering just, "Well, now how is it going to be?"

Marcello: Were you very apprehensive?

Killgo: Well, yes, yes. I really was. Like I say, I was still a young-type fellow. I didn't have any grey hairs like I have now, and I was really to tally-ho (chuckle) as the English say. So I was really looking forward to it. But anyhow, at four o'clock . . . well, they finally

came around and let us know it was four o'clock, and we proceeded to have our breakfast, and then after breakfast we went back and collected all our gear up and everything that they had . . . oxygen mask, all your private gear and your sidearms, your flight suit, and your masks and all this. And so we gathered that all up and went to briefing. The officers had the briefing. Generally, they had the initial briefing of all the technical stuff, and we wasn't worried about that because we were riding along to keep them company, as the boys would say. But then they came in for a group briefing, and they had the map all up on the wall covered up with a special cover that couldn't be photographed through and all that, and they raised that. And then our mission then was outlined in red string, in and out and all this. And it so happened that we were scheduled for one of the more significant operations at that time in Arnhem, Belgium. It was paratrooper, glidertrooper . . . we were doing preliminary bombing for the glidertroopers' and paratroopers' invasion of this area of Belgium. Everybody was relieved because we had been scheduled for Berlin a couple of times, and that made everybody nervous because Berlin was well protected, and they always took a lot of prisoners. We knew that.

Marcello: Had you been hearing all sorts of stories from the veterans who had made several of these runs before?

Killgo: Oh, yes. The older boys always kind of pepped up the younger fellows, you know. They excited them about it. Of course, they told us the hard fighting was over with. I mean, we had the milk runs, and they really got us to believing it. And I'm glad because I might have refused to go (chuckle) if I'd known. But anyhow we were flying, and we were scheduled to go into this softening up raid at 18,000 feet, and 18,000 feet in a B-17 is low-level. I mean, we didn't like that because for the German 88 that's just like shooting fish in a barrel. We figured if we got up to 30,000 feet we were relatively safe. I mean, we were harder to hit. But at 18,000 it just tore us up (chuckle). But anyhow, it so happened it did. I don't remember exactly, but it was late in the morning we made this . . . well, it wasn't too late in the morning. It was about 9:30, I imagine, that we made our initial run. And they cut loose on us, and this was my first action with the 88's, and I found out that they really knew how to shoot them. And it wasn't for fun or anything else. They were serious about it. And I came to believe then that we were really in a war, and I was right in the middle of it.

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Marcello: What does it feel like to get caught in one of those flak barrages?

Killgo: Bad. I don't think that there really is a way to explain it. I mean, you can't explain it to an individual. You're scared. There are no heroes up there. There may be a bunch of liars, but there are no heroes. You are scared, and, of course, this is something that we knew was going to happen, but it wasn't going to happen to us. Well, it did happen to us. We were flying what we called a "deputy lead." We were flying wing man off of the radar ship. We had one radar ship that led the squadron, and then you had another radar ship that was a back-up, and then being new crews, well, they knew where this radar ship was flying. And so they picked on him. They wanted him. And we were flying wing man off the radar ship. They figured that when they got him, well, there would be a back-up, and we were the likely candidates then. They figured that it would be us. They had no way of telling what the radar ship was, but they knew the position it flew in. But anyhow, they shot our radar ship down in the first burst. And this tore me up because whenever he went . . . well, it wasn't no big explosion or anything like this. They shot his engines out, and he headed down and the boys started bailing out

because they were at a fairly low level. And I said, "Oh, things are bad today." And sure enough, they were. They started picking on us. And actually I had trouble looking over the turret because my knees were getting plumb weak. They didn't need gunners then anyhow (chuckle).

Marcello: In other words, there was no fighter opposition at all.

Killgo: No, it was all strictly flak, and flak you can't see until it's there. But anyhow, they fired two bursts on us and knocked an engine out on each side. I mean it was just like that, and here we were sitting fully loaded with bombs and everything and two engines, and we were not to the target yet, and we were hauling fragmentation bombs also which are very dangerous. I mean, they're dangerous up there whenever they're armed. So actually, I thought, "Well, they're through with us. They just got both those engines. Everybody checked out alright." And then they came tracking up and zeroed in right from six o'clock.

Marcello: In other words, they started walking those 88's shells in.

Killgo: They started walking right on into us. Well, in the meantime, before that third burst got to us, well, our

old engines just couldn't stand up to it and down we went. We still had power and we could navigate, but we salvoed our bombs for weight, to get the weight off, and we headed back. I mean, we cut out of the formation. We couldn't even . . .

Marcello: You were going back on two engines?

Killgo: We were going back home. We were going to try to. We couldn't stay in formation. We didn't have enough power with our engines to stay with them, so we salvoed our bombs.

Marcello: What does it feel like, incidentally, to get hit by flak?

Killgo: Bad (chuckle). No, it . . . you know, you say, "Well, they missed me." I mean, if you can hear it, well, it's a miss. So we figured they missed us. So that's the way I felt about it. Now, of course, I kept . . . this shows you how brave I am and all this. I kept feeling something on my neck, and I kept wiping it. I thought I'd been hit. It wound up that my dog tag chains got cold (chuckle). But this is actually an impression that I had. I was numb, I'd say.

Marcello: Well, when this flak hit the plane is it a jolt, or what does it do to the plane?

Killgo: No, when the flak initially bursts, well, it's just a bunch of pig iron, and the shrapnel is what does the real damage to you. So as it bursts, well, you get

the vibrations. It'll shake that airplane just plumb good, and then you start looking for the physical damage. Well, like it was with us, that flak burst close enough that parts of the flak knocked the cylinders off of the engines. And I mean when you knock cylinders off those engines--you've only got nine--and whenever it knocks one of them off and leaves it out there in the open it just completely puts that engine out of commission. So they did that on both--one on the right and one on the left--and I mean they knew just what they were doing. It's a wonder they hadn't got all four of them. They had good opportunity, but . . .

Marcello: So you had to get out of formation and then try and head back to England after you had salvoed your bombs.

Killgo: Right. We were actually fairly close to friendly territory because this raid was right over the front, what they call the front lines. Of course, there wasn't any specific front line, but I mean it was not too far into enemy territory. But we didn't get to do any damage with our fragmentation bombs that day, and, of course, we had an old pilot along with us. Supposedly he had sixteen missions, and evidently he had had milk runs because he'd never been hit. Well, we checked him

out that day. I mean, we really lined him up. So they got a little bit excited and then they overtemped our engines.

Marcello: They did what?

Killgo: Overtemped our engines. Got them hot. They were too hot.

Marcello: Overtemped, like temperature. They overheated them.

Killgo: That's right. Overtemped. Well, you don't worry about what we call the red lines anymore, the maximum readings on your gauges. You go ahead and get out, and then you wonder how high it went. But we overtemped the engines, and they were what you call detonating, losing power, like burning regular gas in an ethel-type engine. And so we had to get rid of all of our equipment or anything that would keep us from flying. The big weight was the ball turret, so we proceeded to drop that ball turret. I think they said it usually takes about thirty minutes. We did it in about ten (chuckle), so we proved them wrong. But anyhow, we dropped the ball turret and threw out all the gun jackets and guns and ammunition and salvoed the bombs, of course, previously, and this made the old plane fly a little better. And we finally decided that we couldn't make it back to England because the power just wasn't there to carry the old bomber, especially with two engines. And so we saw a little

airfield that still had German fighters on it. I mean, it had been bombed out, but it looked like we could make a shot at it. It was about thirty miles southeast of Brussels, Belgium.

Marcello: Now this was still in German territory, however.

Killgo: Well, we thought it was German territory at the time, but it had just been turned over. I mean, they had just come in and taken over the airfield. There wasn't any Air Corps people there. It was just engineers, mainly, trying to get the strip . . . it was just a strip and it still had the German fighters and everything parked out there. Those that couldn't fly off the Germans left. They had to. Well, we thought we were on a German strip, really. So we went ahead and came on in, and the pilot wasn't used to flying an airplane that was so light. So he made a standard approach, and we used the biggest part of our runway up before we ever got to touch it. That old B-17 just floated like a balloon with all the weight off of it when he was coming in for a landing. So we wound up about a hundred yards out in a potato patch, bogged right up to the belly. I imagine they burned that airplane because there wasn't no way of getting it out. But anyhow, this runway was good, and I still thought that I was in enemy territory, and my job was to burn that airplane. I had me a phosphorous

bomb and was fixing to toss it, and a great big colored engineer come up and said, "Hey, fellow, don't drop that. Don't do that. You're in friendly territory." (Chuckle) Well, I wasn't paying no attention to nobody around me. I was thinking about that airplane, so I didn't pay any attention to him until he hollered at me. But anyhow there was a photo reconnaissance plane flying over, a B-24, and they saw our predicament, and we left them plenty of runway to land on. So they landed and picked us up and took us on back into England. This was my first mission.

Marcello: That was some way to start out, wasn't it?

Killgo: So I had a full day. We got back about nine o'clock that night. I didn't even get the shot of whiskey they'd promised me or anything, and the only way you can get good whiskey over there is after a mission. So that was an incentive at that time and I needed it.

Marcello: How many missions were you to fly altogether before you came home?

Killgo: Oh, I was due to fly thirty-five missions. Thirty-five is all we had to fly before we could come back home.

Marcello: I see. And here was your first mission, and you'd kind of been washed out on that first one.

Killgo: I had already been scrubbed. Yes, I figured I was one

of the luckier ones, though. I was still alive. Nobody got hurt. Not a man was touched. Well, I take it back. The bombardier did get one little needlepoint of flak in the whole deal.

Marcello: How many other missions did you make before you were finally shot down?

Killgo: Well, three and a half.

Marcello: Okay, let's go back and talk a little bit about the second mission.

Killgo: Well, the second mission was really one of those milk runs. It was to Cologne. I believe we made the second mission to Cologne.

Marcello: Cologne had already been hit hundreds of time already, I suppose, had it not?

Killgo: Oh, yes, but they never did hit the flak emplacements. They were always in working order, and we flew through just . . . well, we could have walked through it, as the old saying goes. But we didn't get any sizeable amount of flak. This may have been due to the fact that we had a radar deterrent, what we called chaff, aluminum strips . . .

Marcello: Would this be aluminum strips that they threw out?

Killgo: Yes, and the group ahead of you always throws your protection out, and they were very diligent, so it did

help us through. But you had no trouble smelling the cordite from the bursts. You can smell it right on through your old oxygen mask and all. But it was basically uneventful.

Marcello: Any fighter opposition?

Killgo: No fighter opposition at all. I would have been glad to have had fighter opposition because if the fighters came, well, we didn't have the flak because they'd quit shooting at us. And you know if you can see your enemy, well, you're not in too bad a shape, but you can't see him you don't know where that next one's going to be. Well, this is what puts the nervous in it.

Marcello: At this stage in the war I suppose you had fighter escorts which could go along with you all the way on these bombing runs.

Killgo: We did. The fighter escort was light on our first mission. Now on our missions on into Cologne and all we had good fighter escorts, but they stayed out of flak range. I mean, they covered us. If we had any fighters, why, they'd come in and say, "Okay big brother, we'll help you," but while they were shooting that flak they were sitting out of range. But they didn't shoot fighters, see, because they would have to pick them more or less individually, and the bombers are what they were after anyhow.

Marcello: How many planes were going on this raid over Cologne? Obviously the one over Arnhem did not have too many planes in it.

Killgo: Yeah, in the raid over Arnhem I would say 300 to 400 airplanes, I imagine.

Marcello: Three to four hundred airplanes. And how many pounds of bombs did each one of those carry?

Killgo: Well, I believe we had 6,000 pounds of bombs, and they were in 500-pound fragmentation units.

Marcello: How about over on Cologne on the second run? About how many planes . . .

Killgo: Well, we were carrying six 1,000's there, and the planes . . .

Marcello: Six 1,000-pound bombs?

Killgo: Six 1,000-pound bombs is what we were carrying over Cologne, and that was about the maximum load for the B-17's. But now there's no way I can make an estimate as to how many planes--an accurate estimate--but I think there were about 500 to 600 bombers.

Marcello: I would imagine it took quite a bit of coordination to put 600 bombers into the air and get them over the targets and have them return again. Now, of course, all these bombers did not come from the same base.

Killgo: No, they formed by what they called "buncher signals" over England. Now this is what we called it. Now this

is my term for it, and I wasn't associated with them really other than just knowing that we had a "buncher signal" that a certain group formed over. Well, we would form, every group, over this signal, and they would be, say, in twenty mile intervals around, and you formed from take-off up to this signal, and you formed on that like the airwave signals they now fly. You formed at a predetermined time. You had so much time to be there, and you'd better be there. And then after you formed, you took off toward the target, and you formed in the bomber stream so to speak to go to the target. And usually you formed a string of what you'd call groups--bomber groups and bombers--all going toward the same target.

Marcello: And I assume you had to have a pretty good reason for turning around and coming back, did you not?

