

**Dwight A. Lambert**  
**Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force (Retired)**  
**Served in European Theater in World War II**  
**Prisoner of War, Stalag Luft 1, Barth, Germany**

Interviewed on 20 June 2003

In Mr. Lambert's home, Riverside, California

Kleine: My name is Jim Kleine and today is June 20, 2003. This interview is taking place at the home of Mr. Lambert, Riverside, California, as part of the Riverside Veterans' History Project, a Riverside Public Library partnership with the Library of Congress.

O.K. Dwight, if you'll give us your full name, where you were born and raised, and your family background as a start.

Lambert: My name is Dwight A. Lambert. I was born in 1920 in a small iron mining community in northern Minnesota, about eighty miles from Canada. My father was a civil engineer for the mining company. Most of the employees worked for a subsidiary of U.S. Steel up there in that district. The land in the area was either all owned or leased by United States Steel. I grew up in this little small town of something around 8,000 called Eveleth. It was named after one of the discoverers of the iron ore up there in northern Minnesota, the Mesabi Iron Range. I doubt whether anyone remembers reading that in their history books, but at one time it was pretty famous. Hibbing, Minnesota, is nearby, that boasts of having the largest open pit mine in the whole world. It's a gigantic hole in the ground; that's all I can tell you. I don't remember the details or how deep it was or how long it was. Anyway, I had my primary school education there, in Eveletti and then to junior high. Then when I finished high school, in the class of '39, with 120 other graduates, most of us stayed on and went to junior college because we were still in the Depression and there were no jobs. Moms and dads couldn't get a job, so it was very difficult for a young kid to get a job. Most of us stayed and went to a local junior college for two years. I was prepared to go on to a four year college except that I knew that the financial situation for my parents was such that . . . my older brother was already in college and they were having a hard time trying to keep him going . . . so I knew that the chances were slim or none that I was going to get to go to a four year college.

I said, "Well, don't worry about it. I'll join the Air Force." The old Army Air Corps Cadet Program. So I was qualified. Having had two years of college made me eligible and physically I passed all the exams. So on August 15, 1941, I took the Oath of Office in Fort Snelling, Minnesota, which is down near Minneapolis, and they put me on a train and sent me out to attend primary flying school. The Air Force had a contract with a private airport and private operator to handle the primary flying school in Santa Maria, California, which is right near Santa Barbara. I was one of, I think, about eighty cadets in my particular class – 42C. It was designated as 42C. I started in August of 1941, and, of course, it was my idea to successfully become a pilot, go through the entire program, and I was going to conquer the world, more or less.

So I did the best I could. As a cadet, I believe we were making \$75 a month plus room and board, so that wasn't so bad in those days. As a matter of fact, the \$75 a month staggered me. I couldn't believe my good fortune! The food was good also. The discipline was fairly rigid. It had an upper class system which dealt out the punishments if you didn't follow the straight and narrow. I think it was a good experience for anyone to attend that kind of a course with that kind of regime . . . that regiment.

Unfortunately, however, I didn't last too long, but I enjoyed every minute of it. I got the chance to solo but my check ride . . . my military instructor said that I flew it fine except he thought I was dangerous so I was eliminated from flying school. I decided that, well, my next course of action . . . what else can I do? By this time it was towards the end of September of '41, and I inquired around and found out that they had a navigation school to teach people how to become air navigators up in Sacramento, California, at a place called Mather Field, California. So I applied for that and was accepted and arrived in late September, I believe. Some of the streets were not yet even paved at Mather Field; some of the troops were actually still living in tents, because they were just getting geared up for the war that was apparently going to be inevitable.

I entered the program in the class of 42-2; they had, I think, nineteen other students in my class. Twenty of us altogether. We went through a very rigorous program of instruction plus some military training. We had to do some marching. We didn't excel at that, I'm sure, but we succeeded in finishing the course, which was an academic program plus flying. It got us some experience actually trying to perform the job of a navigator. Navigation was brand new. I was in class 42-2; there were only three classes that had preceded me. So I figure that I'm among the first 100 navigators to finish school at Mather Field, California. We graduated the 29<sup>th</sup> day of January of '42 and I was lucky enough to stay right there at Mather as an instructor. I might recite the fact that I joined the flying program because it was kind of glamorous. Of course, the Navy had a program also but I had an older brother who was already a first lieutenant in the Army Air Corps. (Laughing) He would have killed me if I had joined the Navy instead. So that's why I was in the Air Force as opposed to any other service.

My assignments, as I say, started out as an instructor. They kept me on as an instructor, and I continued teaching as more and more and more students kept on coming in and the place kept growing and growing. I think we had as many as five classes going at one time, so it got to be a pretty extensive operation.

On a personal note, something important happened there while I was at Mather. I got engaged to my wife by telephone. I was at Mather and my wife-to-be was away at college living in a dorm. We got engaged by phone. This young lady was someone I had known since we were in tenth grade together. So it was a long-lasting relationship. It wasn't anything brand new. We knew each other very, very well. Then we got married later on that summer, on July 31<sup>st</sup> as a matter of fact. We had to wait until pay day to get married. We laugh at those things these days, but you did lots of things that maybe you wouldn't have done had not the war occurred.

I remained in that job. I advanced in rank to first lieutenant in February of '43 and remained on as an instructor. But my day inevitably was going to come where I was going to be transferred into combat because that's the way things go in the military. That's why you're training, to learn how to go and fight the enemy. In my view, I was a pretty good accomplished navigator by the time we left. In May of '43 our daughter was born. That kind of complicated things, but that's the way you had to deal with it. Everybody has those same identical problems. So in the service that's probably pretty much par for the course. You've got to expect to have lots of different things come up which you have to cope with as they happen. So we did.

We got our orders to go to combat in June, 1943. My first assignment was over in Tucson at Davis Monthau Field. I was assigned to a B-24 unit. That's a four engine bomber. I didn't really enjoy the assignment, and I particularly did not enjoy the airplane. It was hot; I guess it was in July, maybe in late June when we arrived and it was so hot! I couldn't believe that anyplace could be so hot. And our little girl . . . our daughter . . . was affected by the heat. I had to keep her in during the day. The only time my wife could take her out in the buggy was at night after the sun went down, (laughing) but we survived that. My wife wanted to come with me all the way through the training, even though she knew that it would be just a few months here and a few months there until finally I would go overseas. But she wanted to be with me all the time until that occurred. So I couldn't talk her out of that although it probably was good for us, looking back on it. We were trying to overcome difficulties.

So, in the middle of my training . . . I'd been there just, I guess, nearly a month . . . when a call came out for a request for navigators . . . twelve navigators to join a new unit that was forming. You had to go to a special school. They wouldn't tell you what it was, but it was in Florida. The ultimate assignment was going to be in B-17s. So I said, "I'm your man!" I volunteered and twelve of us finally showed up from Tucson and went to our destination, which we found out was Boca Raton, Florida. So I flew down, but my wife and one of the other navigator's wives, who was on the same assignment, drove down all the way across the southern states there from Tucson to Boca Raton, Florida. So we twelve navigators joined up there and enjoyed the beach a lot. We had lots of nice times down in Florida.

