Grand Valley State University
Veterans History Project
William Lalley

(01:14:12)

(00:20) Background Information

- William was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1922 and later moved to Lowell, Michigan where he attended high school
- William's father had owned a haberdashery shop, but died when William was only six months old
- His mother took him and his three other siblings to Lowell to live with their grandparents
- William graduated from high school in 1940 and began going to school at the University of Michigan
- He later transferred to Michigan State University and signed up for an Army Air Corps program in 1942 that was supposed to defer service until he graduated
- The government was short on troops and he was pulled out for the Air Corps before graduating in 1943

(3:45) Training

- William went through pre-flight training at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center in Texas
- They were testing for aptitude, reflexes, depth perception, and also basic drilling with physical exercises
- William was in Texas for 5 months and was then classified for pilot training
- He began basic flight training in a small town in Texas working with PT-19s and a civilian instructor
- After basic flight training William was assigned to work with heavy bombers

(12:05) Advanced Flight Training

- William had already been training for about a year before he went through advanced flight training
- He graduated and got his wings, was commissioned, and went home on furlough
- He was then assigned to a flight crew that had already been working together
- They were training in B-17s and William worked as the co-pilot in Oklahoma

- In April of 1944 they received their orders to leave the US

(15:35) Britain

- They took a troop transport ship across the ocean and traveled with a convoy and air escort
- They experienced nice weather and had good food on the ship, though it was completely crowded
- The ship landed in Britain and they traveled to a small town near Northampton
- They were part of the replacement crew because there was a very high turnover when they arrived
- William was part of a bomb group stationed near the an airfield and they received orders for their first mission within a month after arrival

(19:15) Berlin Mission

- William and his crew were like a "filler" on the mission; they were to fly behind newer planes and more experienced crews in an old beat up plane
- Berlin was very heavily defended and everyone was nervous about the mission
- The air was filled with flak, the background was black, and it was almost as through you could walk across air on all the flak
- William's plane got hit and they had to turn around after dropping their bombs
- They were quickly losing altitude and decided to abort
- William landed near a plane that was just passing, which may have helped to cover him from the enemy; he later found out that the rest of his crew was captured
- He detached his chute, buried it, and began running through the woods in his bright blue suit
- William wandered through the woods for a long time through the night without a light or compass
- He eventually found an abandoned house and slept in a haystack and ate raw eggs in the morning

(28:10) Dutch Underground

- William left the house and wondered through a small town in which many people were watching him, but not saying a thing
- He was finally approached by a nice couple that told him they could help him
- He stayed outside their house in the woods and was later picked up by another man on a bike
- They left on the bike and went to a different house in another small town, where they stayed for a few months, hiding with other soldiers and Jewish hideaways

(36:00) Moving through the Netherlands

- William had arrived in the house in April of 1944 and left that August
- He left with a British officer and continued to move on and avoid Germans
- They were eventually caught by some Germans, who at first pretended to just be asking them some questions, but continued to intensify their interrogation
- William went through further interrogation for about a week and was then sent to a prison camp in Germany

(43:50) Prison Camp

- William was sent to a prison camp near Berlin; they traveled in box cars from WWI that could fit 70 men each, jam packed, for two days
- There were many wounded men and disfigured in the camp
- It was specifically for officers and surrounded by barb wire, light towers, and gun emplacements
- Before his arrival about 50 Canadians had tried to escape and they were all executed
- Camp was boring and strict; there was barely any food to eat and some men had to work outside in fields

(52:35) Switching Camps

- They found out that Russians were nearing and could actually hear the artillery through the woods
- They left in the middle of the night and were told they were being moved to evade the Russians
- They marched for 48 hours through cold woods and many men died on the way

- They arrived in a small town and stayed for a while in a pottery factory that was very warm and felt great
- They then traveled to Nuremburg where most of the Germans were in pretty bad shape and they could tell they did not have time to keep track of POWs
- They were staying in another prison camp where they were separated from the British and Russians

(59:50) Rescue from Camp

- The prisoners were told that they had to move again and there were about 15,000 of them marching in the road
- They arrived at yet another camp and the prisoners caught on to the Germans' low spirits and could see that they were now losing the war
- They began to hear artillery from far away and could eventually see tanks coming
- The camp was liberated in April and all the men were evacuated onto planes within 3 days
- William stayed in France or one week, where many of the other prisoners ate too much food and died
- He took a troop ship back to New York and was sent to a hospital in Chicago for check up

(1:07:20) Back in Michigan

- William had some time on leave and was not sure if he would get called back up for service
- He signed up for the reserves, but eventually found that he no longer had time for it
- William received his degree in business administration for Michigan State University, got married, and eventually began working for Donnelly in Michigan until he retired