Killgo: Yes. If you turned around and came back and couldn't prove you had trouble, well, you were courtmartialed, and back in those days they could make it stick. So you better have trouble. Now this was basically one of the things that I had to help determine. See, I was supposed to have been the mechanical crew member, and I . . . of course, the captain made the decision, but the captain along with myself and our observations made the decision because we worked as a team. Even

though he was an officer, he didn't mind asking a sergeant a question and for his opinion, and he respected that opinion, too. That was one of the things we had to train for. We all had enough training to go ahead and get in a bomber and fly, but we trained as a group, as a crew, and this is what we got used to in there, and this got it lined out to the extent that he knew his flying, I knew the mechanics of it, supposedly, and so with what he observed and with what I knew and what I could tell him we made the decision to go or come back.

Marcello: What was the third mission like?

Killgo: The third mission was . . . well, I had the attitude, and most of the boys did, that we finally got the milk runs. We came back from Cologne, and we finally got our drink of whiskey, and we . . . it was good, too, good bourbon whiskey, but we had said, "Well, now we've been shot down one time. People fly thirty-five missions and never get shot down, so we've had our part. Now then it's all on the house." This was a good attitude because this made us go on instead of staying back and doing KP for the duration of the war.

Marcello: In other words, it was a feeling of confidence.

Killgo: Very. It was a confident attitude. It was a confident attitude, and it was formed by the opinion that, like I

say, these people had flown these thirty-five missions and never got shot down, and so we'd had ours and there we were. But anyhow, one of the main incidents I . . . we started on a bomb run into Kassel. But anyhow, the bomb bay doors wouldn't open, and, of course, this was my job to crank the bomb bay doors down. They had one of those emergency cranks, and the extension for the crank was in the radio compartment. So I called over the intercom and asked the radio operator to hand me the crank extension across the bomb bay where you could step in. Of course, it was all cluttered with bombs, and it was tight anyhow with your parachute and all kind of paraphernalia, and it was hard to go around, go through. Well, by the time I got back he had pulled his oxygen mask off--his hose connected to his oxygen mask--because he didn't think it was going to be long enough to affect him. And when I opened my door, well, there he was. The doors had already been opened. The bombardier discovered the malfunction, and the radio operator was sitting there just almost tilting over the doors, and he was just about gone. So I had to go around all that paraphernalia in there, and I caught him before he fell out. I mean, he was right over the open bomb door. But I got him back and got his oxygen to him, and he was real fine. He didn't leave his

oxygen anymore. He learned his lesson there. He was a very fine fellow, too.

Marcello: Do you remember what your targets were over Kassel?

Killgo: No, I really don't, nor do I over Cologne, but I did . . . well, this shows you the nonchalant attitude. We didn't care. We was going to Cologne. I think it was a synthetic oil plant.

Marcello: In other words, everybody kind of had a job to do, and I suppose each of you assumed that the other knew his job and therefore was going to do it.

Killgo: That's right.

Marcello: I guess that the pilot knew that it had to go to Kassel; the bombardier probably knew where he had to drop the bombs.

Killgo: Right.

Marcello: That was his business, and you assumed he was a professional and that he knew exactly what he was doing.

Killgo: Well, you know, actually we had a navigator, a bombardier, a pilot and co-pilot, radio operator, gunner, and, of course, you're familiar with the crews. Anyhow, at all times the navigator knew where he was. He kept himself pinpointed. He was navigating all the time. But we were following a lead ship, so he didn't have to do any navigating. If he wanted to loaf, he could loaf

until it came time to get out on his own. And it was the same way with the bombardier. The bombardier didn't have to worry about using that superior Norden bomb sight and guiding that airplane in on automatic pilot and dropping those bombs because the man up front was opening his doors, and when he dropped his bombs, well, the bombardier dropped ours. So he didn't have to do that except if something happened up front, and then he had to do it himself. Well, he had to know how to drop those bombs. So everybody was independent in a way, but he didn't use his independence unless it came to an emergency. As a result, well, it was all an action of control from one strategic point.

Marcello: What was the fourth flight like?

Killgo: That was the real thriller, and it was a sad flight, too, because we lost two of our crew members. But we were doing real fine . . .

Marcello: Well, let's just go back a minute here, and let's just talk about this fourth mission from the time it started once again. Since this is the most important mission, let's start from the beginning of this mission.

Killgo: Alright. Well, basically, we were numb because we had flown a mission on the 26th, we had flown a mission on the 27th, and this was the 28th. Our fourth mission

was on the 28th of September, and we got to where we were more or less like what you would call zombies. We would get back late and get up early, and we were bushed. But after this fourth mission we had a rest leave coming which was what we were looking forward to and all. But it was all routine, I mean it had got to be routine. We checked our aircraft over; we checked our guns over; everybody did his job. And so there was no big problem except we were extremely heavily loaded with fuel since we were going on a pretty long run. This mission was to Magdeburg. If I remember correctly, it was slightly south and west of Berlin. Like I say, it started out just basically as routine, and we were all doing fine. We hadn't encountered too much flak, and everything really was going along fine. It took us to about eleven o'clock to get from England over there. I figure around that basically because time was figured after you turned off the target and headed toward home. Then you started figuring time.

Marcello: Magdeburg was pretty far into Germany, I gather.

Killgo: Oh, yes, it was . . . Berlin was . . .

Marcello: Over in the eastern part of Germany.

Killgo: And Magdeburg was south and slightly west of Berlin, so it was a long mission. I believe we figured that

was a nine-hour mission. Anyhow, it was routine and up to a point of not an overly amount of flak. And then all of a sudden things got real quiet. In my estimation we were about ten minutes from the target.

Marcello: Was this a large raid?

Killgo: Yes, it was quite a riad. It wasn't, I don't believe, what they called a maximum effort.

Marcello: Something a little less than maximum.

Killgo: Yes, it was less than maximum, but it was a very important mission, and so they had as many airplanes as they could muster. I would say as many as a thousand airplanes. Like I say, your records or cross reference system will find out how many, but it looked like a lot of airplanes to me--miles and miles of them. But anyhow, we were never told exactly how many aircraft. Basically, everybody estimated the number. Officially we weren't told, but then everything quieted down, and I noticed that we didn't have our fighter escort. I was scanning all the time, rotating the turret and everything, and about the time I missed the fighter escort, well, I noticed the Germans--FW190's--about forty of them.

Marcello: FW 109--that's a Focke-Wulf, right?

Killgo: That's a Focke-Wulf 190.

Marcello: Pretty hot fighter plane.

Killgo: It's a very hot airplane, and they knew how to fly them. They were well trained, but they came in in waves of about twenty, just about two waves of them.

Marcello: Did you ever find out what happened to your fighters? Or were they busily engaged in these FW 190's?

Killgo: No, what happened really on the fighters was that they ran out of gas. I mean they were just a little bit late coming in, and this is what they do. They sit back out and wait, and if there's any mess-up in the tie-in with the escort, well right then's when they hit because they don't need long. Five minutes in a fight like that is way too much. They can do all the damage they want to do in a lot less time than that, and did. Well, our fighters came in, but I mean they had already done the damage. Well, they shot . . . actually, I think, basically we were the first airplane hit in the raid, and I think a lone fighter--in my estimation a lone fighter--came up in the vapor trail and shot number three engine completely--not completely but almost--off of the airplane.

Marcello: In coming up through the vapor trail, I assume he could come up practically unseen.

Killgo: That's right. He can see you. It's just kind of like a fog. He can see you, but you can't see him. So he

came up, and he evidently pulled right into a stall and just shot the tar out of us, but he shot the number three engine all almost off of it. It just left a hole that you could almost walk through and set the aircraft on fire. Of course, at that altitude it don't burn like it would down at lower altitudes. We were flying at about 27,000 and . . .

Marcello: What were your reactions when you saw this? Or what were your feelings?

Killgo: Well, I didn't have time to think then to be honest with you. There was no thought, because we were the first airplane hit, and then when we got hit the rest of them came in. I was paying attention to these out here, and I got all set up and dialed it in just like the book said and all this. I had a Sperry gun site that's supposed to be infallible and all this. So I had it tuned up; I got me an enemy I could see. And this was a relief because you had something tangible. You could see it; you could fight it. Well, I shouldn't have been happy really because they knew what they were doing. They never did hit us again, but they damaged us so bad that we had to leave the formation, but we didn't leave the formation before the fight was over really. But they came in in those waves, and you could tell when they came into range because their

wings would light up like a neon sign. They shot 20 millimeters and they had the lighter 30's on the wings, and it looked like the wings were on fire. And, of course, we were shooting; we were fighting back, too, blaspheming and praying all at the same time. It's laughable now, but it wasn't really funny. It's not funny. War is not funny. I'm glad that I can reminisce about it because I lived, but it was personal. It was very personal, and you had your own private talks, and you had your own private talks both ways, and so I got it figured out that I was close enough that He heard me, and He took care of me. But we were knocked out of the fight. We couldn't maintain formation with the three engines and with the aircraft shot up as it was and burning.

Marcello: Did anybody get hurt in this initial burst?

Killgo: No, nobody got hurt. Every man was in fine shape. We got the fighting over with. All the fighting was gone, and the escort came in, and naturally the fighters went. They shot down sixteen of us that day. We shot down eighteen of them, but they got a pretty good bargain because they sacrificed eighteen fighters for sixteen bombers. This is not a sporting deal or anything. It's serious business, and we'd already developed a serious attitude, really, toward it, but . . .

Marcello: I'm sure you developed that serious attitude after the first brush.

Killgo: The first flight I developed a serious attitude. It wasn't any fun then. It was no laughing matter. Of course, you had to keep smiling, you had to keep laughing, and you had to keep acting even though you was scared. And, like I say, there may be some heroes, or talking heroes, but I didn't meet any of them, and I know just how everybody felt. Even though I didn't want to keep going on, I did have nerve enough to keep going on. And, of course, there's nobody . . . we have some people that don't mind being called a coward and will say, "This is it," but I mean with the thinking in those days, man, that was the worse thing you could be. And I wouldn't have been that way anyhow. I guess I'd have gone on if I'd had known I was going to get shot.

Marcello: So what happened after the planes had to drop out of formation?

Killgo: Well, we didn't stay out of formation long before we left the airplane. I told the captain that the airplane was on fire and it was burning, and we were going to blow, and I was afraid it was blowing up.

Marcello: In other words, the engine that had been hit was on fire.

Killgo: The oils were ignited by the incendiaries from the

exploding 20 millimeters. And the high octane gasoline . . . of course, they were sealed tanks, but this gas leaked out. A full tank won't blow up; an empty tank blows up. But if that fire got into it where it would finally just burn right on through. But we were lucky that the plane never did completely burn up and explode. It spirled on down and crashed. I didn't see it, but I left early in the game. I mean, as soon as he said bail out I was ready (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you think about bailing out?

Killgo: Well, my primary thought was getting away from the airplane, getting out before it blew up. This was my thought; this was my objective. But I wouldn't leave the airplane until he said bail out. He's supposed to give the order. The captain gives the order, and I thought he never would, but after he gave it, well, it didn't take me long to make up my mind to go. Well, I left from the front escape hatch which is down under the flight deck. And at the time, the initial thought was to get out of the airplane, and I knew there was fighters in the area, and I was afraid that they would shoot us in the parachutes. And this scared me. It just ran me in shock almost, thinking about getting shot in a parachute.

Marcello: Had the Germans been known to do this?

Killgo: We had heard rumors, but I don't think that . . . now there may have been rare instances, but I don't think that they really did it. There may have been a gung-ho boy or two that was just like our side, maybe, that would have done it, but I don't . . . we'd heard rumors, you know, the boys talking, and I took And so I said, "Well, I'm going to delay my drop. I'm not going to open that chute while I'm up here where they are. I'm going to get on down to the terra firma before I do--closer anyhow. Now, you'd think your senses would . . . I guess some people would think your senses would just black out and what have you, but I had all my facilities. I was thinking just like clockwork. As a matter of fact, as I was falling . . . well, I was falling head first with my feet extended, and every now and then I would rotate a little bit, and I was just raising cane in my mind with the little short fellow that gave us a lecture on parachuting, and he was telling us how you could guide yourself and all this, and he said you'd be able to turn and could tilt or anything, and here I was trying to stay straight and I was rolling. And I was just thinking about when I was going to get back and give him part of that lecture with my fist. But it wound up that the reason I was rotating was

because I had my hand on the ripcord, and I was trying to guide with this other one and my arm sticking out was unbalancing me (chuckle). And this was the reason why I was rotating. But anyhow, I got on down, I guess, I estimated it to about 5,000 feet, and I rolled over one time and a nice fluffy cloud was right at me--a low cloud--and I immediately . . . I don't think my brain sent a message to my hand to pull the ripcord--I mean, it went--and I don't remember sending the message (chuckle). And, as usual, I didn't have one strap tied as tight as the other, and it felt like it pulled my leg off plus a pop in my neck like a whiplash. And after that, everything was deathly quiet. I couldn't hear anything and I was wondering. I said, "Well, now something's done happened." Well, the sudden drop in altitude and all will stop your ears up. Well, immediately I cleared my ears and then everything was too loud. And I was drifting in until the time I got to where I could hear everything and all the whistling through the shroud and what have you. I was heading toward an open field, and I was drifting backwards. So I reached up and grabbed my shroud lines and held them to where I could go forward and look forward. And about the time I was ready to land, when I figured to hit, well, I closed my eyes and limbered up.

And I couldn't hear nothing but cracking limbs (chuckle).