The training was rigorous. It turned out that it was radar training. Radar training. We had never even heard the term "radar" before. They quickly advised us that everything heard from then on about the word "radar" was to be classified and not to be discussed at all. It was "secret." What it was was they had done some experimental work up in Bell Laboratories up in Massachusetts and had devised this radar machine. Radar . . . everyone understands now what radar is . . . but it really is defined as radio direction and ranging. It's a very common thing today, but it was top secret then. Well, maybe not top secret. But it was so secret that nobody was allowed to talk about it. My wife didn't even know what we were doing, as it should be. So we did air training. Actually with the primitive equipment. We had flights, oh, about every other day and the other alternate days we spent in school trying to learn how this magic gadget worked. This radio direction and ranging radar was something brand new; nobody had known previously about this, or had experience with it. So we would practice. You can actually . . . they incorporated a cross hair on the thing . . . you could maneuver . . . first of all you had to find out . . . practice detection of some kind of a target down below and try and identify it. That takes a lot of practice. We were really nowhere near ready or qualified or proficient at it . . . maybe

that's the right word . . . to drop bombs by it because it takes some experience to understand and interpret what the images you see on the radar are. But we did the best we could and kind of got the hang of it, in a minor and not very skillful way, I'm afraid, looking back on it. But we learned to put the cross hairs on the target and do a few little calculations with pencil and paper and turn a couple of switches, then the bombs were designed to drop on the target. This process would solve our wind and any other things that could interfere with the dropping of the bomb, especially the inability to see the target because of cloud cover. You became the bombardier, in other words, as well as a navigator because you're the one who dropped the bombs. It was all done automatically. So it was an amazing concept; we learned later on that it was decided at the highest level that we . . . the Air Force or the military . . . had to devise some kind of a system to drop bombs through clouds, whether you could see the target visually or not, because we could drop the bombs using radar through the clouds did not matter. We were losing airplanes needlessly because an entire formation of bombers was sent out to attack a target and if the target happened to be overcast, there was no way to see the target. So all aircraft would have to turn around and return home and drop all its bombs in the North Sea.

We were stationed in England. I failed to mention that. The whole concept was designed initially to fight the war in Europe. We needlessly lost all kinds of time, personnel and aircraft which collided or sustained damage needlessly because of the sheer volume of aircraft in the air at one time. There were hundreds of aircraft milling around in the air. Lots of these folks were just really quite inexperienced with maybe fifty hours of flying time in a bomber. We sent them to combat and a needless loss of life was experienced. That's one of the reasons why they decided, well, let's get some kind of a system going where it won't matter whether you can see the target or not because if we have radar, we can detect the target, get to the target, drop the bomb on it with some degree of accuracy. Maybe that'll make the war end earlier and we'll lose fewer airplanes and we'll bomb out the ability of the Germans to pursue the war.

So that was the concept. And we finally got to go overseas. I got ahead of myself there somewhat. I finally arrived over in England after having left Florida, first of all, and then practiced this procedure, joined our crews, B-17s, brand new ones, up in New Hampshire, at Grenise Field and Manchester, New Hampshire; then we went overseas to England to an air base which was about sixty miles due north of London on the main throughway that goes north and south through England, Alconhury by name. We had our crews all organized and on our first mission we went to bomb Wilhelmshafen on November 3<sup>rd</sup> after training for a couple of months with our new crews and with new equipment and getting some "expertise" in how to drop a bomb by radar.

So we did practice in England for a couple of months and they finally said, "Well, you're ready. As ready as you're gonna be." So we went on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1943 . . . that was my first mission . . . and proceeded on this mission without incidence. Nothing ever happened to any planes in my particular squadron. We were in the lead aircraft because we had to be in the lead because not all the aircraft over there . . . we only had this one unit equipped with radar. Only twelve of us were qualified . . . at least at the beginning. So one of the twelve of us had to be in the lead airplane because we were the ones who had the radar. If it turned out that the target was visible by sight, we would drop back and our Number 2 airplane would take over and the regular bombardier would drop the bombs just as you normally would with an ordinary bombsight. But

if you couldn't see the target we would drop them by radar and everyone would drop on the leader. The first aircraft would open the bomb bay doors and when the time came the bombs would leave the aircraft for the target. Once that occurred everybody would drop their bombs on the leader's bombs. That worked pretty successfully enough so that they pursued it.

We bombed such targets as Frankfurt and Wilhelmshaven. That was my first mission, and I survived that successfully. Nobody in our particular formation was attacked or injured by any enemy fighter attacks or by flack. Those were the two big sources of our difficulty. Of course, we would sometimes have to turn back because of equipment failure, like if one of the engines quit or something. The B-17 was a hardy old aircraft. I was pleased to be flying B-17s but malfunctions occurred in that aircraft, too, so sometimes we had to abort the mission. If you were alone up there in the sky, that was the thing you didn't want to do most, to be alone up there. You needed to be in a formation, otherwise you were an instant target of opportunity because you're limping along.

January 11<sup>th</sup> was my most hazardous mission I was ever on and, as the expression goes, "the hairiest mission" I ever remember being on. Boy! I still remember it. January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1944 was not the day I got shot down, but that was the day that we attacked the target. Braunschweig which happened to be on a direct line with England and Berlin. Up until that time Berlin had not yet been attacked. Apparently the German higher ups figured that we were heading for Berlin and so they put everything they had in the sky that would fly. The opposition was fierce! The enemy aircraft were flying, buzzing by so fast and so close . . . if I was ever scared in combat I was scared that day. You could almost tell what color the enemy pilot's eyes were. Boy, they were that close, making passes that were within feet of our aircraft. We were in the lead aircraft so obviously we were being targeted because they wanted to get the leader, if they could, which is a reasonable course of action. We lost forty-two aircraft that day. Forty-two. That means ten people per crew so we lost 420 people that day.

So we were pressing on with our missions, coming along rapidly. In those days we had twenty-five missions to perform, to complete a tour. So in twenty-five missions the loss rate was four percent per mission so you kind of run out your luck there by the time you got to twenty-five missions. There weren't a whole lot of people who were finishing twenty-five missions. If you did, you automatically got a Distinguished Flying Cross pinned on you. I was fortunate enough . . . unfortunate enough to be shot down just a few weeks later, after this January 11<sup>th</sup> raid where we lost so many. The lead aircraft, and our #2 aircraft were the only ones that got back out of our squadron from that particular raid. They were just so intense! And the opposition kept coming and coming and coming. As I say, there was a maximum effort trying to get us all shot down. To keep us from heading for Berlin, but we weren't. The target was Braunschweiger-Oschersleben.

