Fort Smith Historical Society Oral History Center
World War II Project
Interview with Ben Core

OC: Okay. My full name is Orville Ben Core. And my birth certificate only says Orville because that's all that the doctor reported in at the time I was born. But my dad named me Ben within two or three days after I was born because he had an uncle named Ben and he named me after that uncle so I grew up as Ben.

CB: When were you born?

OC: (DELETED CONTENT)

CB: Did you have brothers and sisters?

OC: I had one brother, who was exactly eighteen months older than me. His name was Charles Manford Core, and he was born (DELETED CONTENT). And then I had two sisters; first one was born (DELETED CONTENT), her name is Hilda Lou. She married Hurtline, Joe Hurtline, so she is now Hilda Lou Hurtline. And the second one is Martha Charlene, and she was born on George Washington's birthday, (DELETED CONTENT).

CB: What were the names of your mother and father?

OC: My dad's name was Opal Arch Core.

CB: What was the first name?

OC: Opal, O-p-a-l.

CB: Opal George?

OC: Opal Arch Core. And my mother was Elizabeth Ming, spelled M-i-n-g. And course her name became Elizabeth Core after they were married.

CB: Where were you born?

OC: I was born out in the country, just south of Horseshoe Mountain, over the line dividing Franklin County and Logan County, and I was born on the Franklin County side. We lived just over the line on what was called the Utley place.

JW: What town was that near?

OC: The nearest, I don't know if it was incorporated as a town at that time, but Coxville would be the nearest. And I guess the nearest actual city was Paris, Arkansas, in Logan County.

CB: Well, what did you do growing up? Were you raised on a farm out there?

OC: Yes. I did everything from milking cows to feeding the hogs to planting corn and cotton, and howing cotton and corn, and picking cotton and gathering the corn when it was ready. I did all the jobs on the farm. We always milked from ten to twelve cows so I got quite a bit of experience milking cows.

CB: Well, I know that's come in handy.

OC: Yeah.

CB: Did you go to high school in that area?

OC: Yes. We rode the bus to Ratcliff School and we started in 1930. My brother and I started at the same time, we were in the same class going to Ratcliff School, started in 1930 and I finished in 1924. But he had joined the 142nd Field Artillary in the National Guard, and he was assembled before he finished his high school so he didn't get to finish high school. But I did.

CB: Did you attend college or did you go into the service?

OC: Went in the military first.

CB: What did you do there? Did you enlist?

OC: No. When I finished high school in 1942, May the 8th, I was only 2 seventeen years old and wasn't going to be eighteen until in August. And I found out, in talking with the draft board, that you couldn't get in the Army until you were eighteen. You could get in the Navy if you were seventeen, but I didn't want in the Navy. So a classmate of mine, James Stiles, and I, went to Chicago and went through the Coyne Electrical School, that's spelled C-o-y-n-e, Electrical School. And we finished that, and in August, we went from May, June, July to August, finished Coyne Electrical School. And so then I was ready to get in the military, but I had developed some debt, as had James. So the school, Coyne Electrical School, would get you a job and they did get us a job. And we worked for Johnson Fan and Blower Corporation there in Chicago until we got enough money to pay off our debts. And so we got on a bus to come home. We lived in Chicago until December the 3rd, 1942. We got on a bus to come home and I was going to come home and enlist in the Army after a week or so at home. And we rode the bus all night, and in the morning, it stopped in St. Louis for thirty minutes to load up and let some people off. And James and I got off to eat breakfast, get back on the same bus. And as we went in the bus station there, there were some newspapers in one of those places that they put newspapers that you can buy them, and the headline said "FDR Stops Voluntary Enlistment". And I was on my way home to volunteer in the Army, in the Air Corps. I always saw those airplanes flying over the farm where I worked and I wanted to fly one of them. So I wanted in the, at that time it was the Army Air Corps. And I was on my way home to join the Army, but FDR stopped voluntary enlistment. So I got home and went down and talked to the draft board, not the old board, the guy that was running it. And I wasn't ready to be drafted, they hadn't pulled up my number. So I tried to find a job, even came up here to Fort Smith looking around for a job until my number came up in the draft. And I couldn't find a job so I went back and talked to the draft board and asked him when I was going to come up. And the guy who was running it there, he was in charge of it, he was a second cousin of mine, his name was Dean, that was his last name, I've forgotten his first name. But he said, "Well, I can pull your number up." And I said, "By all means, pull it up", and he did. So I volunteered to be drafted, and that was April the 14th, 1943. And that's the day that I went to Little Rock; well, actually, North Little Rock. I believe it was Robinson was the name of the place.