I had drifted all the way across the field into a forest, and here I was hanging about thirty feet off the ground strattling a limb--not a scratch. Very, very lucky. Well, then I kept saying to myself, "What are you going to do? What are you going to do?" Here I was alone. There wasn't even a bird. I couldn't hear a bird. I could hear airplanes and bombs because we were close enough to the target that you could hear the . . . I was close enough to the target that I could hear the bombs going off. And finally I said, "Well, you've just got to get hold of yourself. You better stop and rearrange here now." One of the first things they taught us to do was to start running in the opposite direction that you wanted to go and throwing away part of your equipment as you went along. So immediately my training took over. And I proceeded . . . I didn't know which way I wanted to go, but I knew I was going opposite the way I decided to throw the equipment. So I threw all my equipment as I went about fifty yards at a time and headed back the other way.

Well then, I heard a dog and some kids hollering at the dog. I didn't speak German, but I knew I associated the dog and the kids voices with the dog.

Over there, they cultivate their forests, the biggest part of them, and they have hedgerows. It's kind of a hedgerow, a brushrow. This is, I imagine, for wildlife to grow and nest. Well, these boys kept coming closer, and I could hear them, and they were coming from the way I was going. Well, I'd already thrown away all the material that I had. I couldn't have anything else to throw away. So I said, "Well, I've got to do something." So I noticed a little deer nest. These little old small deer make a nest just like a rabbit. And I noticed one of those in the brush, in the row of hedges, so I proceeded to crawl in that dude. And I crawled in and pulled all the limbs over me as much as I could. And so here in about, oh, a couple of minutes one of those little mouse-type deer came running up--about two feet tall. He came bounding up right up by his nest and stopped right in front of me, and just sat there and stared right at me eyeball to eyeball (chuckle). And he was just shaking and trembling as bad as I was because he was running from that dog. And here that cotton-picking dog came after that deer, and those kids were following him. Well, whenever he got to me, I must have been making a good smell because he stopped and he paid his attention to me, so I proceeded not

to pay any attention to him. I just sat still and closed my eyes. I figured, I guess, if I closed my eyes it'd go away (chuckle). So I heard a rustle inside of another minute or two, and I opened one eye real slow, and here was a little Luger sticking right in my eyeball, and I got my first lesson in German.

Marcello: Was this a German soldier?

Killgo: No, it was a farm boy. He was about fifteen years old or sixteen, real well built, two of them. They were about fifteen and about eleven, I guess. One of them had a shotgun and the other one had this pistol.

Marcello: They were specifically coming after you or had they been there already?

Killgo: They were after the deer. Basically, they were after the deer. They didn't know I was in the country.

Marcello: But this one boy had a Luger?

Killgo: He had a Luger. I assume it was a Luger, a pistol. I didn't pay no attention to it really (chuckle), but I was looking at it right down the barrel. I could see the projectile. And he moved back a little bit, and I said "Comrade" just real easy. I didn't make no movement at all (chuckle). And he moved back and motioned for me to come out. And they weren't afraid of me. I mean they had no fear, really. They were friendly, basically, but he kept that gun on me. I mean, he wasn't

that friendly. And so he carried me on up to his home and it was . . . you know they farm around. They have villages over there generally, and they farm around these villages. And so he took me on up to his home which was in the outskirts of this village. And they took me upstairs and gave me a little old roll and an apple, and I couldn't eat it. My mouth was dry and my adrenaline was all tied up and everything else. And he was showing me his pictures of all his family. He had a brother that was in the Hitler Youth and all this, and his sister was off somewhere with some unit or corps or something. And so he was showing me all that, and finally, well, he decided he'd take me on up to burgomaster, I guess.

Marcello: All this time he was keeping the gun on you.

Killgo: Yes, one of them had the gun on me all the time. They wasn't going to trust me that much. I had some gum. I gave them some gum and they ate it. I motioned to them, I said, "Mum, mum, yum, chew it." And then I gave them another piece. That took care of the gum because I had my piece (chuckle). But anyhow, they didn't have the attitude or didn't act toward me that I was an enemy.

Marcello: Where were their parents?

Killgo: Their parents were on up in the village, and evidently one of them had already called or something and told them that they had me. And when I got there they had a crowd.

Marcello: A hostile crowd?

Killgo: Well, not really. All except the burgomaster. Now the burgomaster could speak English. He could speak English fairly good, and he proceeded to interrogate me. They must have all been told that the first time they caught a flier they were to be sure to get his name, rank, and serial number--which I gave--and what kind of airplane I was flying. They wanted to know where I was from and what city I was from. I made out like I couldn't understand. I said, "I can't understand you." And he knocked the tar out of me. Man, I mean he just . . .

Marcello: Hit you with his fist?

Killgo: With his fist, just right flat in the face. And I got up and he asked me again. And I told him my name, rank and serial number. "I don't know," I kept repeating because I was afraid to talk. I was thoroughly indoctrinated. I believed that whenever they said if I talked I'd be courtmartialed. Of course, it was insignificant, but that's good. It made a good soldier out of me. I guess at that time I was a peacetime

fellow, but I was a soldier and I was a professional. I volunteered for it, so that made me a professional. But I believed it, and so as a result I didn't talk.

Marcello: Did he hit you anymore than this?

Killgo: Yes. He'd cup his hands and hit me over the ear with it, and that would knock me out immediately. I mean, I'd come to on the floor. It's a wonder I didn't have a busted eardrum. But I didn't. I can still hear, but anyhow he hit me, I guess, about four times. So then he made me pull off my britches.

Marcello: This was still outside in public.

Killgo: No, we were inside, women, everybody available there, but he made me pull them off right on down to bare. He made me bend over. He checked me thoroughly for any weapon or anything I could have on me. He made me pull my ring off. Of course, I'd only been married a year--not quite a year. So he made me pull my ring off. Well, I reached over and got my ring back. Initially I pulled it off, and whenever he striped me down and all this and then checked me and then let me dress back up again, well, I reached over and got my ring. Whenever I did, he reached over and popped me once again.

Marcello: He popped you when you went to get your ring?

Killgo: Yes, yeah, and put it back over there. And I reached over and put it on again. I grabbed it and put it on my finger. Well, this time and when I did it he gave up. He let me alone. He let me keep it, and they never did take it away from me even though they wanted gold. I mean, they was needing gold. I know they took gold out of some of the fellows bridges. But they let me keep that ring. But by this time the police--the official police for that area--had come in. He came in on one of those motor scooters, more like a trail bike.

Marcello: Was this a civilian policeman?

Killgo: He was a civilian policeman, and he came over and he proceeded to try to ask me questions. Of course, he couldn't speak as much English as I could speak German, so we had a common ground there, so I didn't have to lie to him or nothing. But anyhow, he finally decided, well, that was all he could do there, so he motioned for me to hit the road--get going out ahead of him--so I took on off.

Marcello: And all this time the crowd really showed no hostility.

Killgo: The crowds there showed no hostility. I was more or less an attraction. There were farmers.

Marcello: And, of course, the farming areas really had not been hit by bombers.

Killgo: They had not. That's right. They heard the bombs. They heard the bombs going off, but they couldn't travel to the cities to see. They wouldn't let them travel to the cities to see, and they weren't as hostile as the people in the cities were. But they were just inquisitive. I was something different. I was a soldier. But now the German people respected a soldier, I mean, the German soldiers did. They respected the military people. I guess they were brought up to that, and they passed on some of that. I guess some of that respect kept the hostile attitude against me down.

But anyhow, he proceeded to get me on out on the road to the next village--I found out--which was about three to four miles. And he cranked that motorscooter up and proceeded to boot me in the behind and told me to get going. So I started out running, and I ran, I guess, a good mile and I'd gone as far as I could. I was shot. The two previous nights and all this interrogation was beginning to show on me. I was young and I had plenty of vinegar, and I was tough then. They trained me good, but I ran about a mile with him on that motor scooter. Every now and then he'd pop me one. And I finally said, "Well, I'm going to walk. I can't go no farther." And I guess if there is such a thing as mental telepathy, I experienced it because

I felt like that man was going to shoot me because we was away off from anybody else and I could feel it. Just as sure as I feel I'm sitting here right now, I could feel it. Well, these are things that thirty years don't erase. But I said, "Alright, I'm ready to go because I can't run any farther." I sat down and he let me rest for about ten or fifteen minutes. And I got back to where I could breathe, and then he finally saw that I was able to go, and I had new life, too, and I figured, well, I made that one. And he proceeded to crank his motor scooter and said, "Raus." And I became indoctrinated to another word. I knew that meant "run."

Well, I didn't run as such as I did in the beginning. I trotted good; I jogged real good. And every now and then he'd boot me, I think, just from general principles, but he took me on in then to the next village, which was a larger village. And this is where they had the civilian jail and all. Well, he proceeded to march me down the village, and I never saw the like of children, old people, women in my life that were gathered there. I didn't think there was that many people in that country. Well, it looked like a bunch to me. I don't imagine it was more than 100 or 200, but the whole village was there, everybody that could walk.

So I proceeded to walk up on the sidewalk because where I come from you did, and he butted me off of that sidewalk and put me in the gutter. Well, the horse manure and all this stuff was in the gutter and all. You see, they're cobblestone-type gutters, and they drain down to the sidewalk, and I proceeded then to walk over on the dry side, and he booted me back down in the gutter. I finally got the idea he wanted me to walk in the horse manure, so horse manure it was.

And he took me on down to the jail. The jail was down kind of in the lower end of the village, and when he opened the door I saw it had kind of an inner door. One door you could open and lock, and then you unlock the other and you open it and lock it, that kind of thing. I guess it was a safety factor. But anyhow, he sat me in there and he wanted my dog tags. Well, I pulled one dog tag off and gave it to him, and he motioned to me that he wanted the other one. I'd been told I got to keep my other dog tag, so I refused to give it up, and he proceeded to jerk it off my neck. He did. He jerked it off and laid it up on the ledge. I said, "Well, I guess you've had it again, ole fellow."

So he unlocked the other door, and when I stepped in that door I almost went into shock. I had read and heard about these cells and the cages that they have where you can't stand up in and you can't sit down in.

They had one of those cotton-pickers in there, and I just knew I'd had it. I'd heard in the process of reading about this somewhere--I don't know where I got it--and, I said, "He's going to put me in there, and I don't believe I'll be able to go," because where I read it it was torture. Well, he didn't. He didn't put me in there. But somebody hadn't taken care of the sanitation services, and they had a half drum, and it was just about full, and he made me drag that out and take care of it--emptied it right out in the street. So I had a fresh drum, but I didn't have any water and I didn't have any food. And he took my apple and my bread away from me, so it'd had about a good six hours since I had anything to drink or eat. Oh, it'd been longer than that because I didn't have any appetite for breakfast. I thought about it.

Marcello: In the meantime, you were completely separated from any of your crew. You had not met any of them yet.

Killgo: Nobody. Nobody. Right. I didn't know what had happened to them. I didn't know whether they were dead or alive or what have you. I had no contact whatsoever. Now the process of delaying my fall separated us by a few miles because I went right straight down.

Marcello: Incidentally, were the people in this town any more hostile than the ones in the other town?

Killgo: Well, no, they didn't show a hostile attitude, but there's one thing that I didn't state in that. He stood me up in front of this jail, and he had all these people out there, like I say, babies and little children and all, and he made a long speech about me. Well, naturally it'd be about me, but he made this long speech there. Now he pointed out to me, and he used the most guttural language he could dig up, I'm sure. And he impressed them with what a terrorflieger I was, and there wasn't anything worse in Germany than a terrorflieger. That was a flier, and I was a terrorflieger. And I can understand why now because, like I say, they respected a soldier, but they respected an infantry soldier. They didn't respect a flying soldier. They respected them, but I mean a flying soldier was something different; he was new. And so he made this speech to them. They were well indoctrinated as to what a terrorflieger looked like.

Marcello: So anyhow, he put you in this cell.

Killgo: Well, he put me in the cell, and I didn't have a bed to lay on. They had a board, about a 2 x 12, about eight to ten foot long, just laid up against the wall. And I found out what lice were because they were hungry, and I got my first lice in my life. This is an

experience, and it's an experience that millions of people have never had, and I hope they don't ever have. They bite good, and they'll keep you awake even if you're tired. I mean, I've never been bit by a lice if that's the correct (chuckle) gender, but I had a crowd of them there, and they were hungry. But then after staying overnight there--not sleeping overnight, but staying overnight--he woke me up the next morning about . . . uh, woke me up (chuckle) . . . he came in the next morning about, I would figure, about seven o'clock, and proceeded to take me up to the railroad station and escorted me on the train to Magdeburg.

Marcello: In the meantime, you had had nothing to eat.

Killgo: No, nothing to eat at all. No water to drink or nothing. I asked him for water--and this is pretty universal--"Trink Wasser," water. "Nicht." That's universal (chuckle). We got on the train and headed for Magdeburg, and this was the city that we had bombed the day before.

Marcello: Was this a rather uneventful train trip to Magdeburg?