I was a first lieutenant at the time and, as I say, we were designated as a lead aircraft every mission because we were the ones who had the radar. So on one mission . . . I don't remember which one . . . the colonel who was riding with us and who was always the overall commander of the whole operation that particular day, lead the raid. It was quite an honor for them to be selected to do that because he was in charge of everything that happened. One hundred airplanes, two hundred, five hundred. At one time we flew a thousand aircraft on a

target. One thousand aircraft . . . you'd look out the back of the airplane and all you could see was black specks way, w-a-a-a-y, w-a-y off in the distance. It takes up that much space to make a thousand airplanes, and it took a couple of hours just to make the formation. Formations were sometimes hazardous too, and I think the record would bear me out when I say that . . . not frequently, but occasionally, two B-17s would collide in mid-air while we were just forming, before we even started out over England. So it had its hazards all right for sure.

I was a first lieutenant at the time and continued to be a first lieutenant until (laughing) flying after I got back home from overseas. I finally got promoted in the Fall of '45 long after the war was over. Anyway, February 4<sup>th</sup>, '44, was **the** day that I remember as being a pivotal event in my military career because we were directed to attack railroad yards in Frankfurt, Germany. About central Germany is where it was located. We attacked it all right and without opposition because there were terrible cloud covers down below. The weather was terrible on the ground so the Germans didn't launch any aircraft, any fighters against us because it's obvious if you . . . the equipment in those days wasn't nearly as exotic or advanced technically as we have it today. You could land today without being able to see your hand in front of your face. But in those days if you launched an aircraft, you'd have to be able to get it back down, otherwise it's gonna be a loss. They couldn't afford to do that so they wouldn't launch any planes. So it was an O.K. day for us to fly over Germany and drop our bombs because there wasn't any fighter opposition. And there wasn't any flack either. So it was a very weird situation.

Except . . . we'd already dropped the bombs and headed on up north for about twenty minutes, and then we were gonna turn west and head for home. So we thought that we were practically home free. The mission was all done. Only that wasn't the way it worked out because we suddenly saw three bursts of flack off in the distance. One of the pieces of flack obviously was close enough to hit our engine and put it on fire. It hit one of the fuel lines or the oil lines. Anyway, a fire developed in one of the engines. We shut it down instantly and feathered the engine and tried to starve out the fuel requirements. If there wasn't any fuel to burn . . . the theory was that it would die out by itself and we'd be all right. We might lose the engine and have to limp our way home on three engines, but we figured that we could do that. But it didn't get better. It got worse!

Finally, just in desperation, the commander said over the interphone, "There's no hope for it folks. We're just going to have to bail out. Everybody! Bail out as soon as you can!" And it was my job, because I was the most rearward officer to make sure that all the crew got out . . . The tail gunner who was manning two 50 caliber guns had to get out of his position and then two waist gunners; I helped crank the turret gunner underneath the ball turret there, underneath the airplane. We had to crank him around and pull him up out of his position. It was so cramped he was unable to really do that by himself. You had to have some help to do that. So that was a very critical job, getting the turret gunner out was very hazardous for that reason. Then the radio man went out and everybody left except . . . I was the last one going. I met the pilot in the walkway. The crawl way. The bomb bays were open because we'd already dropped the bombs and there were no bombs on either side of the crawl way there . . . the walk way, and so there wasn't anything difficult about walking back on the walk way there and just bailing out. Just jumping over the side into open space. So we did.

On the way down I remembered that I had been instructed to NEVER PULL THE PARACHUTE UNTIL YOU COUNT TO TEN because you might get caught on the tail somehow, and, well, you don't even want to contemplate what would happen. So I did. I said: ONE, TWO, THREE . . . I had my hand on the ripcord . . . FOUR, FIVE, SIX, (talking faster and faster) seven, eight, nine, ten! And I pulled the ripcord and that opened the chute, I have to admit, with considerable more jar . . . jolt to it than I had expected. Boy! Man! What a jolt that was. Anybody who does sports parachuting, jumping out of a perfectly good airplane, I think is crazy. But . . . (laughing) that was only my personal experience. I guess if you're trained for that you'd have a different opinion about it.

Anyway we all bailed out successfully and the last time I saw the airplane it was flying off with smoke almost even with the tail. It was time to go. Believe me . . . it was time. After the chute opened . . . oh, I failed to mention that we'd bailed out in clouds. We were at 20,000 feet or thereabouts, and it was a weird sensation because you couldn't have any sense of direction or which way was up and which way was down. I knew I was tumbling. I could feel myself tumbling but then after we got stabilized and the chute opened up, and obviously that's up, where the canopy is, but I couldn't see the ground. I don't really know . . . I didn't know how high I was. Intellectually now, of course, looking back on it, it took us about fifteen minutes to float down, I guess, or something like that. A L-O-N-G time anyway and it was 20 past 1 in the afternoon. I recall looking at my watch when I was floating down. See, we all got out, but I kept calling "Bill! Sam! Joe! Tony! Frank!" Nothing. I don't know where these guys were. They were all on our crew, but I couldn't get anybody to respond so, to this day, I don't know why. I guess there was just a couple of seconds of interval . . . time would probably make a difference of maybe, oh, several hundred feet, and anyway they couldn't hear me or they didn't hear me or respond so I just said, "Well, I hope they're all O.K." I was O.K. I hadn't been hit. This one burst of flack was the only one that we had seen all day. Or three bursts all in quick intervals. So I assumed everybody was all O.K. I found out later . . . I saw all the crew members later after the war and we had all successfully landed. The pilot, however, I didn't know him, and he didn't tell me this when I saw him in the crawl way, that just before we jumped out together, he did get a tear . . . a wound across his middle . . . his abdomen, but he was captured almost instantly. They took him to a hospital and he was fine. I've even seen the scar so I know . . ., and he's A #1.

In those days they didn't give you any air training. If you were on an air crew, you never got any training in jumping out of an airplane. It was . . . just make sure you counted to ten before you pulled the parachute and when you land, try to land with both feet and it's a little bit of a jar. See if you could even out the weight on both feet. I had a pair of regular loafers on but I had a pair of fleece-lined flying boots on over them to keep my feet warm 'cause it gets really cold up in the air there. For the uninitiated, it gets to be as cold as maybe thirty-five degrees below zero. But the airplane was not heated back in those days. During war time you never suspected that you'd be flying in a modern day jet with all the comforts of home and it's cozy and quiet. On an uninsulated airplane it gets mighty cold when you're at 25,000 or 30,000 feet. So we were dressed warmly for it.

I broke out of the clouds finally. I estimated about 3,000 feet. And it was like a Christmas post card scene. There was a farm house . . . farmland down below . . . and a farm house, and a red barn and smoke coming out of the chimney of the farm house and the ground is partly covered with a thin layer of snow. There were some little forests over on the side there, up ahead, so I decided I'd try very hard to maneuver myself towards the woods there to get some protection in case anybody was about. Sure enough there was somebody about because I spied a man . . . a farmer and apparently his wife and a hired man came running out of the barn and they were shouting and hollering, pointing up at me. I couldn't tell what they were saying. All I knew was that I didn't want to get captured by civilians. They say terrible things happened by civilians because they might run you through with a pitch fork or hit you with a 2 x 4 or something. But if you're captured, the idea was to get captured by enemy soldiers because they were bound to accept you as a prisoner of war and take you into custody and you'd be O.K. for the most part.