CB: Camp Robinson?

OC: Yeah, Camp Robinson. And I went in the military on April 14th, 1943.

CB: This was the Army?

OC: Army Air Corps.

CB: Army Air Corps. Where did you go from there?

OC: To Shepardfield, Texas, forgotten the name of that town it's near. I've forgotten the name of it, but it was at Shepardfield, Texas.

CB: Is that near San Antonio or Amarillo. I can't remember.

OC: No, it's north of Dallas.

CB: Oh, is it? What did you train there, what did you train in?

OC: That was basic training. And I took all the examinations to qualify for the pilot training. And the last thing that you had to do was go before a board, and that was made up of a Captain and two or 3 three Lieutenants. And the Captain kept asking me questions about the weather. And of course, I didn't know anything about the weather, how to predict it and what not. And so he finally told me that they've got you scheduled here to go to Radio School, and no doubt that was because I'd gone through that electrical school, Coyne Electrical School. And he said, "I think you better go on to that." So lo and behold, he sent me to the radio school. And so the fact that I had, while I was waiting to get old enough to get in the Army, had gone to that electrical school, that predestined me to be a radio operator. They weren't going to let me be a pilot, so I didn't get to go to pilot training. I passed all of the exams except that Captain there that was asking me those weather questions. And he knew, I'm sure, before he even started the interview, that they were going to turn me down and send me on to radio school.

CB: Then where did you go? You obviously were in a crew on a B-17?

OC: Well, I went to radio school from basic training at Shepardfield, Texas. They then sent me to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I went through a radio school. And then they sent me from radio school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, they sent me to Salt Lake City, and that's where they made

assignments. And again, I took all of the tests for pilot training and passed all of them. And the morning that I was supposed to get assigned to some pilot training school, they had all of us that were in that barracks, to fall out and line up in front of the barracks, and told us that they already had more people wanting to be pilots than they needed. And that all of us there had assignments other than pilot training, and we were cancelled as to pilot training and we were going to go on to what we were doing. And so I was a radio operator. And that was what I was, radio operator. So they sent me from Salt Lake City to Rapid City, where I was placed on a crew as the radio operator on a B-17.

CB: Where did you go from there?

OC: After we finished our training there, they called it phase training, and that was when the crew that I was showing you in that picture, we trained there at Rapid City, they called it phase training, and it went from April until June. And then from there, we went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, which was our port of embarkation, we left Camp Kilmer on a ship. I used to remember the name of it; but anyway, we went from there to England. Landed in England on July the 7th, 1944, and then they sent us to an air base at Ludwigshaven. No, that's a city in Germany. One in England, I don't know where it was; but anyway, it was the 398th Bomb Group in the 8th Air Force. Nuthamstead, that's where it was. They sent us to Nuthamstead, England, and that was our base.

CB: And you were in the 8th Air Force?

OC: Yeah, 398th Bomb Group, 601st Squadron.

CB: When did you start to see some action then? When did you begin to see action then in the bombing runs?

OC: We flew our first mission on July the 29th, 1944, and our target was Merseburg and that was a synthetic oil plant. I don't know what synthetic oil is but it was a plant where the German Army got a lot of their fuel from. And we were bombing that target, that was the first mission, July 29th.

CB: How many planes flew that mission?

OC: I don't remember. Course they've got records on that, but I 4 don't know. A group would put up three squadrons and each squadron would have in it twelve planes, so a group would fly thirty-six

planes. And one squadron would be what they call the high squadron, and the other one a low squadron, and then the other one squadron in between. So they flew at different levels, but they were fairly well together. And so actually, when the group which would all be from one field would take off from their field, then they would assemble with other groupings at some designated place, and I forget what they called them. Anyway, that entire assembly would fly the mission to the target. And there would be other groups also, usually bombing a target. And we might be the first group to go over it or second or third, whatever. But we had an IP, they called it, Initial Point, that all the planes that were going to do the bombing would go to the Initial Point. And then the pilots would let the bombardiers take control of the planes someway, I never knew how, and the bombardiers would guide the planes over the target. And then that's where you would run into the flak usually, was after the Initial Point. And fighters would attack you until you got to the IP, then they would wait until you got through the flak and then they would attack mainly the ones that were crippled by the flak.