Killgo: On the train nobody paid any attention at all. Now there's one thing that might have helped this. We had what we called an escape suit. It was a heated suit with a liner, a snap and zip-in liner, and you could pull this liner out, and we had to have heat for high altitudes. And at that time, we didn't have pressurization and all, so we needed these heated suits. The liner, we could throw those away and just use the outside, and

it looked like the peasant dress--not the peasant dress--but I mean the standard dress suit of the average citizen over there. And this is the way I was dressed--with what they called an escape suit. It was a uniform. And so this may have been the reason they didn't pay any attention to me. I looked like a rugged individual. They may have figured that I was just a crook of some kind that he was taking to jail, but they didn't pay any attention to me at all.

Marcello: Now did he have you tied up or bound in any way?

Killgo: Nope. He did not. He never put a rope or a cuff or anything on me. But I knew that the war was over for me, and I knew that I was deep into the country. And if I had any escape ideas, well, I'd have to plan them. It wasn't going to be right then. But he took me on through . . . well, up to the station at Magdeburg, and then we had to walk, I guess, a couple of miles. So we got on a streetcar from the station, and then I noticed the first indication of hostility because . . . I didn't notice it by the people saying anything because I didn't understand what they were saying, but he put me behind the door. You had kind of a door that separated the cars, and he put me behind the door, and it would open up into a corner, and he put me behind the

door and stood in front of the door. I was still hot property; he wanted me alive because they could interrogate me and go ahead and probably get some semblance of information from me, and information is what they wanted and they needed.

Marcello: Did you notice any of the bomb damage in Magdeburg at this stage?

Killgo: I very definitely did because some of the bombs had hit the city, and this was very demoralizing. I know some of the anti-war people probably will want to expound on this, but to me it was and it is the truth. It was very demoralizing to me to go through that city that had been bombed and see these people going through the streets crying, work-crews, soldiers with hoes and shovels and rakes going through a'singing these patriotic songs. You know that they are very good with their military songs and all this, and they were singing them, and they were singing them with gusto. They weren't like our American GI. You didn't have to make him sing. They sang. They sang to help their spirits, I assume. I know they did because it kept them moving. It kept them going. But to see these people going through the streets crying--women crying--you know that some of their people were probably killed in the raids.

And I know that we wasn't scheduled to bomb the city. We were scheduled to bomb a synthetic oil plant, but whenever you're being shot at and kicked around you're not . . . when these bombs are dropped there's no way that they can really pinpoint them because they did saturation bombing. That's what they did in actuality. So they knew the target was here; they'd come in on it; and some of them did hit the place.

As a matter of fact, I believe that in Magdeburg they have the Elbe River that goes through there. I think it is. But anyhow, they had these old-type stone bridges with the keystone and arch and all that, and there were quite a few of them. It was an old city. Naturally, all the cities over there are old. But anyhow, the bombs in that area had hit one of the bridges and made it impassable for wheeled vehicles. You could walk across it. I know a thousand pounder went right through it and made a hole about as big as this table right in the middle of it. It wasn't a very light bridge, but it blew sediment up that I know that had been there a thousand years. It dug a hole but it didn't tear that bridge up. Now I don't know why I would think about that bridge. I don't know because I had plenty other things to think about. But we walked on across the . . . we rode the streetcar on up to where we couldn't

get across the bridge or get other transportation across the river, so we walked across the river.

We got across the river and got over to where the bus system came in. The streetcar system carried us up to part of it, and then the bus system took over. And he had to get him some grapes. He hadn't had anything to eat evidently, and he asked a couple of soldiers to stand guard on me while he went to get the grapes. I found out he got grapes. That's what he was after. He came back with a big sack of them, and he wouldn't offer me one (chuckle). It wasn't very ethical. But anyhow, these two soldiers had a lean-to, like a waiting place there. It wasn't anything elaborate, just a shelter.

He took over eating his grapes, and the bus came along going--I found out later we was going out to the air base--and when we started to get on, well, the bus driver objected to me getting on. I didn't pay any attention in the beginning. He and the bus driver were starting to argue. I don't know whether you've ever heard of a swarm of bees or not, but if you haven't and you ever have the opportunity to hear bees swarming, well, this is how it sounded inside that bus. Now there was some kind of waves coming out because immediately I felt it. And I come just as close as any fellow you

ever saw to getting lynched right there because those people were mad and the crowd wasn't making an audible sound other than a hum. But that whole bus hummed just like a swarm of bees, and he was sitting there arguing with that bus driver and me a'wanting him to quit then. I found out what the argument was about, and that bus driver didn't let me ride that bus. This was the first real outward hostility other than what he and the burgomaster had inflicted upon me.

But they didn't let me ride the bus, so we proceeded to start walking. He walked fast and I was about gone, and he was walking real fast, and I couldn't keep up with him. I was five or six or seven yards behind him trying to keep up with him because he was my protection. I figured he was the only way out. He wasn't my friend, but I was his friend (chuckle).

So anyhow, finally a German GI truck came along, and they picked us up and carried us to the air base. Well, he took me on in to the adjutant or the C.O. or somebody. It was a fine base. I was inside the base before I ever knew it. They were masters at camouflage. They had stuffed cows out in the field. I saw these later out through the jail cell there, and they were right on the airport.

Marcello: And this airport had never been hit at all?

Killgo: No, it didn't have a scar on it that I could see. They had stuffed cows grazing in the pastures and all right on the runway, and they had mounds with grass growing on them, and the hanger doors had grass growing on them, and they'd raise it up and here was the whole hanger with airplanes by the numbers. I saw those and they'd go about it. The grass was just as pretty as you ever saw growing right there. And you couldn't see the . . . well, photo reconnaissance couldn't tell it because it was genuine 100 per cent grass. But anyhow, they didn't want to talk to me. The C.O. didn't want to talk to me, so they took me right down to the jailhouse. They never did bug me, fingerprint me or anything like this. They just threw me in a cell. Well, then's where I came in contact with Schwartzbrot. It's made out of a little bit of everything.

Marcello: It must mean black bread or something like this.

Killgo: It is. It is. It's kind of like pumpnickle. We called it Schwartzbrot. It was a wartime bread. It had even sawdust in it, maize, sawdust, anything they could cook. It was a real sour bread and hard and almost indigestible. But it was bread. It was food, and as hungry as I was, I immediately ate it. I got a drink-- I had a pitcher of water--and there was another old GI in there. I don't know whether he was a plant to

talk to me and find out information or not.

Marcello: This was another American?

Killgo: This was an American. I never did see him again. After I left there, I never did see him again. But I headed for the water and for the bread then in that order, and I got about three bites of that bread and I slowed down. I said, "Home was never like this." (Chuckle) And so, I finally did after I got settled down a little bit and calmed down a little bit, well, I ate enough bread to get the gnaw out, and the water more than the bread. I was hungry but that water was good. But then I stayed over night there. This was at Magdeburg.

Marcello: They didn't interrogate you or anything at this stage?

Killgo: They didn't say . . . they didn't . . . nothing. Now this other airman was talkative.

Marcello: Was he in the same cell with you?

Killgo: Yeah, he was in the same cell, just he and I.

Marcello: What was he talking about?

Killgo: Well, he was just talking about everything, about over in England and all this and all that, and he wanted to know where I was at and all. I didn't want to talk. I didn't have no . . . I didn't want to talk. I was tired so this is maybe the reason that I didn't talk, but I was suspicious anyhow. I don't know why. I wasn't

that smart really, I . . . but I was just suspicious.

Marcello: Was this base run by the Luftwaffe?

Killgo: Yeah, it was a Luftwaffe base. The fighters that shot us down came from this base, and they were right close to home. They had plenty of fuel (chuckle). It didn't take them long because they were about ten minutes from us probably when they hit us. They were ten minutes from the base at a maximum, including take-off and everything. But evidently from some of their reports and what have you they knew that there was going to be . . . what we suspicioned and what we talked over with other crew members that were with us and that got shot down the same day was that this little interval between, this little delay in swamping over from our escorts . . . in other words our escorts that was with us that brought us in had to leave because their fuel would go right there and that's when they've got to quit because that's their neck, too. You can't blame them. But the fellows coming in to relieve them were just a fraction late. Now they came in when the fighting started, you know and all, and drove them off, but only after eighteen of us were shot down. And we wouldn't have had that many . . . now the flak may have gotten us if it hadn't been for the fighters, but we didn't have the flak there. That was before the flak. The

flak would come later. But the fighters come in, you know, and got their score and the flak took care of theirs. Well, now after leaving Magdeburg, they took us into Frankfurt.

Marcello: How long were you at Madgeburg? Just overnight?

Killgo: Just overnight. The next day they took me on into Frankfurt.

Marcello: By train?

Killgo: By train. I still hadn't had anything to eat but this Schwartzbrot. We went on into Frankfurt, and this was the first big railroad station we saw. They had a military interrogation camp or a Dulag outside of Frankfurt. Anyhow, they took us on out to this camp, and immediately they wanted us to get lined out. Whenever they took us out to this interrogation center, they'd line us all out in front, you know, in rows where they could count us off and everything, and then they would tell us in a real nice manner . . .

Marcello: Well, how many fliers were there at the time?

Killgo: I imagine there were fifty that had been grouped there in one group.

Marcello: Had all of you come from Magdeburg?

Killgo: No, we came from other places. They came from other places, but we came into Frankfurt.

Marcello: Did you meet any hostility on this trainride from Magdeburg to Frankfurt?

Killgo: No, we sure didn't. Everything was very, very calm and collected.

Marcello: Had your policeman left you?

Killgo: The policeman left me, but the military took over.

Marcello: This was the Luftwaffe.

Killgo: Yes. The policeman got his award, I guess, and he took on back home to take care of matters at home. So the Luftwaffe took care of us then, and then they took us on into Frankfurt. Well, there was a noteworthy incident to me, and I couldn't understand it, but the English and the Germans understood each other, you know, being close to each other. But we were down in the bomb shelter under the railroad station in Frankfurt, and this Englishman could speak German, and he talked this guard into bringing a pitcher of beer down. Of course, English beer is . . . you know, they drink it hot and it's a bitter, sorry beer, really. The Englishmen will even admit it, too, I think (chuckle). But he brought a pitcher of real good, light, genuine, old American-tasting beer for this Englishman. He talked to this German officer. I guess they had this esprit de corps, so they got along. He said, "Well, ole buddy, I'll help you out." But he got this beer, and that Englishman

let us have a glass of it. It was about four of us that he let have a small bit of, and that was the best beer I ever drank in my life. It was cold and it was good (chuckle). I'd have gladly given my year's salary for just about four pitchers of that. Anyhow, then they took us on out on a streetcar to this interrogation camp.

Marcello: And who was running this interrogation camp?

Killgo: Evidently, it was a combined group of Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe. In other words, they were in Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht uniforms. But the Luftwaffe would interrogate fliers, terrorfleigers, and I guess the army would take care of the infantry personnel. There wasn't too many of them. Most of them were fliers. But they did have the bureau of Wehrmacht there, too. But immediately what they would do, they'd just come right over with a bull horn, you know, and say, "Well, now you fellows, I know you're all separated from your friends and all this. Now we're going to take about ten minutes, and you all find your buddies and get lined up. Get reacquainted." They were real nice, real nice. Well, again, I suspicioned and we'd been told that a lot of this would happen, and so we went ahead and waited and a lot of boys did it. They'd go out and get with their crew and find out what happened and all.

Marcello: Did you find any of your friends?

Killgo: Yeah, my friends were there. They were there. Now I stood still, and my friends came and found me. We were in a group, and we didn't show crew familiarity, but we were together. They bunched us; they were smart.

Marcello: They wanted to get the crews together.

Killgo: That's right. They wanted to put us together because you'd talk then. Then they took us and put us in a little small cell. We had other groups with us, other people besides the crews, and all our crews wasn't together because we kept pretty well separated. And they put us in this little small cell, and they left us there for about three hours.

Marcello: You were with your crew.

Killgo: No, part of my crew.

Marcello: Just part of them.

Killgo: Part of my crew, not all of it. There was three of them that didn't go in the group. Two of them were killed. One of them was killed outright, the radio operator, and we never heard from the co-pilot. But we stayed there for about, like I say, about three hours, and then they came and . . . well, immediately, I figured what they were going to do. We all did. If we talked about anything that was of a military character, well, they would bug . . . they had the place bugged, so

we didn't talk about it, other than just our own personal people. So they came and got us then and put us in individual cells, two cots wide. They had a cot with a grass mattress on it, a built-up bed the width of a cot, and you had the walking width of another cot. That's all you could go. And they left us in there. I stayed in there for five days.

Marcello: Were you fed regularly?

Killgo: I was fed in the morning with some of this Schwartzbrot sliced real thin with German margarine which was about the consistency of axle grease. But it was good and we had a little sandwich of that and one mug of coffee or ersatz coffee. Then at suppertime--about four o'clock in the afternoon, country suppertime, dinnertime for us--we had a bowl of thin soup and a couple slices of bread. And if you wanted water, you had to call the guard. If you wanted to go to the bathroom, you called the guard. You had a postman's deal with which you'd use a flag. You'd just pull a string and it'd go down, and they may come by. A lot of fellows didn't get service like they should have, and, of course, they had problems. I was lucky. But whenever they decided to come get you, you know, they'd get you. A guard would come and take you down to the bathroom, and you'd take

care of your duties--no showers, no wash, no nothing, just the standard duties.

Marcello: I assume you hadn't shaved or had a bath for several days now, ever since you'd been shot down.