So I kept that in mind as I landed, but I was too intent on trying to maneuver towards the forest to avoid the folks who were running towards me by now. I actually landed on both feet but all the weight was on my right foot and I felt a sharp pain when I hit the ground. I thought, "Oh, no! I've broken my ankle or maybe my leg or something. It hurts! It hurts! It hurts!" But by that time the adrenaline was flowing about a quart a minute, I guess. So I couldn't be bothered with that. I threw off my parachute and just ran like sixty as fast as I could to this little grove of trees. I ran about maybe a quarter of a mile, maybe a little longer, but my foot hurt and I was too afraid to look down to see what was wrong. I couldn't visibly see any blood so I thought that was a good sign. So I kept running, but then I thought, "Well, this is as far as I can go. I think I'll just see if I can evade them by hiding underneath the trees. I pulled some branches and some leaves over me, and I had my little electrically heated suit on and a pair of flying coveralls over those. But the blue suit was surely visible to anyone if you could spot me so I tried very hard to make myself invisible. I did as best I could with leaves and branches over me. I was hopeful that they would pass me by.

I could hear the voices. They were getting closer and closer and I just didn't dare hardly breathe. And sure enough they did pass me by. They were calling to one another, just the three of them on this little search party, and they missed me. When the voices disappeared in the distance, I said, "Well, they'll probably be coming back the same way." And they did. I was still afraid to breathe almost, and they missed me again. Now by this time it was getting a little bit dark because in northern Germany in those latitudes in the wintertime it gets dark fairly early. So they abandoned the search; I finally felt confident to shake myself loose from all the leaves and stuff that was over me. I was then interested in checking my ankle first. I could imagine all kinds of terrible things happening in my boot. I imagined I felt blood in my boots and all kinds of terrible things that never happened. I finally determined it was either a bad sprain or maybe a minor break because it was already swollen up sizably, noticeably. So I took off my boot, but I didn't take off my shoe because I figured if I took off my shoe I'd never be able to put it back on. So I left the shoe on and got some snow and rubbed it and placed the snow on my bruised ankle, hoping that that would ease the pain. And it did, somewhat.

Then I got out a map. It was still light enough to look at a map. We had a map in our escape kit so I examined that and tried to figure out where I was, but all I could do was figure

within maybe twenty miles where I was. I didn't precisely know where I was 'cause a lot of things happened in the last minute or so of the flight and I just quit navigating. I just was too involved with other things. I found out then that there wasn't any bone showing; if it was a break, it was not anything serious. I figured I could cope with that.

I was hungry 'cause I hadn't eaten since, oh, four o'clock in the morning, I guess, before the mission so I unearthed a candy bar that was in my escape kit. The escape kit was provided to everybody who flies; it was a little plastic box, sort of, about four or five inches square and about half an inch deep and had a cloth map of Germany and France. I also had, I think, a hundred dollars of French money, a hundred dollars of German money, if my memory serves me correctly, and a couple of little tiny compasses. They were about as big around as maybe your big finger. Little tiny compass and a candy bar. I didn't tell you about the candy bar. So I ate a half of the candy bar. I was famished. I was starved. Then I tried to decide what I ought to do. I was emotionally and physically drained by this time with all the excitement so I decided, "Well, the thing to do is to lay low until it gets dark; then I'll start heading west. That's my best bet." I guess I read too many spy novels or something because I had assumed, "Well, maybe I could, optimistically, overly optimistically, be taken in by somebody and they'd put me in touch with the underground and we would gradually . . . I'd make my way back." But all this time it was just fanciful because it never worked out that way at all.

I tried to walk my way through as best I could when it got dark. I started heading west. I found out later though that only like one percent, or something like that, of the people successfully evaded and got back. So it was just a pipe dream that I was being deluded by. So, anyway, I walked and found a main road and stayed on it. I still didn't know where I was. I ran across some highway signs, but they were all written in German script and I couldn't figure out to relate that to my map. I didn't really . . . I didn't dig that at all. So I decided, "Well, all right, I'll just keep on heading west and I'll be all right." If a car came along the road I'd just jump into the ditch and wait until it went by and then get back up again and walk some more. My ankle was really expanding by this time because of the activity . . . the demands placed on my ankle by the walking . . . I figured I walked maybe a couple or three miles, but it took a long time to do that.

It began to get light and besides that, it was time for me to get some rest. I was just totally exhausted, so I found another little forest and found my way inside the forest a little ways, just off the beaten path there, and hacked off some branches with a hunting knife I had on my belt. I got some pine branches and made a little bed, a primitive bed, and I lay down. I must have been asleep in about five seconds.

When I woke up it was ten o'clock in the morning. I couldn't believe it. By this time there were no clouds. Just a bright, brilliant, wonderful day. I decided I would try to follow the rules, but I couldn't stay put. So I talked myself out of that. I said, "Well, what I'm gonna do, I'll walk to the west end of the forest and then I'll wait there until it gets dark. I'll have that much of a head start." So it only took about a quarter of a mile to the bend in this little old trail that was there. It was kind of a primitive cart path but it had some traffic through there at one time. I turned the corner, ninety degrees, and there's a couple of civilians looking at me. They were maybe a hundred feet away.

“Ohhhhh, no! No!” Well, I decided I couldn’t run because I wasn’t gonna out run them so I just waited there and they came running up. They were excited. They weren’t hostile. They were just curious. Who was I? Where did I come from? First they said, “Englize? Englize?” “No, no.” I wasn’t English. “Amerikanish. Amerikansky,” or something like that.” They couldn’t speak English, and I couldn’t speak German so by sign language I indicated that I came down from the sky by parachute and they took me in tow and I thought, “Well, since they’re not mad at me, I guess, well, I know . . . I’ve got my escape money. I’ll give them all my escape money. Maybe that will turn their thinking my way.” And so I did. I gave them the money and oh, they were so happy. They’re clapping each other on the back and so, oh, good. They even counted it to make sure that everybody got his share. There were three of them there. The third one had joined from down yonder. They were woodsmen. They were woodcutters. Two of them had axes and the third one had a saw. So I didn’t figure I was going to outmaneuver those guys at all. But they told me, “Well, come on.” They motioned me to follow them to a little side road . . . a little side path sort of and took me out to a road in about a half a mile, and they had their car there. They indicated to “get in the car and we’ll take you.”

I didn’t know where they were going to take me, but I was hoping it was to put me in touch with the underground. That wasn’t their goal at all. They just took me to a place that had bars on the window, and I said, “Oh, no! They got me! I’m in the bag now. I’ve had it, for sure.” And sure enough, I was because these two German soldiers came out. One was a corporal and one was just, I guess, a private; they took over at once. They were very excited. They used an old cranky phone to tell somebody . . . their superior, that they had captured this American. But they were kind to me. They were very good to me. They let me share some of their sandwiches they had brought from home. A little lunch. A baloney sandwich and some coffee and even gave me a couple of aspirins. I told them my ankle hurt so they even got a big bowl and filled it with snow and undid my shoe and my boot and put my ankle in the water, or in the ice cold water, and wanted to help me in any way they could.