CB: I guess you met a lot of that then?

OC: Well, our plane would get hit every once in a while by the flak, but not until our twenty-fourth mission did they bring us down.

CB: Where was that?

OC: Strangely enough, we flew our first mission to Merseburg. We didn't go back to Merseburg until the twenty-fourth mission, the twenty-fourth mission was to Merseburg and they got us.

CB: What happened?

OC: We got the bombs away. And within a minute or two after the bombs had gone away, dropped out of the plane, we got hit in the bomb bay, I think it was by flak. The engineer, Andrew Cosley, he thought that it was a German plane that hit us, but that was the first time and only time the German plane came through their own flak to attack us. And he thought that one of them got us, but I disagree because I think it came from below. And it hit the plane in the bomb bay with the door still open because the bombs had just gone out, and started a fire on the catwalk across the bomb bay. And I think it broke gasoline lines, fuel lines, because the fire just started looming up real big.

CB: Where were you located in the plane?

OC: I was in the radio room, which is right behind the bomb bay.

CB: Oh, really? In the back of the plane?

OC: Yeah. And I could see, the bomb bay was betwen me and the pilots. Course, I could see everything in the bomb bay, and I could see that fire rolling real big.

JW: Do you recall what time of day this was going on?

OC: Few minutes after one o'clock.

JW: In the afternoon or at night?

OC: Afternoon.

CB: Well, what did you do?

OC: Well, I called the pilot on the intercom and told him that we had a fire in the bomb bay and it was getting pretty bad. And his response was, "Well, just hang on, we'll be out of this flak in a couple of minutes." And just in the time that he was talking, that 5 thing was rolling real big and black smoke coming toward me. So I called him right back and told him the fire was getting a lot worse, that I thought we better get out of here. And soon as I let up on my lever on my intercom, he just yelled bail out. And I'm sure that what happened is, in the interim, he had looked back and had seen that fire.

JW: There was no fire extinguishing apparatus?

OC: Yeah, yeah. There was one right by my radio, but it couldn't have handled it.

CB: How many men were back there with you?

OC: Three, the tail gunner and the waist gunner and ball turret gunner; so there were four of us back there. And then there were five ahead of the bomb bay.

CB: Five men up front?

OC: Yeah.

JW: Was a nine man crew?

OC: Yeah, pilot and co-pilot, course they were in the seats operating the plane. And then in front of them, in the nose, was the bombardier and the navigator. And then the engineer was right behind the pilot, so there were five of them up there.

CB: How did you get out?

OC: When the pilot said bail out, well, we had what we called bomb suits that had metal in them and so forth, supposed to protect us from shots and so forth, and they had metal in the front and in the back. And they had a string on them that you could pull and it was supposed to release them on the shoulders and was supposed to drop off. Well, I had often thought that I'll bet you if I ever have to jerk that thing, it won't release up there. And sure enough, when the pilot said bail out, first thing I was going to do is get rid of that flak suit, so I jerked on that thing and nothing happened. And I jerked on it again, nothing happened. And I jerked on it again and I just knew it wasn't going to come loose. So what I did, I just got down on my knees and flipped it off my head. And when it went off, why, that took everything else, even my oxygen. We were at about twenty-seven thousand feet, we had to be on oxygen. So I knew I had like a minute to get out of there.

CB: Where was your parachute?

OC: Okay. It was a chest pack, we called it, and there was two clip-ons. And I'd always clip it on one of them and let it hang down under that flak suit. Well, when the flak suit went off, I pulled it up and clicked it on the other and then I got up and headed to the back. I had to go to the waist in order to get to a door to get out of the plane.

CB: Where was the door?

OC: It was in the waist, back behind the gunners. There was first the waist gunner and then the door, and then on back in the tail. So I had to go back to the waist gunner, past him, and pull the door handle and go out that, the waist door.

CB: In a minute?