Killgo: Ever since I'd been shot down. As a matter of fact, we didn't do much washing in the first place, I mean, not as far as showers are concerned. We had spit-baths, you might call them. But one of the noteworthy things that I saw, as far as the psychology that they were using, they had written all over the walls "Pray" with a nail, like it was scratched in with a nail. And it was kind of a soft-type wall, I guess, or plaster. And they'd written these words pray all over the wall. I think there must have been about a thousand of them, pretty close to a thousand. I counted them. I don't remember exactly, but it was close to a thousand of those. And they went in there with white paint--this was kind of a dull color--and they had gone over with white paint and a brush and slopped over every one of those. Well, it made it stand out (chuckle). And this, I guess, was a signal that somebody had really had a rough time. I just had it figured that they had had a rough time, you know. They were trying to make like they'd had a rough time. I don't think that I was above average in intelligence, but this is just what occurred

to me because of the way they covered it up and all. If they'd wanted to cover it up, they'd have put black paint over it or something. But anyhow, after about five days they took me in . . .

Marcello: Did they ever question you during these five days?

Killgo: Nope, they didn't say anything.

Marcello: They never harassed you in any way?

Killgo: They didn't do anything at all.

Marcello: They didn't lay a finger on you?

Killgo: Just left me alone. Whenever I put my flag down they may come. At night they would come and make me pull my shoes off and set them outside the door, and this was the only other contact that they had with me. I'd throw my shoes outside the door. In the morning when they brought my soup back, they put my shoes in, or when they brought my sandwich and a cup of coffee. Well, after the fifth day, then they took me in for interrogation-- still no shave, still no bath. And I'd about gotten used to it anyhow. It didn't matter. I figured if I smelled obnoxious to them, well, it was good anyhow. But he was a Wehrmacht officer. He was impeccably dressed, I mean, right up to snuff. He invited me to have a cigarette, and, of course, I couldn't hardly hold back (chuckle). Just a cigarette--American cigarette. Of course, at that time, it was Camels. I was smoking

Lucky Strikes. That was before the "Greens" went war even. Well, right about the time. He still had the "Greens," but he had the Camels, no Lucky Strikes. I was smoking the Luckies. He had the Camels. But it didn't matter with me, and I had a cigarette, and he picked up the phone and made a call. I didn't understand this at first. But I had a friend by the name of Matizza from Austin. Matizza was full blood German, and he spoke German fluently. His grandmother had taught him. He came from one of the German communities in and around Austin. She wouldn't let him have anything unless he asked for it in German, and she taught him German, and he hated them with a passion. But anyhow, he explained to me what the phone call was about.

Marcello: Now where was Matizza?

Killgo: Well, now I didn't know him then.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Killgo: I didn't know him. I found out about this later about why he made the phone call.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Killgo: Now what he was saying in German when he picked the phone up was to send the guards up. He wanted to send me back for ten more days in solitary. He said this in German. Well, I couldn't understand German, so I paid

no attention to it, so he determined right then that I was not able to speak German. Matizza explained to me later, like I say, that what he had said to the guards was to send me up for ten more days. Well, whenever they did this to him, and he knew German, he immediately jumped up and said, "What the hell are you doing that for?" (Chuckle) So he hung the phone up and smiled, and he said, "We have decided that you speak German." So this was one of their tactics. Of course, he proceeded to interrogate me as far as basics.

They wouldn't let us know anything, really, over here in the States. They wouldn't let us close to a B-29. We were soldiers and they let civilians all over them, and they wouldn't let us close to a B-29. The B-29 was just being developed. They were just training in it, and we shipped out of a base that had B-29 training, and we couldn't get within a hundred yards of it. So we didn't know anything. They knew we were going to Germany, and they knew that we'd be shot down--some of us would be shot down--and they would question us about it.

Anyhow, he made his speech and then he proceeded to ask me all the questions, all the military questions, and questions about where I was from and all this. I was an American and I was still a name, rank, and serial

number. And mostly what he wanted though was the serial numbers on the aircraft. They were wanting production data. I found out later; I didn't know then. But I didn't know the serial number the aircraft I was flying anyhow. Why, they took me to the airplane, and they said, "This is your airplane." It was a brand new one. I knew they just got a replacement for the one we got shot down in on the seventeenth. I hadn't even given it a name. I thought about calling it "Irene." Glad I didn't (chuckle). Anyhow, I didn't know the serial number of it or anything. I didn't have any questions that I could answer. I couldn't have any answers for his questions anyhow. So name, rank, and serial number was good enough for me. But he looked over at me before he sent me out and he says, . . . well, I'd better not speak (chuckle) the language he said. He said, "You're a dumb son-of-a-bitch to be a sergeant in the United States Army." And I said, "Yes, sir. I sure am." And I was glad of it too (chuckle) because dumb was one thing I could stand. Well, from there, they shipped us to another little staging area.

Marcello: He decided that he couldn't get any information out of you?

Killgo: He figured that I wasn't worth the trouble.

Marcello: He never threatened you or anything like that.

Killgo: Oh, no. He never threatened me at all--no threats. He

was still cool, calm. He didn't let me have but one cigarette. He had chewing gum, too. I'd liked to had some of that, but he wouldn't let me have any of it. But after he interrogated me or attempted to interrogate me, he sent me back to my solitary where they came and picked us up the next morning, and we went on out to Wetzlar. They mined the clay in this little city that they made the lens for the opticals.

Marcello: Yes.

Killgo: And I think that part of the reason why they had this little camp there was because it was kind of a little staging area. They gave you a toothbrush finally. They gave you a little duffle bag, a little salvation army ditty bag with a comb, toothbrush, and razor and five blades. And I'd like to get hold of the manufacturer of those razors. They didn't put their name on them. They wasn't any good (chuckle). Anyhow, I did struggle through a shave with them. But we were up on the hill in this little town. Then I got my first cooked meal. They took the Red Cross parcels, and they didn't distribute them. They took them and made food up from them and served it family-style. Boy, it was good! I mean the crackers and the spam. Everybody kicked about spam. I never did find anything bad about it (chuckle). Anyhow, we got a shower. That's the first shower I got.

Marcello: About how many people were there at this staging area?

Killgo: I imagine there were about 500 at a time.

Marcello: All nationalities?

Killgo: No, mostly Americans. Well, now anything that was flying. The only thing I came in contact with in my tour up to now were Americans' even at Frankfurt they were Americans. And this Englishman, now, I came in contact with him in the station, but I never did see any Englishmen anymore after . . . now he may have been a plant, too. I don't know. But I'd have told him anything if he had given me that pitcher of beer. But anyhow, we stayed in Wetzlar actually about--I don't remember--about three days, I think. It was so nice and restful, and I slept most of it.

But anyhow, then they proceeded to load us up in these freight cars, "forty-and-eight's." They had them with seats on the sides like a school bus and in the middle. And this is what they hauled us on--next to the engine. We found out why. When they tied us on up next to the engine, well, when fighter bombers came over and they saw this big P.O.W. insignia on top of the car, well, they wouldn't shoot the engine out. They may shoot the rest of the freight up, but they wouldn't mess with that car because of that P.O.W. sign. Naturally they wouldn't their own fellows. But they outsmarted

them. They went ahead and bombed the bridges out, so they done about the same damage. As a matter of fact, they did the damage to us. We had to sit there for at least a day before they could get the bridge repaired and go on. It didn't take them long to fix bridges.

Marcello: Now this was strictly a freight train other than the American prisoners?

Killgo: That's right. They had two cars of prisoners on it. Now they were shipping us out. They had these camps lined out as enlisted men's camps and as officers' camps. All flying personnel were NCO's. There weren't any privates or Pfc's flying. I think that since this was a voluntary outfit they had this classification. And one thing that helped was that the Germans, being a soldier nation and all, didn't work a noncom. He could supervise the work, but they didn't work him. This was bad because I'd have been glad to have gotten out and done some work because that way I could have gotten a little food. You can always choke a rooster or something like that outside, and they always have a chicken, or two or you can find a nest and get an egg or two. But in the camps that I was in, well, you were behind the wire and that was it. Now I was shipped out to a place in East Prussia, Stalag Luft #4, at Grostichow.

And this was in a setting kind of like the East Texas piney woods--Ponderosa pines and all this right out in the sandlands. But it was supposed to have been one of the maximum security camps because they had seismographs and everything else, roving dogs and everything. Well, I got into Stalag Luft #4, and I got another shower and a delousing. I got rid of my lice.

Marcello: Was this camp run by the Luftwaffe, also?

Killgo: No, this was run by the Wehrmacht. I separated from the Luftwaffe at Frankfurt. The Wehrmacht--the German soldiers--took over. The field soldiers took over.

Marcello: What did this camp look like from a physical standpoint?

Killgo: It was just strictly old, wooden-type barracks with wood shutters. It had glass windows in them. It had glass windows--a type of swing-out glass windows. But they were very rustic, and they had log blocks, so you could see under them. In other words, you couldn't dig any tunnels out. And they had twelve individual rooms in each barracks, and they had beds built on around the walls for sixteen people.

Marcello: Sixteen people in each of these rooms?

Killgo: In each room. But the beds were made out of 1 x 4 lumber with 2 x 4 uprights, and the slants were made of 1 x 4's. And they had a paper palate-type of mattress with sawdust in it. Now this was for the sixteen beds. Now being

a late comer, all of my group were overage, so there weren't any beds, so we slept on the floor and on the tables and what have you. The sixteen beds were covered. Now we were with Englishmen there--Englishmen, Polish, French. We were all mingled in together. We were all enlisted men, a sergeant or a buck.

Marcello: Did they segregate the prisoners according to nationality?

Killgo: No, no, they did not. I was put in with a bunch of Englishmen. And they had the beds, of course--Englishmen and Polacks. I call them Polacks because they treated us dirty.

Marcello: They really did?

Killgo: Yeah, they didn't like the Yanks at all. I don't know why. I really don't know. I don't understand it. But we found out later why or later that they didn't. They didn't outwardly express it too much, you know, to us. They'd talk against us in their language. This is just little old things that will come out here. But anyhow, we slept on the floor. I slept the winter of '44 and '45 on the floor, just a plain old wooden floor, with one overcoat and one blanket. That's all I had. That's where I slept. And you could throw a bucket of water out, and it would freeze by the time it hit. Of course, you didn't notice. It didn't seem too awful bad, really, basically, as far as being uncomfortable from the cold.

But then we didn't get any more showers. We had an eight-quart bucket. And we had fourteen lumps of coal a day. Now this is about fourteen pounds of coal. They made it briquettes; it's a powdered coal. And that's what they allowed to each room. And we heated our bath water. Everybody in that room . . . well, we didn't get a bath everyday; we didn't get a spit bath everyday.

Marcello: You used the coal to heat the water rather than to keep the barracks warm?

Killgo: Well, we had stoves there . . .

Marcello: I see.

Killgo: . . . so you sat the water on the stove. Anytime you had that fire going you had water heating.

Marcello: I see.

Killgo: Everybody got them a little bit of water. Now you had outdoor privies. They were the old country-style outdoor privies, and your well was right next to it. I mean it'd give the water a good taste. We had a pump. It was all the modern conveniences. It was a hand pump. We could pump it out. But one of the great deals there was whenever they "blew the privy," as we called it. They had a honey cart--they called it that over there--and this cart was a big tank on a wagon. It would hold a thousand gallons. Well, they had a unique way of

pumping that stuff out--the waste. They would insert a long hose tied onto this wagon, a heavy hose into it, and then they would pump a gas into the tank. And they had a big flapper lid, oh, two foot across. It had a rubber seal on it. Well, they pumped this gas in, and then they had a rotating valve. And they'd light a match in this valve and flip it, and this gas would explode, and it made one heck of a noise. Well, that lid would immediately close and create a vacuum, and you'd just pump the whole thing out--real ingenious (chuckle). And another thing that you wouldn't think about was that in burning the coal and what have you, we had the old chimney sweeps come out and sweep the chimney.

Marcello: What was the food like in this camp?

Killgo: Sorry (chuckle). We got coffee, ersatz coffee, and this was made out, I understand, of something like an acorn, and other inert ingredients. And it tasted like, well, something between--you don't really know about it--Black Drought and Three 6's.

Marcello: No, I'm afraid not.

Killgo: Well, you'll find some old timers who know. Three 6's is as bitter as anything that was ever invented, and Black Drought, like I say, not being a country fold, this is another dose (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, what is this, some sort of a . . .

Killgo: Well, no, I was talking about what it tasted like.

Marcello: Yes, right.

Killgo: It was vile, but it was good (chuckle). We got this in the morning. This is what we got--a great big pitcher of it, one big pitcher for twenty-four. And then in the evening we got bread rations, a seventh of a loaf of bread. They're about the size of a small load of bread you buy in the market. It was about the size--what is it--a half-pound loaf. A small loaf, it's about that size. Seven men divided that loaf up, and we got a little bowl of potatoes or kohlrabi soup. Now they had a kohlrabi soup that was made out of . . . a kohlrabi is a turnip. It's a pithy-type turnip. They feed it to cattle over there--cattle and prisoners. The cattle would turn it down and eat grass, and we didn't have any grass. But they'd give us that kohlrabi soup or the potatoes at night with a seventh of a loaf of bread and a little pat of margarine. And on rare occasions we'd get this ersatz jelly. It was made out of grape peelings or something. It was artificial. The biggest part of it was ersatz or artificial. But that consisted of a day's rations from the Germans, and we had an ingenious way of dividing this up. We had one bowl. This was our utensils: one bowl, a fork,

and a spoon. And we would set out twenty-four bowls, and one man would fill the potato ration up along with the bread ration to each bowl. Then we'd lay a card out. We'd just shuffle the cards and lay a card out and issue a card to each of the twenty-four people. High card in the hand got a high card on the table. That's the way we divided it. Never an argument, never had an argument. And nobody would steal anything. That was an unwritten rule. It was rough if you stole anything from a fellow because times were hard.