Then they said, “Well, tomorrow our commander says he’s gonna be here in a car to pick you up early.” He sent a couple of soldiers and picked me up about five o’clock in the morning and took me to a Luftwaffen base. I stayed the night over at the Luftwaffen base. Everywhere I’d been in contact I told them my ankle hurt and that I needed to have a doctor, but they said, “No.” In the first place they didn’t have a doctor. They said, “Well, wait until you get to the air base.” So at the Luftwaffen air base I asked for a doctor again, but he never saw me. They said they would send him, but he didn’t come.

They finally then took me and said that the next morning, they were going to take me again to the railroad station and take me down the Rhine River to Frankfurt. That’s the town I had just bombed two days earlier, so I had some trepidation with that, not knowing exactly what kind of reception to expect. But I had an escorted trip down the Rhine River in a private railroad car. They had orders to keep me separate from the civilians. They roused civilian Germans from the railroad car, so I had this private car all by myself with the two guards. We finally got to Frankfurt, and they took me off the train and guarded me all the time. There I was, in the station that I had bombed just two days earlier, and the crowd . . . the civilians . . . were not good.

Not happy. They shouted at me and shook their fists. “*Schweinhurd! Terrorflieger!*” They threatened me but they didn’t strike me at all.

The guards and I were getting a little nervous, too, so they took me back to the station master’s office, way back in the innards of the railroad station, and kept me back there until a little local train that they were waiting for arrived. Then they hustled me on out through the crowd, but the crowd was getting downright hostile. They were belligerent and spitting at me too. I forgot to mention that, and I could understand that. (Laughing) They certainly were very unfriendly and rightfully so. You would probably, as an American, react the same way.

Anyway it turned out that this was just a little short train ride, and they let me out. There was a big area of barracks there and some other headquarters buildings. It turned out that it was an interrogation center for anybody who was an airman who was captured. Captured airmen were brought there. Every airman was brought to this particular interrogation center. They put you in an individual cell in solitary confinement because they want to play with your mind a little bit and make you very unsettled. So this little room was so small you could touch the sides of it if you extended both your arms. You could touch each wall. All it had was a cot with one blanket and a radiator, a small radiator. The only illumination came from one little window about a foot square way up . . . about nine feet high, and that was it.

They fed you twice a day, a kind of stew, and it was not bad. Not bad. Not good. Not bad either. But it was something to eat. You would have to pound on the door to call a guard if you wanted to go to the rest room, and one of the rules was you were not to talk. Whoever you saw, you were to be silent. And so I walked down the hall with a guard to the rest room and, sure enough, there were other Americans there. I wanted to talk to them in the worst way but “No, no, no! Verboten! Verboten! You can’t talk to anybody!” The Germans would go in the bathroom with you to make sure you didn’t converse with anybody. Nothing!

So they called you then into the interrogator’s office several times a day, and sometimes at night to wake you up out of a sound sleep to call you over for some more interrogation. They were trying to do what their job was, to get whatever information they could get for intelligence purposes. Such as: What’s your name? Rank? Serial Number? And: What unit were you in? What kind of airplane were you flying? How high were you? Were you hit by flack or shot down by enemy aircraft? How fast were you going? What was your alternate target? How many airplanes were in the formation? All kinds of information, just one question after another. But I kept telling them, “No, my name is Dwight A. Lambert. My rank is first lieutenant, United States Army Air Corps, and my serial number is \_ \_ \_ \_ \_.”

After they heard that enough times they finally were persuaded that maybe you were serious about remaining silent and they were not going to have much success getting anything out of you. So they kept me for, I think, two days, like that and finally on the third day, oh, I kept asking for a doctor, and the doctor finally did show up. He said, “Oh, that’s only a sprain. Don’t worry about it. You’re O.K.” He then told me to put my boot back on and forget it. He didn’t tape it up. He didn’t give me any kind of treatment. Just very rough. He grabbed ahold of my foot and twisted it. “OWWWW!” And so I was not impressed with the service that I got there.

But anyway, the next thing that happened, they called me over. This was in the winter, now, February 5<sup>th</sup> when I arrived at that camp. Sixth! February 6<sup>th</sup> of '44. It was cold out, and they would try to play mind games with you and take away the heat so that you were cold. They'd wake you up at two o'clock in the morning to see if they could startle you into saying something you didn't really intended to say . . . to reveal. And finally they said, "Well, we just wanted to confirm who you were. We really knew who you are all the time." And he reaches back . . . of course, it was just like a Hollywood setting . . . and pulls a book out of the rack. He flips through the pages to a page called "55<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group." Oh, O.K. So he says "Yeah, going down the list here. See? There's your name right there. Lieutenant Lambert. It says you're a fighter pilot in the 55<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, and we know where you're stationed. Here's a list of your Squadron Commander and a Flight Surgeon . . . a Chaplain" . . . everybody's name was down there, whether it was staged or not, I don't know, but it was possibly legitimate. I don't know. They had good intelligence. I know that. Except that they had the wrong guy because I don't know anything about fighter pilots. "So, we only wanted to confirm that that's really who you were." So I'm sorry that we didn't get along better than we did, because he offered me cigarettes all the time and hot coffee. I took the coffee, but since I didn't smoke I didn't take any of his cigarettes. But they tried to butter you up so that you'd loosen your tongue a little. But I kept on . . . as I said earlier. If you persisted in telling them your name, rank and serial number, they'd finally give up, which they eventually did.

They took me out of solitary confinement and put me in a, oh, just down a couple of blocks; they had a confinement headquarters where they . . . it was just a barracks building . . . just housed you until they got enough prisoners organized to make a train load. At that time they'd send you out. We asked them how long we'd be there and they said, "We don't know. Maybe three or four days." And it was, I think, three days. They brought us by truck down to the train yards. It was towards dusk, and they locked the train up and nothing happened. We stayed there for a couple or three hours. We were getting a little nervous because the RAF was known to bomb railroad yards at night 'cause that's the kind of stuff that they did. But we finally got out of there after all the delay. I don't know why there was a delay, but they took us by train. If they had taken us by a direct route, we probably could have made it in one day's travel . . . train travel. But it took us three nights and two days because they took us clear east of Berlin on such a circuitous route because, I guess, the rail lines and the roads were already screwed up, damaged sufficiently so that they had to route us the easiest way they could.

We finally arrived, but not without incident. They'd stop along the road to put you on a siding because we were low priority, and the priority trains would go by and then they'd get us back on track again. But they had a little pot-bellied stove and they'd put us in a railroad car . . . just a plain old ordinary railroad car . . . a freight car; I thought that was really shabby for all officers. I expected better treatment than that. It had just one bench that held maybe fifteen people, but they had about forty of us in this place, and they had maybe one bale of hay strewn throughout the railroad car. You were supposed to use that to lie down on, I guess, but it wasn't adequate by any stretch of the imagination. We lived with it, but it got cold so they gave us a short ration of coal. They'd make numerous stops, and we'd all get out for a toilet break. It would be interesting to see everybody all squatted down (laughing) on a great big line, beside the railroad track. Not really too nice to talk about but that's exactly what you had to do.