OC: Yeah. And sometimes the people would bail out of the bomb bay with the doors open. But with that fire rolling on and coming on in the radio room, why, obviously I had to go the other way. And lo and behold, when I got the flak suit off and got my parachute ready and stood up to get back to the waist, the plane went into a dive 6 straight down. And I learned later from the co-pilot that the fire and the bomb, or the flak that had hit us had affected the pilot's controls, but the co-pilot still had enough control that after we had gone down about ten thousand feet, the co-pilot was able to level it out.

CB: Oh, how frightening. It must have thrown everybody down?

OC: Yeah. And course, I was just stuck there in the radio room; but when he leveled it out, well then, I was able to go on to the back in the waist. And then I got to the waist door and was trying to open it. And when I'd open it and push it open, the wind would push it back to. And the waist gunner was standing there, he was still standing up, and he reached around and got ahold of the emergency release and pulled that and the door went off. And so when the door went off, I went out and everybody got out. The ball turret gunner told me later that he was still in the plane when it blew up. But that he had his chute on and was getting ready to get out, and so it just blew him out in space and he was still able to open his chute.

CB: Was he the last one on?

OC: I don't know that, but he must have been close to the last; but everybody got out.

JW: Because the plane went into a dive, were you fairly spread out, from the first guy that jumped to the last guy that got out?

OC: No, no. No one got out when it went into a dive, no one had gotten out.

JW: No one had gotten out before that?

OC: No.

CB: Were you armed? Did you have pistol or a knife or something?

OC: No, no. The Army had issued to us automatic pistols and some people carried them, but I never did because it didn't make sense to get shot down out there in Germany and try to shoot your way out because you'd run into a whole bunch of people, that'd give them a good excuse to gun you down so I never carried it. I don't know what happened to it. You know, it was there where we stayed in the barracks, so I don't know. They may have kept it.

CB: Somebody did.

OC: Yeah.

JW: Do you remember what it was like or what you thought about or anything, as you were flying through the air? I've never done that in my life so I can't imagine the experience.

OC: Well, I was radio operator and my job was to stay in touch with whatever was coming over the radio and pass on information to anybody that it affected, like the navigator, mainly, and the pilot. And so I was busy on the radio the whole time.

JW: I meant when you bailed out. What was that experience like? Do you have any memory of it or just a blur?

OC: Well, for some reason, and I don't know, I may have opened my chute too soon or I may have done it near a plane had gone by or something. Anyway, it really jerked me and it separated my pelvis bone and broke one of them and my shoes went off. And course, those were what we call heated shoes, and I had put my GI shoes, I had tied them to my parachute harness and that jerked them off. But anyway, it was such a jerk, it was such a jerk that I lost conscious. And so part of the time while I was coming down, I'd be conscious and part of the time I wouldn't be. So I was just looking for things around me 7 and looking for the things that was coming up and thinking about

landing. And as I got closer to the ground, I heard shots down below me, and also bullets hitting in the parachute, and it kindly speeding up going down. And course, I learned later that there was people on the ground that had rifles that were shooting at us, not me only, but the other guys, also. And so part of my chute had come up and forced my head back so I wasn't able to see the ground, and so I didn't know when I was going to hit. And lo and behold, I just hit like falling off the top of a house. And there was blood on my face and head at that time, so I guess one of those bullets had scratched me or something, but I didn't feel it. But anyway, my head was bloody when I landed.

JW: Sounds like about as many things going wrong as could go wrong and survive?

OC: Yeah.

JW: So you're hip was hurt before you ever hit the ground. I imagine hitting the ground didn't help that any?

OC: No. Matter of fact, it injured my left hip. I don't remember whether there was any broken bones added to the one that already happened or not, but anyway, it did injure my left hip when I hit the ground.

JW: Were you able to move?

OC: No. I knew that I had landed among a bunch of people that had shotguns and so forth, so I just laid there and acted like I was unconscious. And some people, what turned out to be German soldiers of some kind, came up to me and took off my chute and was searching me and taking stuff out of my pockets. And when they got all that done, they picked me up, couple of them, and carried me some distance and put me in a side car of a motorcycle. And one of the guys got on that motorcycle and started it, and then I passed out again. And so I didn't know anything else until the next day. Well, I was unconscious all that night, because the next morning, when I came to, it was daylight.

CB: Where were you?