Marcello: What did you do in this camp?

Killgo: Nothing. Well, you played solitaire. You walked. You could walk around the perimeter of it, and you had a warning wire. The warning wire was ten feet from the main wire. If you touched that warning wire or jumped over it or anything like that, the guards in the boxes would shoot you. He didn't holler halt, halt and then fire. He shot.

Marcello: Did they give you some sort of an orientation when you came to this camp about the things that you could do and the things you could not do?

Killgo: Our people that were there oriented us. And this is another thing. They were suspicious of us. They had a committee that cleared you. You went in there, and

you didn't know it, but you were being cleared all the time. They'd question you from one end to the other, and they were clever. Our boys were real clever about it (chuckle). And they would clear you because the Germans would send GI's in that could speak English fluently--supposedly GI's--and get their information inside.

Marcello: Did the Germans provide any sort of recreation for you at all?

Killgo: They furnished some recreation. Mostly it was . . . you know, English play football, soccer. They had soccer balls. They had skates that they would issue out. But the boys would have to roll the snow down and ice. We didn't skate. Didn't any of us skate, but the Englishmen and the Polish people did. By the way, these Polish people were with the RAF. They were a flying with the RAF, but they were refugees from Poland. So this is the reason that the Polish people were in there with the English because they were RAF people. And they skated a lot because this was their national pastime. In East Texas, we never did see any snow. We didn't know what skates were. But they would pour water out and make them a skating rink, a small skating rink. But they would be well guarded. They had guards whenever they issued the skates out. They figured that they could

skate to freedom. I don't know whether the skates would have speeded them up in escaping.

Marcello: What were the German guards like?

Killgo: German guards basically were older men. They were not fit for combat duty, and they would use them as guards for the menial tasks, so to speak. And they were basically pretty nice. You'd find an eager one sometimes. We had one that would beat up on sick people. Everytime a man would come through sick, well, he'd whip him to death almost.

Marcello: You mentioned this one guard who would rough up the prisoners on occasions. What were some of the things he would do?

Killgo: Well, generally he just more or less used his fists to slap them or hit them or kick them, but he would always pick on sick people or wounded ones. He was an exception rather than the rule, I think. They were all . . . some of them had experiences, I'm sure, that would cause them to be bitter toward the air force personnel, and I think maybe those people kept away from the air force personnel. Of course, it wasn't a Sunday school picnic, don't get me wrong. We were denied . . . we weren't denied, we didn't have any priviledges.

Marcello: Did you have any nicknames for any of the Germans?

Killgo: Yes, yes. "Goons" was the primary name that we had for them.

Marcello: Did you have any names for any individual guards?

Killgo: Well, yes. I'm trying to think. We had one that we called "Horrible Goon." But I cannot recollect any specific ones other than "Horrible Goon." Now we had one bad guard, one mean old guard. He'd always throw our food around whenever he came in to serve us and all, and he was a "Horrible Goon." Normally, they were just "Goons."

Marcello: For the most part did they generally leave you alone?

Killgo: No, they never really left us alone. They were constantly walking around, snooping, looking. The inner guards would go through the barracks. They were always looking for contraband, so to speak--radios. They've made crystal radios. We got news regular.

Marcello: How did they make the crystal radios?

Killgo: I don't know exactly what all they used. I understand they used razor blades, wires out of heated suits. Then they made the crystal-type radios. They made their own earphones and the works. And they'd receive BBC on them and got a newscast and read it every night to us.

Marcello: Did you ever see any of these radios?

Killgo: I saw it but I didn't know what it was. I saw it during an inspection.

Marcello: Do you know where they ever hid it?

Killgo: No. You had a committee. You had a group; it was an inner group.

Marcello: Was this in each barracks?

Killgo: Well, no, in the camp. Now they took the news. You had a barracks chief, a man over the barracks, and you had your security people and all that. But this radio was known only to a few. It was as close as any fraternal organization you ever saw because they watched it. Now when Stalag Luft #4 was initially constructed, they moved prisoners out from East Prussia down to this Stalag Luft #4. Well, the navy personnel were young people, young military personnel. They were academy-trainees, I think. I was told. This was before I was there. But they brought these boys down from this camp by way of the Baltic up through to Stettin. And from Stettin they brought them down by rail to the camp which was up at Grostichow. And they stationed machine gun posts strategically in the pine forests on each side of the road. And whenever they marched them to this camp, well, these boys from that other camp were well organized and they even had playing-type radios. And when they moved out of this camp, they disassembled those radios completely, and each individual had his part of the radio. So the Germans knew this, and so

whenever they marched them into this new camp, they were going to get rid of this. And they had them chained together, two-by-two. They had shackles on them. And they had these dogs, these canine-type dogs. They were vicious son-of-a-guns, just as mean as what we call Texas yard dogs. But they turned these dogs loose on these fellows and, it'd turn your stomach to see some of the scars where those dogs had attacked those people on their buttocks and all this. It was just deep, blue pockmarks where that dog had bit all over their legs and their behind, just up to their shoulders. And they made them run shackled together and wanted them to escape and all. The boys knew better than this. And they were really sadistic about it, so to speak. But those dogs chewed those boys up something horrible. And, of course, as a result, they threw all their kits down because they had to run, and with all the weight they had they threw it down. And in this way, they got all the equipment that they had taken from the camp.

Escaping before things got rough over there was kind of a game. If you escaped, they brought you back: "Ho, ho, you didn't make it ole buddy." But then it got serious. They got to where they'd shoot you. And we didn't escape, you know, after this group of Englishmen

made this famous escape over there. Well, the word came down, "Unless you've got something that you've got to go home for, you don't attempt no escape." Now if you planned to escape, if you had a plan for an escape, you didn't just go in and enact this plan yourself. You turned this plan over to a committee. The committee decided whether it was feasible or not. If it was feasible then there might be somebody else that might have seniority over you that they would let use your plan. So you didn't just decide, "Well, I'm going to escape." That was the best way in the world to get shot.

Marcello: Were there ever any attempts to escape while you were at this camp?

Killgo: No, not while I was there because we had already been told to stay just where we were. The war was to close to being over to attempt any escape.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you saw one of the radios going in in inspection. You mean this was during the German inspection?

Killgo: Yes, the Germans were pulling a search trying to find the radio.

Marcello: And it was right in front of them, and they didn't recognize it?

Killgo: It was right in front of them. It was in front of me, and I didn't recognize it until it was all over with. It was in a milk can. They had this powdered milk that came in the Red Cross parcels, and it was Klim. It's milk spelled backwards (chuckle). This was powdered milk, and it had a high nutritional value. We were proud to get hold of it because it gave us a little extra energy.

Marcello: Did you get your Red Cross parcels regularly?

Killgo: No.

Marcello: About how often did you receive them?

Killgo: We received about a quarter of a parcel--the equivalent of a quarter of a parcel--a week. And this is over all. And it was designed for one parcel to last a week, per man.

Marcello: How did your weight hold out in this camp?

Killgo: I lost a bunch of it. Well, I say a bunch of it, I wasn't very heavy to begin with, and I lost about twenty pounds.

Marcello: How much did you weigh when you went in?

Killgo: I weighed about 140, and I went down to about 120.

Marcello: And you went down to about 120.

Killgo: Approximately 120. We didn't weigh, but, I mean, I was pretty tight on the bones.

Marcello: How did you get along with the other nationalities in your particular room?

Killgo: We had lots of arguments--no fights. Nobody had energy enough to fight. And we argued a lot. But the other nationalities weren't like the Americans as far as sharing their food and things like this. Now this is kind of hard to say, but the English fellows that I was associated with, when it came to food, well, it was survival of the fittest. Now maybe we don't blame them, but when we came into this camp, we hadn't had any food all day. They had just got their rations and our rations wouldn't come until the next day at five o'clock. And they wouldn't offer us any food--no part of their food. You see there was only a couple of us who went to the room at a time, so out of sixteen men it wouldn't take much to give a little food. Well, now, we did. Now, I'm not patting Americans on the back or anything like that, but whenever our Americans . . . most of them coming in were Americans, and these Englishmen and Polish people were in there first. And whenever our boys came in, well, we would go ahead and we'd divvy right down the line with it. We'd divide it right on up with them, and see that they got fed. But coming back to these Polish people, they were always sitting over in the corner. You see, we'd have racism come into it,

but they was the ones that was doing it. But they'd sit over there and talk about the sorry Americans and all this bunch of stuff. I mean, they were just going on and on and on, and we didn't know what they were talking about. And we had a poor little old fellow come up from Chicago. I don't know him and I don't remember his name except he was "Shorty." I was talking about them taking the gold out of their partial plates and all. Well, they took his partial plate. He had gold partial plates, and he didn't have any front teeth. And he really looked bad (chuckle). And whenever these Polish boys would come in, he'd say, "Hi, fellows." He'd say, "Hi!" You know, just a general old American greeting. Immediately, well, these Polish fellows got over in the corner and said, "There's another one of them son-of-a-bitch Americans." (Chuckle) And they started yakking like that, and he walked over to them, and he started spitting that stuff back on them. And that young fellow could speak seven different languages fluently, even Russian. And we didn't have any problems then. (Chuckle).

Marcello: Were there very many Americans in this particular room?

Killgo: Yeah, there was eight, well, at full capacity. There was eight. There were sixteen in the beds and eight Americans on the floor, and that's where we stayed.

Marcello: In other words, there were twenty-four people in there and . . .

Killgo: Seniority prevailed, let's say this. That's as it should be.

Marcello: In other words, there were twenty-four people there, and of the twenty-four there were eight Americans.

Killgo: That's right.

Marcello: And the rest were British and Polish.

Killgo: They were all from the RAF. But anyhow, after that we had no problems. We had no huddles. We had no Polish remarks (chuckle).

Marcello: Who did the work in the camp if the noncom's didn't do it?

Killgo: You did your own policing as far as your room and your camp area. There wasn't anything to dirty up camp with. You smoked a cigarette until it burned your finger, and then you kicked the fire out and saved what was left. Then you rolled it back up with another mixture and smoked it again, so there was no salvage. Now we had the cookhouse that took care of cooking what potatoes we had and the kohlrabis for the soup and to make the coffee and what have you.

Marcello: Did the prisoners have to maintain their own cookhouse?

Killgo: We had people in the cookhouse supervised by the Germans.

Now here's another thing that we did. We had people that couldn't live on the rations that were issued, so by popular vote we agreed to let these people that couldn't survive on the rations as they were issued-- we had doctors that would confirm it--we would let them work in the cookhouse because for 1,000 people you wouldn't miss what they would eat, basically.

Marcello: Was there a very high attrition rate in the camp? Did very many of the prisoners die?

Killgo: No, not really because we were all in the prime of health. We were inoculated for every disease that you could have or that they knew about, and there must have been a bunch of them from all the needle scars I got.

Marcello: When you say you were inoculated, you mean you were inoculated when you were in the American service.

Killgo: That's right, before I went over.

Marcello: Right.

Killgo: Cholera, everything that they could think of.

Marcello: What were the medical facilities like at this camp?

Killgo: Bad. Well, the Germans didn't have any medical facilities themselves. I mean they had paper bandages and all this. Now the Red Cross furnished some medicine for the prisoners. If it hadn't been for the Red Cross, it'd have been a sad situation. That's the reason I feel sorry for the . . .

well, I feel sorry for any prisoner, but I feel sorry for the Japanese prisoners because they didn't have any Red Cross. They didn't have anything but fish heads and rice and all this because I talked to these boys. And I'm sure we didn't have it . . . we thought we had it bad. I mean, it depends on your individual situation. But I didn't want it any rougher than I had it because I liked the comforts. But still, to me it was real rough. I mean, I had never known anything like this.

Marcello: Did you ever have any contacts with the German civilians at all while you were in this camp?

Killgo: No. German civilians would sometimes deliver food on the wagons and all. Mostly, though, it was soldiers that would do it. The civilians were away from the camp altogether. The camp was out in the woods. It was far removed from any civilians by at least two or three miles.

Marcello: Were there any ways that you could supplement your diet?

Killgo: No.

Marcello: The Germans did not provide you with any space for a garden or anything like that?

Killgo: If you had had room for a garden, you'd have trampled it down because you take 1,000 people in a compound that is not as big as a football field, including the barracks . . . let's see, we had twenty . . . we had about 2,400

people in one compound that wasn't as big as a football field. And you had to do all your exercise, all your . . . they had a roll call here. You had to stand in front of each barracks, you know, and they checked you every morning and counted you off and all this. And by the time all these people got through walking around and getting their exercise there wouldn't be no room for a garden unless you just walked right around in a little circle, and there wasn't enough room for this. No, you couldn't have a garden. You couldn't raise a garden. As a matter of fact, the tools that you'd use to raise a garden with you could dig out with, and they wouldn't issue you any. You had rolled, double barbed-wire fence, guard boxes on each corner, ten-foot warning line ten feet from the fence, and you better not touch it. Now they had lots of garden space there, but if anybody got over there he'd fertilize it; they'd shoot him.