It was cold and the ration of coal would go out. I mean we were fresh out of coal rations so the German guards . . . they had a German guard on each car . . . and he would lock the door on the inside after each one got inside. We were all in there already and he'd lock the door. So it was time for a break so he would . . . we did this regularly. Several times, they'd stop by the road and wait for another priority train to go by, and they would encourage us to go in another train or two parked on either side of us. When that happened we'd try to find the coal car, and the guards would encourage us to go up on top and throw down some coal which we did. We did. And anything burnable. Anything . . . heavy wood we'd send down . . . throw it overboard and we'd cart it in and use it for firewood to keep warm.

One day this happened. It was in the evening. We had been on the road, I guess, two nights. This was the third night now when they threw a big box down, made of wood. Heavy wood. And it was heavy. Heavy. And two or three guys had to man-handle it to throw it overboard. They got it inside our freight car. There were about forty guys in there, and one of the guys was a chemist. He said, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Wait . . . I don't think that's a very good thing to do. I smell something. It might be combustible. I don't know what we're doing with this thing. Something must have cracked or broken loose in there when you threw the box down. I think we ought to get rid of the box right now!"

But it was already too late because some fumes came over and ignited the whole thing. It was a blazing inferno inside the car, we pretty nearly knocked the guard down trying to get out. We were all so darn anxious to get through the door and get to safety 'cause that fire was getting hotter and bigger by the minute. It got to be uncontrollable. The guard was so nervous he had trouble opening the lock. It was just a little padlock, but he finally got it open. We all jumped out and ran like hell! The guard lost all control of us. He just was at his wits end. It was dark. It was night. The train station was up ahead there . . ., and the guard hollered for all the other guards to come. They all came running to try to keep us corralled and had to separate our car from the rest of the train. Isolate it. And let it burn because it was beyond control. (Laughing) The German officials were just madder than can be. They were just u-p-s-e-t because how were they going to explain that to the authorities.

So we were transferred to, oh, six or eight of us in each of the other cars or something until all forty of us were accommodated. We rode the next day the last leg to our prison camp. We finally arrived and it was already daylight by the time we got there. We saw a flag from a distance. Ohhhhhh, a cheer went up. We thought it was an American flag! Nooooooo. That was a German flag with a Swastika and what not by the time we got close enough to tell.

So we had to walk from the railroad station, oh, I guess a mile or two, to the camp which was north of town. We were the first ones to arrive and be located in this particular compound. This was a new facility. We were the first Americans to be assigned to this old German World War I barracks that was for enlisted people. It was just one, big, long barracks about 200 feet long with a long, central hallway from one end to the other. It had rooms off the main hall, and we did have indoor plumbing. We had indoor plumbing. But no hot water, just cold water. It turned out that ours was the only compound that had water facilities. All the rest of them had . . . they had an outdoor john if you had to go to the restroom.

Our food was lousy. We didn't get any meat ever from the Germans. We ended up with about ten thousand of us in this one camp. We filled up ours. As I said, I was one of the first ones there . . . the first day they opened that camp. We were there. We were the first ones. February 20<sup>th</sup> we arrived. February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944. I remember it well. We began a period of sweating out the war then because we knew nothing good was going to happen until after the invasion. So we sweated out the invasion. Oh, that was the hardest, longest wait there ever was. As I said, nothing good was going to happen EVER until the invasion occurred.

We went to our breakfast, and they had a small dining area and a small kitchen area . . . mess hall, to accommodate us. We were the only ones in the compound who had an eating facility at all and a kitchen that could provide our needs. We sat down and had a bowl of what looked like oatmeal. And some milk. We said, "What is that?" "Oh, that's barley. Instead of oats, that's barley." And I said, "Yeah, but what are those little, little, little things about like so . . . ?" They appeared everywhere throughout the cereal bowl. He says: "Oh, those are worms." "What do you mean 'worms'?" Well, they had been in storage for so long that they had been infested with some kind of a moth, I guess, and during its larval stage, those little, almost square, about like so, in shape, a little cube about oh, 3/16<sup>th</sup> of an inch square, sort of, and you could tell definitely when you bit into one because it tasted, oddly enough, it tasted sweet. You won't believe that but it was. Ask anybody. They'll say, "Yeah, it was sweet."

Well, we gingerly separated all the barley from the worms, and the worms from the barley . . . vice versa, and then we ate. But, of course, by then the dish was totally cold because it had been sitting for about three, four or five minutes while you were so picky about not eating any of those little animals there. But we quickly got used to it because it was always cold if you did that. So somebody came up with this idea. "Well, let's change that around a little and just not look at the . . . the things. Just close your eyes and then eat." We did that for a couple of weeks until we finally said, "Ahhh, the hell with it! Let's eat!" So everybody just dug in. And you'd ask for more if there was any more, but there never was any more. One bowl. That was it. That was your quota.

And it was kind of funny. We had Spam. We had potatoes and lettuce, sometimes, in the summer. But all the Spam came from American Red Cross food parcels. When the war began, the Red Cross went to our American government and said, "If you provide the food, we'll package it and we'll guarantee delivery anywhere in the whole world that you want us to send these. Just tell us how many and where you want them and we'll package it and send it." And they did. They held good to their promise. We would get a can of powdered milk in every parcel. One parcel per man per week. And it was, I think, twelve pounds. Eleven pounds. Eleven pounds, I guess it was supposed to weigh. You'd get a can of Spam, a can of powdered milk, a couple of candy bars and oh, oddly enough, peculiarly enough, they almost always included a can of *pate de fois gras* which apparently somebody, probably a dietician, decided that that was really, really rich in nutrients or something so they included that. I could tell you exactly what else we got but my memory fails me. I don't know. But this was supposed to last one person for a whole week. But we practically almost never got one man per week. By the time they arrived, they had ordered a thousand packages, but by the time we arrived we had maybe fifteen hundred men so we always had to share. In our compound we had a central mess

hall so we provided all of the stuff. It went to the mess hall, and they prepared everything out of the mess hall and meted it out and allocated it to everyone equally. When you were at the table, it was kind of funny but illustrative of how greed takes over. We'd have a server appointed every day at your table and he had to serve . . . you're THE man for this week. You would separate all the potatoes so each one had an equal portion and cut the meat so that there was Spam for everybody and was satisfied. The server was always the last to choose. He had the last dish because he wanted to make sure that he wasn't getting any extra. (Laughing) Because he was the one who was preparing the portions. So a little slice of life there, I guess. Everybody wants his share.

As I say, we never got anything . . . any meat from the German people at all, ever; the German government did not provide any meat. Oh, I think a couple of times they did provide some beef, but you had to be very cautious when you ate it because probably we determined it was road kill. It was artillery that had killed the cattle, and they had somehow carted it off to the POW camps where you'd get a piece of meat that you were gonna bite on if you weren't cautious. So we weren't really crazy about that idea. We had an MD and he was not too keen on us eating the beef. He said, "You don't know much about where it was. Whether it's been refrigerated or what. Or maybe not any of those above."