OC: I was in a room on a bed, it wasn't really a bed, it was wooden table of some kind, and so I came to on that and I didn't know what time it was. But I could see a light shining through from the sun and I finally determined that it was morning. And so when I first came to, I heard somebody

doing a lot of moaning and as I became more conscious, I realized that it was me, and so I stopped that.

JW: And you were alone in the room?

OC: Yeah, I was the only one in the room. And finally the Germans came in and realized that I couldn't move, I couldn't move my left leg at all. So they brought three of the members of the crew in to take me to the restroom. And the three members were the ball turret gunner, the bombardier and I've forgotten who the other one was, but there were three of them. So they took me in there. And then later on that day, they assembled all of us together and we had all the crew there except the pilot was missing. And I asked some of the others if they had heard anything about him, where he was. And the German guard told us to shut up and not be talking. So they finally moved us out. And the only other one that was injured was the ball turret gunner, and he had a big bandage wrapped around his head. I asked him how come that, and he said that it was a civilian in what was Hitler's -- 8 I've forgotten. Anyway, he said it was a civilian in that --

JW: SS?

OC: Yeah. Had beaten him somewhat and injured his head. But he was only one that was hurt. And anyway, after awhile, they put us on the train, and we went a little ways and they took me off. And I was at Leipzig, turned out later. And they put me in what they called a POW hospital, but it wasn't anything but a business building and which they had a bunch of prisoners in there.

JW: But you did receive some medical treatment then?

OC: Well, I guess you could call it that. A Polish doctor came by and looked me over, and I don't think he gave me any kind of medicine. Then he went on, I didn't see him anymore. And then a German doctor, well, they moved me from the first floor up to about the third floor. And the German doctor came by and he just looked at me a little bit and went on his way. So I was there about a week and really got no attention whatsoever. And I couldn't walk to the restroom, somebody always had to help me. Anyway, I think we were there about a week and then they put me on a train and took me to, gosh, I should have reviewed some of this stuff. Dulag Luft, which was an interrogation center. And after Dulag Luft --

CB: Did they interrogate you there?

OC: Yeah. And all I would tell them was my name and rank and serial number, and which was our orders, not to tell them anything else. And after quite a bit of threatening and so forth, the guy that was interrogating me, told me that I'd be kept there until I was willing to tell them all that. And put me back in a room, and then the next day, they took me to Hohemark Hospital, which was near Dulag Luft. And there, I saw a German doctor and he didn't do much, didn't give me any medicine. I was there at Hohemark Hospital for one week. And then they put me on a train and I went to Wetzlar, went to Wetzlar, Germany, which was a place where they got you ready to go to your permanent camp. And so I was there about a week, and then they put me on a train and I went to Luft 4, which was near Peenemunde. And there, I saw an American doctor who had been captured on a B-24. And he got x-rays made and that's where he diagnosed the bone breaking, and he kept me in the hospital eleven days. And then we got there on the 16th day of December, the day that the Battle of the Bulge started. And then that was at Barth, Germany, I believe it was the 30th day of January, that was at Barth. And I was eleven days in that hospital and then went back to room 6 of barracks 6. Then I believe it was January 30, they abandoned Luft 4 and a bunch of us were put on the train and taken eight nights and seven days, about a hundred and twenty miles away to Luft 1 and that was at Barth, Germany. And I was at Barth until the war was over.

CB: What did they do to treat your broken pelvis?

OC: Nothing.

CB: Could you move at that time?

OC: Well, when I had to move, I did. When I went to what'd I say that interrogation center was? Dulag Luft, when I went to Dulag Luft, they had given me a pair of crutches while we were waiting to go from the train station out to Dulag Luft, and I started walking on those crutches. And the German guard took them away from me and gave them to another fellow. So it was really quite a walking, I had to do this, that's the way I walked. It was slow. 9

JW: Painful, too?

OC: Yeah.

JW: Everyone I've ever known that had a broken hip, there was surgery involved. So I assume that's what you were supposed to have and missed out on?

OC: Yeah, I never had it.

JW: Pretty amazing that you hadn't been crippled the rest of your life.

OC: Yeah. But I guess they healed back, the bones did.

JW: Being young helps, I guess.