We had one incident that's always stuck with me. We had a new record that came in through the Y.M.C.A. or the Red Cross. I think the Y.M.C.A. sent this record in. I'll always remember it. It was "Sugar Blues." And I mean it was strictly New Orleans style. We had this new record and all, and we were going to have a

meeting up in the what they called the mess hall then. It was made for a mess hall, but they never used it. We never did use the mess hall. They messed up on the design. Anyhow, we all lined out and they issued so many tickets to each barracks for us to go up to listen to it. Well, I just happened to get one of those tickets. I mean, they would do it by lottery--everything by lottery. So we were all seated and everything and we had this "Horrible Goon," and he was doing the guarding. You had to have permission to go and everything. They got permission from the commandant and all this and everything. So we got seated and they played the old scratchy record on the old phonograph, you know, old crank phonograph they had set up on the stage, and we were all there like we were at a big opera.

Marcello: Did the Germans provide this phonograph?

Killgo: No, the Y.M.C.A. sent it.

Marcello: Oh, I see. They provided the phonograph and the record.

Killgo: The phonograph was there before, but the record came in.

Marcello: I see.

Killgo: You see, we had a bunch of old scratched up records and all this. And so this "Sugar Blues" was a band new one--no scratch, no nothing. So we were going to have this concert, and they played all them old sorry records, you know. Well, it was good, but it was old records. And

here we come to the grand finale, "Sugar Blues." And this guard decided that we didn't have permission, and he went up and started arguing with the camp leader, old Tech Sergeant Paulis. He went up arguing with him, and Paulis was giving him a bit of static, too. He was talking back because he could speak German fairly well. Paulis was our designated representative. But anyhow, he got to arguing with him, and we was about half through "Sugar Blues." This argument was going on and everything, and it was still good even with the argument. It was a brand new old stateside record. And he reached over there and slapped it--the head, you know, on the phonograph--and just scratched that record something horrible. I'd have killed him in a minute if I'd had something to have shot him with (chuckle). But he ruined the record and he ruined the performance, so we took our benches and went back to the barracks.

Anyhow, right about the end of winter--late winter of '44--the Russians were getting close to the camp, and they decided that they were going to move us out, part of us, at least. And so they took the ones that were sleeping on the floor. We were kind of lucky. Well, the Englishmen thought that we was going to all have to go, so they got free with their cigarettes that they'd

collected over the years and everything. So nobody wanted them. We couldn't carry cigarettes or anything like this. I was a heavy smoker. This is one little incident that I remember real well. But anyhow, they had one fellow that was always holding a raffle. He'd raffle a square of a D-bar, D-ration bar. He'd raffle a square of D-ration bar off for a cigarette. And he'd go all over camp, and he may get 1,000 cigarettes for one D-bar. He was really a promoter. Well, he had a Red Cross parcel box full of cigarettes, loose cigarettes, all kinds, and he'd smoke one every now and then, but he never offered nobody a cigarette. So when we were going to move out of the camp, well, he said, "Anybody want a cigarette?" There wasn't anybody who would have anything to do with him. So I got a little brainstorm. I had a prune box, and these prune boxes come in pretty heavy paper, wax-type paper. So I took that prune box, and I slit those cigarettes individually and put them in there. I had a little piece of a 2 x 4 that would just fit down in this prune box, and I'd put a few cigarette tobacco in that prune box. Well, the Germans were checking all the food that come out, but I left just enough room to put little old prunes on top of it. And I said, "Well, if I win one, okay; and if I lose one, okay." But I had me a bunch of tobacco, and I

I went out, and sure enough, they didn't even look. They didn't pay no attention, and I went right on out of the camp when they shipped us out. So this gets my tobacco all lined out for the duration of the war, except for four cartons of Camels that my captain threw over the fence at Stalag Luft #1 where they eventually sent us.

But getting on with the story, they shipped us on out--me and my tobacco and all of us. They shipped us out in these "forty-and-eights," and they put fifty-four of us in there. Now you talk about a mass of humanity! You get fifty-four people in one of these European "forty-and-eights," and you're right close to the armpits, really. Well, we got out of that boxcar once in eight days. They fed us Italian corned beef that was a delicacy, and the reason they gave it to us was because the Italians wouldn't eat it. But we all got dysentery, and we had one bucket with grass in it for fifty-four men, and 90 per cent of them had dysentery. Now you think you ain't got horrible conditions. Now I know just exactly how those Japanese prisoners felt. I can sympathize with them because I went through eight days of it. Well, they ran us out of Grostichow into Stettin. Now we stayed on the tracks at Stettin for a day and a half.

Marcello: That was kind of risky, too, wasn't it. Stettin was a pretty big city, and I assume it came in for its share of bombing.

Killgo: It didn't get any bombing, but there was a lot of individual air activity, dog fights and all above the city. But most of it was refugees being shipped out. And they put us on a siding while these refugee trains went by. And the Russian prisoners could hear the artillery, and they knew that their comrades were coming. Now they used them as slave labor, and so they started escaping or trying to, and for a day and a half I heard them being shot. They would shoot them. They didn't have no qualms about it.

Marcello: Up to this time, you really had no contact with Russian prisoners, had you?

Killgo: No, other than some . . . now some refugee prisoners would be riding herd on the honey wagons.

Marcello: Well, this is why I asked you awhile ago who did the work in the camp. From what I gather, all the dirty work was done by Russians. Is that correct?

Killgo: Well, now in some areas, yes.

Marcello: Uh-huh.

Killgo: Now this was outside of the camp area with the dirty work. But now inside the camp on the honey wagon, the German soldiers--the German privates--did this. They

drove the wagon. Now they would have some Russians. At times they would have some Russians come in on the honey wagon, but this was the only instance inside the camp that they had them. Now what they did with them outside . . . they had Russian barracks now. They had Russian barracks outside the camp. I don't know why they did because they'd escape. They could escape. They were guarded, true enough, but they could have escaped because they had more of an opportunity than we did. But they'd shoot them and even leave them lay. Now this is one thing that you know about any war, and that is that human life is cheap and it was. But they made us stay on the sidings out there at Stettin, and this is where I heard most of the Russians being shot.

But these refugee trains that were coming from the East Prussia were going on back into Central Germany were mostly women and children, and this was another kind of a mournful time for me. I was kind of downcast anyhow. You know, how old Tony Galento was a big fighter back in those days, and the "Beer Barrel Polka" was his number one song. And somebody in that refugee train, those Germany . . . well, this was their song anyhow, and they were playing and singing the "Beer Barrel Polka." And that made me so dadburn homesick I wanted to get out there and kick the wire off and go (chuckle).

Anyhow, we made it on into Barth, Germany, to Stalag Luft #1, one of the oldest prison camps in Germany. Now this was formerly an officers' camp. We were enlisted men, but they put us on into Barth, and this is where we really got hungry. This was right close to the end of the war. The food got scarce or they held out on it, and it just wasn't there.

Marcello: Did you lose more weight at this point?

Killgo: No, my total loss was about twenty pounds. That was about the most I . . . of course, we drank water. I was water logged and my gut stuck out. You had a hungry look on your gut. One of the durndest fights I ever saw was over a crow. We had an old crow that hit the fence and killed itself, and the boys could see this out the window through cracks even though they close the shutters. And they saw this old crow had broke his neck during the night, and he flopped just outside of the warning wire in the campsite. And so when the guards come along to open the door--they were lined up on both ends of the barracks--when they opened that door, these boys swarmed going out for that crow. I mean, some of them didn't get nothing but feathers (chuckle). It was a poor old crow, but they tore the thing up. Now we got to the point to where we ate the cats. Now they had a few cats that would come in, and

it got so bad here along towards the end of the war that we didn't fricassee the cats, we boiled them in the eight-quart water bucket. And we ate everything but the hide and hair. And the Germans put the order out that it would be a court-martial offense if we ate the cats.

Marcello: The Germans said that?

Killgo: (Chuckle) Yeah, yes sir. They said they'd put us in the dungeon if we ate cats, but there ain't nobody ever caught us. Well, what they did, they'd eat the cats and take the skin and put it in the outhouse.

The outhouses were separated from the barracks, and this is the one case of brutality that we experienced. We had an air raid warning. Anytime you had an air raid warning, well, you must be inside the barracks. Everybody knew this. Well, we had captain--I don't know his name--and he was in the barracks two barracks down from us in Barth. And the air raid warning sounded. They were going around closing the barracks. They hadn't closed the barracks yet, but he was in the latrine. And he come out of this a little bit late, and he was running to the barracks, and they shot him half way between his barracks and the latrine and killed him and wounded another guy in the barracks. A roving guard shot him. Hearing that day a man died was an experience.

Marcello: Did you witness this?

Killgo: I heard it. I didn't see it. Nobody saw it because we were closed up. He was just late, and they shot him going to the barracks. He wasn't trying to escape or anything. It was just a mad guard. That's really what it was, and he had an excuse and he shot him.

Marcello: I assume that food was probably on your mind more than any other . . .

Killgo: Amazingly enough, you'd think that you would put 4,000 men together, and sex would be the main subject. It was not. Food was it. Now once we got lots of food, well, the subject reverted--good wine and food and all. And after the Germans left Barth--they evacuated and left us to the Russians--we liberated a bargeload of the finest French wine you ever drank. We liberated chickens, we liberated geese, goats, ducks. Anything you could get your hands on we liberated and cooked it right on the spot.

Marcello: I would assume that the prisoners sat around the barracks and dreamed up menus.

Killgo: We did. We had more discussions on how to cook and what to cook, and this shouldn't have been because it was just agitating our hunger. But we did. We had that and . . . well, we argued about anything, really, but about food mostly.

Marcello: I understand from time to time prisoners could even imagine that they smelled a particular type of food cooking someplace. Did you ever experience that?

Killgo: I could taste every bit of the food that I had thrown away. Now anything I'd thrown away I could taste it. But now just ordinary food, any big dinners or anything like that, no. But I could remember the food that I had thrown away. Now, you know, a lot of GI food is not good to eat. It's not palatable. It wasn't then. You'd get good cooks, and you'd get bad ones, and sometimes we'd just throw it away. Now I can remember that, and it was good to me then. The thought of the taste of that was good.

Marcello: How did the facilities at Barth compare with those at Stalag Luft #4?

Killgo: Basically they were the same. The only thing really that kind of stuck in our craw was that we were hungry, and the senior officers naturally had their privileges. And being enlisted men, nobody notices it when it was strictly an officers camp. But especially Colonel Gabreski. He was a war hero, and he was a fighter pilot. He was so good that he shot himself down. I mean, he really stated that he shot himself down. The ricochets from the explosion . . . he actually flew into his ricochets, and I guess it's possible. But anyhow,

while we were suffering the pangs of hunger, and I'm sure they were too, they had their meal with a violin player in the mess hall (chuckle). Of course, that's a natural resentment. I mean, you resent something like this. You see, here you are walking around and your mouth's watering and all and him in there eating, regardless of what he's eating. And you see it and him having him a GI fiddler.

Marcello: Now this was Gabreski?

Killgo: Gabreski, yeah.

Marcello: How did he merit this special treatment?

Killgo: Well, he was a senior officer, naturally, and they had windows in the mess hall where he ate, and so we'd see it. It was a natural resentment, though. I mean, I don't blame him.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that this camp had officers in it now.

Killgo: It was all officers.

Marcello: Did you, as an enlisted man, have to work in this camp?

Killgo: No. Now, at this time--this doesn't have any historical significance--but the English officers were allowed a "dog-robber." This is in their army manual. It's still there. Well, whenever we got to the camp, well, the American officers didn't have this. Even the colonels and all didn't have a "dog-robber," unless it was

borrowed from an Englishman, and so they decided that they was going to have them do their menial tasks.

Marcello: That is the American officers thought that.

Killgo: The American officers did. See, they had enlisted men and we were expected to do that. Well, you know an American GI. That didn't go over at all. We were threatened a court-martial and threatened everything else, but we know what our rights were, so this dropped off real quick. Then they said they would pay us in cigarettes and things like this. Well, we decided we wanted food. We'd work if they'd pay us in food. We'd be glad to. But they didn't have any food either. So cigarettes don't fill you up, and besides I had all the tobacco I needed from my pack, and I furnished all the boys in the barracks tobacco until the end of the war (chuckle) that one pack. We rationed it, but we had smokes.

Marcello: Who did the work in this camp?

Killgo: Well, the work that was done was done by the Wehrmacht, by the German soldiers. Now the outside, like I say, the outside was Russians. They had Russians outside. Now they had Russians . . .

Marcello: What would the Russians do, cut wood and things of that nature?

Killgo: That's right. They would cut the wood and all this and haul the coal up to the initial point of the compound where you'd go get it. They'd put it inside of an area, and you could go out and get it, and things like this. They did all the tasks outside the camp, the Russians did. But inside the camp they did not have any Russians doing any of the tasks.