So anyway we had a British major, I believe he was, who was our camp doctor. He'd been in the bag since way before we got into the war. He was already a prisoner. He'd been captured at Dunkirk. So you know how long ago that was. He was already in the bag for three years or so before we got actively involved in it. Anyway, he could take care of normal medical things. He had minimal equipment though. We only had one American dentist but he said, "They provided me with drills and equipment that was so ancient that I wouldn't dare even try to use it because it's so dull and inferior." They never gave him anything. So he said, "If you've got a toothache, I'd pull your tooth. That's about all I can do for you. Otherwise, you're on your own. It's only me, and I've got ten thousand of you. What can I do? Nothing."

So medical care was available. Several people had appendectomies and other less serious things that happened to them that were cared for by the doctor. And they tried their very best to do the best they could with the equipment they had. Life could be summed up . . . as a prisoner of war . . . they never did anything to you, but they never did anything for you either.

We had roll call seven o'clock in the morning. A German guard would come walking down the central hall every morning, rain or shine. Sleet, snow, no matter what, we had roll call at seven o'clock in the morning. We all had to bale out and line up outside the barracks to be counted. They had an officer and a German sergeant who would count, and if they had a discrepancy . . . they were so exact in their procedures, that if something went wrong and they didn't agree, there was just turmoil. They would come unglued. "What do you mean? We're only supposed to have 79? We have 78? No! 79." We'd line up again. Another roll call. And we had one little guy who was, I don't know how he got into the Air Force as an officer because he was so short. And then we had a big guy, about 6'5" and in the winter time there were always big overcoats, the little guy would sometimes slip up underneath the big guy's overcoat and hold on for dear life and they'd get a count of 79. "Well, let's count them one more time."

So then he'd get back and now there's only 78. Or vice versa. I told the story wrong. "Now we've only got 78? What happened? Count them again!" And we'd drive them crazy. Sometimes roll call would take two or three hours. We'd tell them, "Well, one guy's in the hospital. Or one guy's in jail." 'Cause if you violated the rules seriously, like trying to escape, they would put you in the cooler, we called it. Like even as *Hogan's Heroes*, they'd put them in the cooler. But we had the guards all bribed so if you got sent to the cooler you'd get fed better than we did normally.

Cigarettes were the medium of exchange, and if you had unlimited cigarettes you could pretty nearly buy a Lugar or a wire cutter (laughing) if you had enough cigarettes. What we did to control bartering . . . control the price . . . you had to go through a central person, an American, who would do all the bartering because he could control the price then. He had a monopoly on it so it had to come through him. He would negotiate the price you could get for lighter fluid for your cigarette lighters. If you needed food. We'd barter in maps of German . . . the local area. We bought civilian clothes to aid in escape attempts. And oh, any kind of a tin or metal kind of device that you could use for digging. I guess we had somebody who was always running a tunnel. They were starting a tunnel and the Germans would inevitably discover it just before we were ready to break out. They would come in with some heavy equipment and kind of knock it all in. So it kept us busy by doing that because I think they had a seismographic technology at work there. So they knew. They knew. They would let us expend our energies. It was ingenious the devices that we came up with to dig with.

We had indoor plumbing, as I say, in our particular compound, which had about almost two thousand people I guess, and so the hardest thing about digging a tunnel was how do you dispose of the earth? So first of all we tried to flush it down the toilets; that worked for a while to a limited degree, but then you'd clog up the plumbing and couldn't avoid being detected then because they'd have to come and fix the plumbing. They'd discover that we had dirt thrown in there.

Another time we angered them because in our disposal efforts we put earth from the tunnel in Red Cross food parcel boxes that we used up . . . empties. We'd put the earth in there, and then we'd put them up in the attic. We made a hole up in the ceiling, very carefully, and we'd put them up there. You know, they have a false top. Just a façade to make a ceiling out of and we'd put so much up there we broke the thing down twice and so they said, "No, no. Don't do that anymore. We're not gonna put up with that." I don't guess we did give it up, but nobody ever made a successful escape all the time I was there in this one camp. Not a single person escaped.

They had a German commandant who had lived in America for eight or ten years. He was sharp and he could speak English perfectly. Probably better than I speak it.

All right. The food situation. We only had food enough and facilities enough to eat two times a day and morning breakfast was always the same. Barley with worms. We actually had a printed menu that they would publish just for fun and it always said, "Barley mit worms." And we only had one serious time where we were really, really short on food. That was, I think, for a

period of five weeks, the last five weeks we were there. Because the Germans' transportation system had been so debilitated that there wasn't anything . . . anyway they could get food to us. We had something like fifty thousand parcels about twenty miles away at a seaport town, a little, small seaport town, but they couldn't even negotiate that last twenty miles. So we were eating whatever they could scabble together. Our daily ration of food was two pieces of black bread, which was about half sawdust, and one bowl of potato soup without the potato. By that I mean they had maybe a big kettle holding fifty gallons and they'd put in fifty gallons of water and five pounds of potatoes. If you got any potato, you considered yourself lucky. So that's what they called potato soup. And two pieces of black bread. People got to the point where they would stay in our rooms all day long, too tired to get out and walk. And I lost, myself, about twenty-five pounds; everyone else did likewise. It was too tiring.

But fortunately the war ended because suddenly the Russians appeared on the scene coming up north from out of Berlin . . . We could hear the booming of their guns for a couple of days beforehand. Then the first of May we went to bed, just like usual, with the sentries in each of the guard towers with rifles and machine guns, but when we woke up, the German guards had all left. Everybody had departed because they didn't want to get captured by the Russians. (Laughing) They wanted to get captured by the Americans. So that's the way that ball bounced. So we were our own bosses for a couple or three days. Well, it turned out to be wrong. We thought it would be about three days, but it actually was about ten days before the Americans flew bombers . . . B-17 bombers into a local airfield. They loaded up twenty to twenty-five ex-prisoners in each of the B-17s and flew us all out to France. Eventually over a period of three days, I think, we all ended up in France.

It's noteworthy that there were about ten thousand of us there and ten thousand of us got home safely. So all's well that ends well. From that aspect you'd have to say that it was a good war. (Laughing) We all ended up O.K.

The name of the camp was Stalag Luft 1 in Barth, Germany. We had some rather exotic foods. Have you ever tasted rutabega jam? Synthetic stuff. And we had trouble with the cold. Besides being bored, we were plagued with the coldness of the winters. In the summer it was a lovely place. It truly was a lovely place. A summer resort. Barth, Germany. Near the Port of Stetten, right on the Baltic Sea. As a matter of fact they let us go swimming twice in the Baltic Sea. They made us sign a waiver that we would promise not to try to escape for two hours; we didn't want to do that at first, but our commander, a fighter pilot named Colonel Hubert Zemkee, said, "Ahhhh, it's only two hours. Come on! Go ahead! Sign it! That's good. Get a chance to do something different. It'll decrease the boredom." There wasn't much to do. We played cards. I think I played cards as did everyone else, probably ten hours a day. Usually bridge. Lots of people say, "Well, how come you didn't play poker?" Well, we didn't have anything to ante with and it was hard to ante with matches or pieces of paper. Well, there wasn't any paper. We didn't have any paper except the letters we got from home. We could get unlimited number of letters from home, I might add. But you could only write five cards and three letters, or vice versa. I forget now, which was which, but I was shot down February 4<sup>th</sup>, arrived in camp February 20<sup>th</sup> and never got a single piece of mail from my family until August 15<sup>th</sup>. So there

was about a seven month lapse there before I knew for sure that my wife knew that I was O.K. That was true with everyone.