OC: That's the weigh I had to walk until, well, I was still walking that way, some better, but still having to really lean back on my left leg when I moved my right leg forward. It was still doing that when we got out of Barth. When we got out of Barth, they left there, the Germans left there April the 30th. So we got out May the 8th, no, May the 13th, got out May the 13th.

CB: What happened when the Germans left? Where were you? Were you immobilized pretty well in a room?

OC: Well, no. I had to get out every morning when they counted you.

CB: Oh, really.

OC: And then at night, they'd count you again. So there were those two assemblies every day that they counted to be sure nobody had escaped.

CB: Where was a meal served?

OC: There weren't any meals. Well, when we first got to Luft 4, they would bring something to eat to the room or to the barracks where you were. And then when we got to Luft 1, let's see, we got there February the 8th, I believe. And they were serving us, we'd go twice a day to a place where they had a kitchen, and then that building burned down in April. So from that time on, they'd bring what food they'd give you to the barracks. Well, they wouldn't bring it to the barracks, they'd bring it to outside the barracks and you had to go out there and get it. Well, there was always black bread, they called it, which was like eating a piece of wood. I think there was a lot of sawdust in it. And then for a time, there would be potatoes. And then once, there was tomatoes. But mainly, it was that black bread.

JW: And water?

OC: Sometimes you'd just get black bread, yeah.

CB: Did they interrogate you anymore or did they just leave you alone once you got to that point?

OC: I don't remember being interrogated after we left Dulag Luft.

JW: Did they mistreat people?

OC: I didn't see it, you know. I didn't see it.

JW: If you had to assemble once in the morning and once at night, what did you do in between?

OC: I read. There at the Luft 1, there was a library where you could check out books, and I read over forty books.

JW: They were English?

OC: Yeah, during the time that we were there. Times we'd go out in the area, but that happened very rarely. Usually, you just stayed in the barracks.

JW: Just waiting and watching?

OC: Yeah.

CB: Were you aware of what was going on in the war? Did you have any 10 war news?

OC: As a matter of fact, at Luft 1, which was an officer's camp to start with, and then they put all of us, a bunch of us enlisted people there. But they had developed a radio system where they could get broadcasts from Britain, from England. And about every two or three times a week, some fellow would come by the barracks to read to us what they had developed from the messages that they had heard out of England. So we knew pretty well all along how the war was going.

CB: Well, were you close to the Russian front in this final camp?

OC: Yeah. The Russians arrived before the Americans did.

CB: Is that right?

OC: Yeah, at Luft 1.

CB: Is that before the Germans left or did the Germans leave ahead of them?

OC: Germans left before.

CB: On April 30th?

OC: Yeah.

CB: And the Russians arrived about that time?

OC: May the 2nd.

CB: Oh, is that right?

OC: Uh-huh. And then the Americans were there May the 4th.

CB: Who were --

OC: I don't know. They came in those vehicles, what do they call them?

CB: Armored carriers?

OC: No. Those, oh goodness, those small vehicles.

JW: Jeeps?

OC: What'd they call them? Anyway, there's two of them came in that. One was a Sergeant driving it and the other was a Lieutenant.

CB: Oh, was it a little Jeep?

OC: Yeah, that's what it was, it was a Jeep.

CB: What'd they tell you?

OC: I didn't talk to them but Colonel Hubert Zempke -- The Germans always had a what they called some kind of a camp leader or whatever, but anyway, they always had an officer that theoretically represented all the prisoners, and Colonel Hubert Zempke was the one at Luft 1. And the story later was that the German commander told him that they were going to have all of us get out and march away from the Russians. But Hubert Zempke convinced them that we wouldn't do that, and that they'd have to gun us down to get us to go. And so they didn't, they left us there for the Russians. The Russians came in, we were still there. The Germans had left.

CB: Well, that was really a good thing, wasn't it?

OC: Yeah, yeah. Zempke, Zempke could speak Russian. And he really convinced them that they couldn't make us go.

CB: And he was a German officer?

OC: No, he was American.

CB: He was an American?

OC: American pilot, yeah. And the Germans were running from the Russians. And he convinced them that they were much better off to be running without us than they were to be running with us.

CB: Well, that's true.

OC: Yeah.

CB: How were you treated by the Russians? 11

OC: Well, we weren't treated. The Americans got there two days later, so we never had any Russian treatment.

JW: You were there basically alone?