Marcello: Did you ever see any evidence of any collaboration? I'm speaking now of Americans or any prisoners who squealed on fellow prisoners in order to get some special favors from the Germans?

Killgo: I wasn't aware of it. Now the German soldiers would collaborate with the American soldiers. You could trade them cigarettes and things like this for pepper or salt. And we didn't get any salt--no salt was issued. All our food was opened with a meat cleaver. Of course, canned food, anything, and the parcels were cut open. You couldn't store it. You had to eat it. But it was all hacked open. Cigarette packs were split in half--everything was checked. But now back to this radio that I was referring to that I saw. It was sitting on the table. When they pulled a check they were looking for one thing. They had one thing in their minds, and irregardless of what they see other than that, they'll never record. And this is their psychology, I guess.

But the radio was sitting in a milk can, and they didn't see it. Anytime they searched, if whatever they are looking if you've got it set out in the open, generally it was okay.

Marcello: I would assume that sneak inspections of the barracks were a rather common occurrence.

Killgo: Right, at night even, anytime. But we always posted a guard. We always had a guard at the end of each barracks. This was our signal, "Goons!" I mean, whenever you hollered, "Goon up!" we knew the guards were approaching.

Marcello: Did you ever receive any mail during the time that you were in camp?

Killgo: No.

Marcello: Were you ever able to send any mail?

Killgo: Let's see, they gave me one letter and two post cards, I believe, a month, and that's all that I was . . . I never received a letter. I never heard from my family for one solid year. I didn't know . . . until I got back to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, I made my one phone call and found out that my wife was still thinking about seeing me when I came back home.

Marcello: As the war drew to a close, did you notice any changes in the attitudes of the Germans?

Killgo: No, not as a whole. There was individual changes. A lot of them were favors by the German soldiers that actually were retaliatory favors. In other words, we had one poor fellow who turned BBC on. We had an intercom system and speakers in each barracks at Barth, and they would pipe music in at intervals. Well, this young fellow was scheduled for the Russian front, and he turned to BBC, British Broadcasting Company, and it came into the barracks with all the news all night long, and he shot himself. Now instances like this and then there were private favors--individual favors among the guards to individual people that the guards knew, possibly because they would squeal on each other. I mean, they had people that . . . they wouldn't squeal on each other, maybe, but they had people that were watching them--surveillance. And the guards in the boxes could watch all the time, so it was tight security.

Marcello: Now was the camp at Barth run by the Wehrmacht, also?

Killgo: Yes. Actually they were an older guard. They had what we called a flak school. It was a ground tracking school that the . . . it was mostly where young girls would train. And they had an old . . . I don't know, it was an old Fokker, I believe, a single engine airplane that they followed all around. We always called him "Fearless Fosdick." I mean, all the boys from Barth

remember "Fearless Fosdick." But he would come in and make the move, and they'd track him and all. Well, now, you were talking about food. As hungry as we were, even the young girls didn't turn our heads. Groceries (chuckle) was what we had on our minds. But I guess that just about turns us up until the end came.

Marcello: Well, let's talk about your eventual liberation. I'm sure you recall it quite vividly.

Killgo: Very. The first indication that we had that we were going to be liberated was that the army started destroying all papers by explosion. They'd blow them up. They'd blow their papers up.

Marcello: They didn't burn them; they blew them up.

Killgo: Yeah, they blew them up. They'd burn them and blow them up. But blowing them up would obliterate all these basic semi-security papers and all. But this was the first indication. Then whenever they started to leave out, they told us that they had a little room and that they would carry a few soldiers. And we told them, "Huh-uh, we don't believe it." They were going to take us on back into the interior of Germany away from the Russians. They thought we wanted to escape from the Russians. At that time, we did not want to escape from the Russians. That was people we wanted to see because they were in the position to liberate us. And we told

them, "No, we'd stay right there." Well, they pulled out one night.

Marcello: I assume they had a great fear of the Russians.

Killgo: They did for a fact. They did because the Russians didn't practice the soldierly art of war.

Marcello: Well, the Germans had given the Russians a pretty hard time, too.

Killgo: That's right. They did, too.

Marcello: They'd killed a lot of Russian civilians.

Killgo: And the Russians retaliated. I mean, they retaliated with the salt mines. I know that one of the last sights I saw in Barth, Germany, was about 500 German soldiers and about twenty tough Russians guards riding big horses heading toward the salt mines, and they were walking at a fast pace. But they had caught them on back down the line and brought them on through and was going through. But they blew up all their equipment--aircraft--and they were manufacturing jets at that time at this little city of Barth. They were making about one a day. And, you know, jets were modern weapons of war, the ultra-modern weapons of war then. This excited me because I knew that we didn't have any jets over here. And they'd already told us that we'd have thirty days a year after they won the war--we'd have thirty days a year--to go back and visit our families.

That included traveling time, of course. And then we'd come back, and we were going to rebuild Germany. And from the sight of some of those jets and the performance of some of those jets, and from some of the stories that I got from some of the boys that came through, I figured that maybe they might make good their promises.

Marcello: You were able to see some of these jets flying over?

Killgo: One a day. They took it right off from the airport. Now this was an encouraging thing, also. Now the English usually flew at night. And the airport was about five miles from camp, and the English would come back from Berlin in the Mosquito Bomber. This was a high-performance bomber. And they would come back from Berlin, and they'd shoot the airport up for us. I mean, they'd just come over and just tear things up. Well, we really got a big kick out of this because we knew that something was going on, and our English friends were really fixing them up. But the Russians did finally come on in, and the Germans evacuated before the Russians came in.

Marcello: Did they just kind of disappear, melt away?

Killgo: And they just disappeared. They just melted out. They had headed on the other way. But this was the darndest conglomeration of soldiers, these Russians were, that I

ever saw. I saw dog teams just dragging carts, World War I-type tanks, handsome cabs with great, big, fine horses pulling them. And they were more the Mongolian-type people. They were the peasant Russians and the Mongolian-type. They were the front people, and they had been on the front line since Stalingrad just constantly. They lived off the country. But we were their friends, we were their friends. They'd give you anything but their gun. He wouldn't turn that gun loose, but he'd let you have everything else. He had this little sub-machine gun, about a .25-caliber, and that was his friend.

But then the White Russians came through with law and order. And we had these Russian women that were working as slave labor for German women as maids downtown, and so whenever these women left they had rings that they'd liberated from them right out from the end of their fingers, these Russian women did--fur coats and sables. And the White Russians are the ruling class Russians and they came in and shot those women for looting, flat shot them. And they had law and order then. And they were strict disciplinarians. But with those frontline troops, anything went.

Marcello: Well, what happened when the Russians came in and liberated you?

Killgo: Well, we went completely berserk (chuckle). But they got law and order back again, supposedly. And we . . . this will be verified by any other interview you have. But they got law and order back. Gabreski and all the leaders of the camp put English soldiers as guards in the boxes and kept us within the camp for the first day. And after the first day, well, Zhukov, Marshal Zhukov, rode through on one of the finer-type horses of that era. And he rode up to the camp, and this Shorty, the one that could speak all the languages and who could speak Russian fluently . . . Zhukov hollered out and wanted to know if there was anybody there that could speak Russian, and old Shorty volunteered (chuckle). So him and the vodka and Zhukov got together. But anyhow, old Shorty says, "What's the matter?" He said, "I liberated you fellows. Aren't you proud of it?" And so old Gabreski told the boys, "Ya'll put on a little demonstration for him and show him that you're glad that you got liberated." Well, he shouldn't have said that. We tore that camp completely up, completely, except our barracks, but there wasn't a piece of barbed wire standing. We took tractors--the old one long diesel tractors--and we pulled miles of that barbed wire. We'd eat and pull wire (chuckle).

Marcello: Did the Russians provide you with any food, or was this when you started to loot food yourselves?

Killgo: We had the parcels . . . they had the parcels that they had stored. They issued them to us and said, "This is it." I believe we had two parcels apiece, and they said, "Regardless of how long you stay in Germany, that's all the food you're going to get." And then the Russians come in and they had 800 cows, and they said, "There you are." White bread . . . whether it was white bread . . . it was bread they had had baked somewhere. I don't know where. But we just hung those cows over a sausage grinder, and we made hamburger meat out of them (chuckle). We made ourselves sick. But we ate. We had good groceries. You can bet we were high off the hog, and I had what you call a sick parcel, and it had pure, genuine, 100 per cent Maxwell House Coffee. And that was . . . we hadn't had any real coffee. I brewed up me a pot of that coffee with about a pound of that hamburger meat and a duck egg. I'd liberated me a duck egg. And I got just plum sick, but I enjoyed it (chuckle). It was good. I liberated me an officer's feather bed and a feather pillow. We were sleeping on the floor in the mess hall then. We were the mess in the mess hall. And I had that feather bed lined out in my area and that coffee pot over there and my little lump of coals to ignite it so I could keep it warm. And

lived on wine (chuckle). But we did really celebrate. We had a celebration.

Marcello: Did you inspect or tour the countryside at all?

Killgo: Not too much. We stayed to the roads because the area was mined. But we did wander around the dikes and the harbor part. One of the saddest cases we found while in our explorations were a German woman and a little boy and a baby that this woman had shot--this German woman had shot--before she, I guess, was overtaken by the Russians. She shot them and then shot herself. This was bad. I mean, women and children have no place in war, but they always seem to have to be the victims of it. But we buried them there. There wasn't nobody left to bury them. We buried them. And then you had the front line Russian soldiers who raped and pillaged, and this goes with any war, too. Now this is something they couldn't understand because we couldn't see that, and they felt that we were strange people because we would not rape right along with them. Well, they weren't really--these people up front--they weren't responsible because mentally, I think, they were shot because they had been fighting too long. Of course, they were responsible alright enough, but the time those people had been up front and the constant war . . . it'll warp a fellow.

Marcello: How did you get your first contact with Americans?

Killgo: There was a captain and a sergeant who came in in a jeep. And how they got there I don't know. But they were there about two or three days after we were liberated. And they came in in this jeep and said they'd take mail back. They were going back, and they'd take mail if you wanted to write letters. You talk about writing a bunch of letters! We put a whole bunch of those "free's" on there (chuckle). But then they proceeded to . . . we found an old B-17 that had been shot down, and they patched the radios up on it. After we had torn the camp up and then got everything kind of lined out there, they found an old B-17, and we called the Allies on the radios of this old B-17. We got the radios going it and told them that we wanted transportation home. Well, the Russians wanted to take us back home through Odessa and all this by train. And we said, "Huh-uh," we're going to be flown out by our people." And so the Allies, our people, weren't going to come unless we checked the runways and all for mines, and so we told the Russians we needed the mines cleared off that field, and they cleared it for us. They went out there and swept and loaded mines up (chuckle) by the bunches. And here come a squadron of B-17's, and they hauled us out thirty-five at a time.

And it took them a day and a half, but they really had an operation. They got rid of 8,000 people, "kriegies." So that was the start home. They sent us back into Reims, France. That's where I got my first, genuine, 100 per cent American donut, good-looking Red Cross girl, cup of coffee, and a Frenchman gave me a half a loaf of French bread--big old hard baked, long bread. It was the best bread I ever ate, and I knew I was heading home. We stopped off in Camp Lucky Strike. That's where they kept us until they shipped us on out. Ike Eisenhower came by right after we arrived. We had a Red Cross tent. They were serving eggnogg, cookies and cake, and things like this. And they had a barbed wire entanglement around it except for the front entrance and the rear exit. Well, Ike got up on the stand--I won't ever forget it--and after his formal speech welcoming us back and all the formalities, he said, "You know, I think you fellows have probably seen enough barbed wire, haven't you?" And it was about ten minutes, and that wire was gone (chuckle). And then came the congressmen, the senators, and we got our usual ration of promises. And then that day came that they said, "Well, you're ready to load on that truck." And I here I loaded on the General Butner, and eight days later I was in good old U.S.A.

Marcello: You came across on the General Butner?

Killgo: General Butner.

Marcello: That was a liberty ship?

Killgo: No, that was a regular troopship. That was one of the newer ones, the fast one. It took us fifteen days to get to Europe on that banana boat in a convoy, but this General Butner got back in, I think, about six or seven days. I mean, it was a traveling ship (chuckle).

But there's only one thing that kind of stuck in our craw. We got back home. They said, "Well, fellows, you really earned first class transportation, and everything is first class from here on. And we're going to get you home. We're going to get you lined out real right." So, fine. We don't care. Just get us home. "well, we're going to get you first class." So they loaded us up on 1918 chair cars, and every slow freight train in this country passed us. They stopped us in St. Louis, and here was German prisoners heading back to Europe in pullmans. They stopped the trains together, and they darn near had a riot because we just almost got together. They moved the train and reactivated about seven MP battalions and everything else. But we were just fixing to have it. We were going to take a whole set of pullmans over, and we were going to turn that train around. But this is the way they got us back

home, but we didn't really care, except the idea that a German prisoner was riding a pullman and we were riding in a 1918 chair car with wicker seats. No other GI's rode that seat anymore. We got to San Antonio, and they weren't rideable anymore. We took care of that. But this was personal. This is a personal opinion, idea, or a personal feeling that I'm expressing now. I was glad to be back home. I didn't care how they treated me.