We had some peculiar circumstances happen. A couple of guys got draft notices while we were there in camp (laughing) in prison camp. Stalag Luft 1 will never be the same. We'd been back twice to the old camp site but there's nothing there. They have succeeded in leveling it, totally, and you can't find a nail or a board or a screw or anything . . . piece of concrete, nothing. Nothing. It's just an empty field now with crops growing on it. The war did have an effect on my life surely because I'd missed out on life. The fifteen months of my life I spent in a prison camp I figure was wasted. I'll never recapture that. Never recover that. It's gone. My daughter was four months old by the time I left to go overseas, and when I got back, she was twenty-five months old. War can do terrible things to you besides break and bruise your bones, or your body, or anything. Well, it's lost out of my life. I didn't see her take her first step or anything that a normal family sees, but that's what you do if you're a soldier. You do what you're asked to do. So I ended up the war as a first lieutenant. I eventually left the service, but not until I served twenty-two years.

I came out of the war, wearing my usual quota of ribbons. I won the Purple Heart for breaking my ankle. I also was fortunate enough to win the DFC 'cause one of the colonels who was a commander of our whole mission one time, was really impressed with me because I had successfully avoided some known flack sites on the ground. I avoided it by using the radar, I could direct the aircraft away from those areas so we didn't even get any flack that particular day. He thought highly enough of it to write me a letter of commendation. It turned out to be a DFC that I proudly wear.

One of the good things to say about it, after the release from prison camp, is that I wouldn't give you a million dollars for the experience, but I wouldn't do it again for ten million. If I ever got in a situation like this again, I'd crawl home on my hands and knees before I'd allow myself to be captured. Boredom and cold. I didn't tell much about the cold, but we had to sleep on bed slats on a mattress cover filled with straw. That was what we had for a mattress, and the day you filled it was a happy day because it was about eight, nine, ten inches high. Every week it would go down and down and down until finally you were sleeping on dust. My hips hurt for about a month after I got back home because we ended up by having to contribute to the heating of the room by giving up our bed slats. We had I think, each of us, eight bed slats and when the war ended we only had three. One for our head. One for your behind and one for your feet. And it was so cold that at night the best way to handle the situation was to leave all your clothes on. Don't take off anything but your shoes and put your feet in the stove just before you jumped into bed. Then hope that they stayed warm until you fell asleep.

So altogether I made lots of wonderful friendships. It was a good experience for me . . . human life and getting along with people. There were really only two fist fights the whole fifteen months in our room. Other rooms had fist fights weekly. (Laughing) So it all depended on what kind of guys you had in your group. We slept on double-decker bunks; they had eight double-decker bunks in one room, and it was, oh, about fourteen feet square, as I recall with just room enough for the eight bunks and the card table in the middle and a little pot bellied stove

over in the corner. But that stove was useless because we didn't even have enough coal ration to keep us warm. And that's about all I can say about it.

After the war I had a career in the training command where I held different jobs, first of all as an instructor and navigation school again at Mather Field. Then I advanced in rank to be a major, assigned to the training analysis and development unit there, for the whole school which had oh, I guess twelve hundred students at a time, all the time. Then I was transferred to SAC; I was in SAC for ten years, flying B-47s for about seven years. Then I spent the last three years in the missile program up in Rapid City, South Dakota. It wasn't the Minute Man program. It was the Titan One program. It was just an emergency kind of a thing, waiting until a Minute Man became available. So that was how that worked. The B-47 is a six engine jet bomber and they had lots of activity out here at March Field during that period, during the '50s. We had two bomb wings and a refueling unit as well out there at March Field during those years. Then I got promoted to lieutenant colonel. Then I was sent to missile school and ended up the war . . . my whole career, I should say . . . by being assigned to Elsworth Air Force Base. I didn't really need that assignment because it was just a reminder of how darn cold things can be. I was from cold country, from Northern Minnesota, and that was just a three year reminder of how darn cold it can get. That's about all I have to say about it. That's my story and I'm stuck with it.

After my retirement I was only forty-two years old, and I still had a girl . . . a daughter in junior college and a son who was a junior in high school so I had to hustle around and make some more money. I couldn't just simply retire; retired pay was not that good, that bountiful. So I got a job and worked for the county government as a court clerk for a Superior Court judge for about three years. A little less, I guess, two-and-a-half. It was interesting while I was learning all the ropes, but it got to be so routine after a while. You had to be in court every time the court was in session. If you don't know what a court clerk does, he swears in all the witnesses. You've heard and seen it enacted on T.V. a thousand times. Well, anyway, I prepared all the paperwork to send people to death row. I took care of all the paperwork for divorces and any other kind of a case – probate – anything that you can imagine I took care of the paperwork 'cause I was only just a clerk. Period. I got really bored with that job and the pay wasn't all that great either. I was just a kind of a flunky in the courthouse system. I had three years of college so I went back to college full time at Chapman University and got a degree there and also a teacher's credential. I graduated from college, finally, by the time I was forty-seven. So there's hope for all of you out there. (Laughing) I taught then as a full time career for about thirteen years. Then I retired again when I was sixty-two from that career. I continued on as a substitute school teacher subbing two or three times a week sometimes. Not often. I retired finally when I realized I was seventy-five years old. What am I still doing this for? So I quit. I really retired then. I haven't taught school since. I'm now eighty-one and a half years old.

Kleine: Now Dwight, we failed to get the information regarding the squadron or the group that you were with when you were in England, and the question is: Have you ever maintained contact with any of those veterans with whom you served?

Lambert: I was in the 812<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, 482<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group, over in England. This was my experience with them. It began in September of '43 until I was shot down February 4<sup>th</sup> of '44. I made some really fine acquaintances and friendships during that period of time when I was over in England and while in prison camp. My best friend that I met over there used to live in Pomona, but he's now deceased. I used to see him regularly and maintained contact with just a couple of others that I was really close to over there, but we don't have reunions. I am acquainted with the POW movement because they have national conventions, yearly. I've been to a couple of them, but the unit is so large, the contingent is so large, you can't really enjoy any warm relationships unless your old buddies are there too. That turned out to be so large an organization that I quit going to them. But they still continue to have their meetings annually; they also publish a POW magazine every month. You can glean lots of information from those meetings and magazines as to what's happening in the POW movement.

Kleine: I want to thank you for participating in this important project and for sharing your military experiences. Your interview will be reviewed, and you will receive your own personal copy. Copies will be placed in the Riverside Public Library as well as the Library of Congress in the Archives of the National Veterans' History Project. Thank you again. This concludes our interview.