CB: Ben, after the Americans arrived, tell us how that played out there, what happened.

OC: As far as I was concerned, after the Germans left, myself and two or three others, changed barracks that we had been in over to one that the Germans had been using, where we had more room. And also, we made one trip into a town, city of Barth, which was within walking distance of Luft 1. And so we just, you might say, fooled around there for thirteen days. We'd heard that the Americans were going to bring in some planes and fly us out, so we were waiting for that. And it finally happened. And I think the first group went out on the 12th of May, and my group went out on the 13th of May, and the last group went out on the 14th. And they flew us to France and we spent the night at a camp in France. And the next morning, we got on a C-47 and they flew us to Rouen, France. And there, we got on an eighteen wheeler and went out to Camp Lucky Strike. And we got to Camp Lucky Strike, I think, on about May the 15th or so.

CB: Where was that?

OC: That was on the coast of France. And I don't remember what city was near it, but it was near some French city and they called it Camp Lucky Strike. And General Eisenhower visited there while we were there, and made a speech to us, it was there, they had an airfield there at Camp Lucky Strike. And the prisoners assembled out there on the airfield and Eisenhower made his speech there. And in the process, he told them that they were going to be getting, or told us that we'd be getting on ships pretty soon and head back to the States. And lo and behold, I ended up, I had had trouble when I was in POW camp with, what is it?

CB: A digestive upset or infectious disease?

OC: It was gall bladder, it was a gall bladder problem. And so when we got to Camp Lucky Strike, I had limited myself to eating. Well, I would eat two meals and skip one. And so one morning, I was supposed to skip, no, I was supposed to eat breakfast, but this gall bladder had attacked me so that I couldn't. I didn't get up. And so the medics came and took me to the hospital. And then they sent me to a hospital at another city in France and I stayed there for about eleven days or so. And then they sent me to one closer to the coast of France and I was there about four, five days. And then they put me on the USS ACADIA, which was a hospital ship. And all that was because of my gall bladder trouble.

JW: Had your hip healed up to a degree by that point?

OC: I was getting around better.

JW: So did you receive any attention to that while you were with the Americans doctors?

OC: No, no.

JW: Good thing you could heal on your own.

CB: You must not have complained.

OC: I didn't. The ACADIA only took seven days to get back to the United States. And we went back to Camp Kilmer, of all places. And the Americans, they came to each of us and asked us, course, I was with a group that was having medical problems, and they asked us where we wanted to go, and I told them Army Navy General at Hot 12 Springs. And lo and behold, they put me on a train and I went to Army Navy General at Hot Springs.

JW: I bet your parents found their way there pretty quickly.

OC: Yeah, yeah. I think I was there a couple of days before they showed up. And there, they took out my gall bladder.

CB: Well, when did anyone get interested in your hips?

OC: They never did. I was walking better when I got to Hot Springs. When I got to Camp Lucky Strike, I was walking better.

JW: Have you ever had any trouble with your hip since then?

OC: Well, only at night when I lie too often on my left side. It begins to hurt and so I have to get on my right side.

CB: Have you ever had it x-rayed? Is it healed?

OC: Yeah. And incidentally, I meant to tell you, when I was at Luft 4 and I saw that good American doctor who was a prisoner but they had let him treat the prisoners, he had what they called a medical office, but he wasn't much, but anyway it was where he would see prisoners. Fact, they called it the hospital. And he sent me to a place, I used to remember the name of it, where I was x-rayed. They took, the Germans took some x-rays and that's when it was determined that the pelvis, the bones had been separated, and the one on the left side had been broken. And I don't know what happened to those x-rays; but anyway, he had it done and that's when he found out that I'd had those.

CB: Could he do anything for you then?

OC: Well, he kept me in his so-called hospital eleven days; but no, he couldn't do anything about it. I was just more or less immobile.

JW: When you were shot down, was your family notified and what were they told? Missing in action or --

OC: Yeah. My understanding from talking with them is that they got the message that, first, that I was missing in action; and then later on, that I was a prisoner of war.

JW: That's all better news than you were dead.

OC: Yeah.

CB: Did you receive any mail from them?

OC: No, but they said we could write to them. And I wrote six or eight letters to them and they arrived after I got home.

CB: Really? Isn't that interesting. Well, did you receive Red Cross packages or did they visit you?

OC: Occasionally we would get a Red Cross package. Well, we wouldn't get it. What'd happen is two or three of us, one time four of us, would get one Red Cross package and the Germans passed those on to us so that the Red Cross would keep sending them over there. And the Germans used them, very literally. In fact, they had a whole bunch of them in Luft 1 when the Germans left, that they didn't take with them. And boy, the prisoners really enjoyed getting in there and passing them out.

CB: Did you meet anyone while you were in that situation, from Arkansas, anyone that you might have known?

OC: I don't think so, no. No one that I would have known. And I don't remember meeting anybody from Arkansas.

CB: When you came back on the ACADIA?

OC: Yeah, ACADIA.

CB: Did it come into New York?

OC: Yeah. 13

CB: What was that like?

OC: Well, course, it was good to see the, what is that?

CB: Statue of Liberty?

OC: Yeah, Statue of Liberty, yeah. And we arrived in the daylight, so we had a good view of everything around there, and we wasn't long until they unloaded us. So we didn't stay on that ship long.

JW: Were you on the town when you got off the ship? Did they say go R and R or anything?

OC: No. The Army had transportation to that hospital at Camp Kilmer, so we got off of the boat on their transportation.

CB: Were there any fatalities? Did you finally find what happened to the pilot?

OC: Yes. After the war, myself, along with some others, kept inquiring about what they'd found out. And we found out that about three days after we were shot down, that his body was found floating in a lake near where we hit the ground. And part of his head was missing and most of the major bones of his body were broken. So we knew that bad things had happened to him after he parachuted out.

JW: He was killed by villagers or soldiers, and not by the impact of jumping out of an airplane?

OC: That's right.

CB: He had been killed?

OC: Yeah. And one of the tours that Callahan and I participated in, took us back to where he had been buried after they discovered his body. And that they had taken him out of that cemetery, and taken him to the one in the Netherlands. And so we visited that place where he had been buried. And then later on, visited the same one in the Netherlands where he's buried now. And I've got a picture of that somewhere. In fact, the co-pilot and myself and another member of another crew are in the picture, three of us. We're standing by the headstone that has his name on it. And I remember that note there, there was a picture up here, but I remember that being taken but I've forgotten who took it or why. And then this is while we were training at Rapid City. Stayed in the military until he died, and he died real early.

CB: Do you think there were some health consequences to having been in that POW camp for so long? Did any of the boys suffer from that later on in life?

OC: Yeah. I have read things about some guys complaining about having something, what is it, stress disorder of some kind.

JW: Post traumatic stress?

OC: Yeah. But I don't know. I haven't observed it of anybody since the war. Yeah, post traumatic stress disorder.

JW: Not being a medical doctor, but I remember as a kid, there was some World War I veterans in town. And one of them that I knew was shell-shocked. And you don't hear of people in World War II being shell-shocked. I assume they moved on to another name.

OC: I guess so.

CB: And now we've got post traumatic distress. But shell-shocked looked pretty bad to me when I was a kid.

OC: Yeah. I've heard that, too, and it was about World War I people. There's the USS ACADIA.

CB: And that's what you came home on?

OC: Uh-huh. 14

CB: That looked good.

OC: Yeah. There were a lot of nurses, it was a hospital ship and there were nurses on it that would massage you. I really didn't need all that, but they did it anyway.

JW: After three years of war.

CB: Well, this has been really interesting and we thank you for sharing your experiences with us.

OC: Well, I hope I did an adequate job.

OC: You did an adequate job, very good job. We appreciate it so much.

CB: I appreciate what y'all are doing. Y'all are doing the work.

JW: It's pretty easy work.

OC: I used to be President of the Fort Smith Historical Association.

JW: I remember seeing that. I've got a set of the Journals. Did you see that Sarah McCullough died yesterday? Did you know her?

CB: Sarah Fitzgerald McCullough?

OC: Name sounds familiar, but I can't place.

JW: She was in in the early years of the Journal. I don't really know off the top of my head how long, but her and Amelia Martin, she was kind of Amelia's right hand.

OC: Yeah. I bet I did know her.

JW: But I never got to meet her.

CB: I talked to Art, and he said, oh, yeah, she did a lot of research for Amelia. So I'd like to ask you to sign this release form. 1