

>> Drummond: ...I was trying to think -- let's say 40.

>> Interviewer: Would you please tell me your name?

>> Drummond: I'm John Drummond from Greenwood, South Carolina.

>> Interviewer: And tell me a little bit about your background growing up in South Carolina.

>> Drummond: Well, I was born in Greenwood on September 29, 1919. My dad worked for Greenwood Mills. He was employed with Greenwood Mills. And we left Greenwood and moved to Ninety Six in 1927, and I've been in Ninety Six ever since.

>> Interviewer: Where did you go to school?

>> Drummond: I finished high school in Ninety Six and was out one year and went into the service in 1940.

>> Interviewer: Would you tell me about your experience in the service and particularly the war?

>> Drummond: Well, the first service, I went in with the South Carolina National Guard. I trained the summer of '39 and '40, and then we went into federal service. We were one of the first drawn into federal service, in January 1941. We were in the coast artillery protecting Charleston, South Carolina, with the Battery. Believe it or not, we manned those 10-inch disappearing carriage rifles and also the 12-inch mortars.

And I left and went into the air force training. I passed the exam and went in the air force cadets. I actually joined the paratroopers first, and then I found out that it was the same

requirements for air force pilot training, and I went into pilot training. Left Fort Moultrie, and I finished my training through advanced training in Texas. Forty-three G, so that was -- I graduated in 43-G and left there, went to St. Petersburg, Florida, for transition in P-40 fighter planes, and then was actually getting -- they were shipping us to the Pacific, and something came -- evidently, preparation for D-Day coming up, and they formed a new group. And it was in Walterboro, South Carolina, so I was transferred to that, the nucleus. We formed a new group called the 405th Fighter Group. Three squads in that group. We went to Walterboro, South Carolina, and trained there and left there in January of '44, straight to -- went straight to Europe.

And we went on the "Mauritania," I believe it was, the whole group, all the pilots and all, landing in Liverpool at night and went straight over to England and went to Christchurch down on the -- next to Bournemouth on the coast, southern coast. And I spent the time there in combat. From there, then went over D -- about D -- I think D plus 10 or 15 days. After they cleared the beach over there, we landed. Went over and worked off of a little Y strip at Sainte-Mère-Église, pretty well up on the front.

>> Interviewer: What division were you protecting?

>> Drummond: Well, first we -- of course, our main mission, I'd say, from -- I believe they turned us loose in March, April, and May prior to D-Day. We did a few escorts for B-26s, short-range bombers, doing a lot of bombing up and down the coast for the French and up the Belgian coast and inland as far as -- probably as far as Paris, mostly hitting railway yards, what they call no-ball targets. I didn't realize what they were talking about. Later on, that was the V-1 ramps that Hitler was fixing to -- and boasting he had a secret weapon, and he did have a secret weapon. But I used to go look down, and I'd see all those bomb

craters that looked like in an open field, but I found out later on was camouflaged ramps where those buzz bombs, they'd call 'em when they first was coming.

But then I believe in the first of May, they, what they call, turned us loose. And that was to go down and stop everything moving. Put the bridges in the river or just a small [indistinct]. Stop all rail lines, bombing what we'd call railroad -- your marshalling yards, they'd call 'em -- railway yards. We'd call 'em railway yards. Stopping transportation and doing as much harm as we could to the Germans, knowing that D-Day was -- this was prior to -- in preparation for D-Day. And by -- of course, in hindsight now, I know a little bit more about what we were doing by dropping all the bridges to make it difficult for the Germans to, wherever we hit up and down the coast, to reinforce. And we had a lot of missions. Lost a lot of my friends at the end of that 30 days and in about May and then, say, after Patton's -- up till -- after Patton's breakthrough. Lost a world of, world of pilots, especially my close friends.

>> Interviewer: Now, at what point in all this were you shot down and captured?

>> Drummond: As I said, I had lost my wingman, two or three of my wingmen. I'd lost my flight commander. And the day that Patton broke through at Saint-Lô, the first massive bombing and breakthrough, the Germans then had to come out from cover. They stayed pretty well covered up under the trees and all during the day. They moved a little bit at night. They only had about three or four hours of darkness, so they had to move a lot.

But when Patton broke through the woods, the roads were full of 'em retreating, and we were staying on the little -- I had been ordered by the colonel to take a couple of days off and go to London 'cause I had just lost my best buddy the day before, or that morning really. And I was -- I guess it's just the good

Lord. I was dressed in my pinks and greens, and in comes my CO, Curran, and Captain Curran and Major Jenkins had did a victory roll. And you probably don't know, but a fighter pilot, when he gets a victory, back then he'd come down off the runway and do a roll for every one. And they did a victory roll and landed on the little Y strip we had, and they said that roads are full of 'em; they're retreating.

And two young -- two freshmen -- that's what I call 'em, freshmen, not what we'd call 'em then. Politics make me call 'em freshmen. But they came in and said they wanted to see some action. And of course we were pretty well -- I was a flight commander, so we had pretty well leeway. You had your own plane. And I just told 'em to go load up with some frag bombs, and I'd jump over the line, which is just 5 miles, and do some strafing.

And when I went over the line, they hit. I saw where they were -- the roads were full of 'em, and I went in on what we'd call a roadblock. The SS boys had moved up, putting up -- at the roads, putting up antitank guns and all to stop Patton so the retreating troops could get through. And when I rolled in to strafe 'em, I thought my two buddies would be behind me, covering me. They weren't, and I lost my temper and tried to win the war alone, and I shot down several things, but I got shot down with ground fire. I jumped back in the middle of 'em from a very low altitude. And from then on, the next ten months, I was a guest of Hitler in Stalag Number 1 up on the Baltic Sea. There were about 65,000 other officers, I believe, all air force people, all Allies.

And I guess that was -- well, it's difficult to understand when you land back in -- right in the middle of the enemy, so-called, and you look and they look just like you. You know, I said, "These are the guys we've been fighting," and I was a little curious, but they were -- the German soldiers were sharp and good, good soldiers. And I guess because I had on a dress

uniform, they thought I was a general. That's probably what saved my life.

>> Interviewer: How old were you?

>> Drummond: How old was I? I was an old man fighter pilot. I think I was either 21 -- right between 21 and 22. I had just lost my wingman, 19 years old. And a lot of our pilots -- the average was probably about 21, 20-21.

>> Interviewer: When you were shot down, what was the process of getting you from -- you were in France, and they took you to the Baltic?

>> Drummond: Of course, as I said, I jumped right back in front of the front lines. I had shot up a motorcycle dispatch rider, and one of the soldiers that picked me up, that was a good friend of his, so he didn't do too well. But that's what I said -- they thought I was probably a big officer. But I stayed that night up on the front, and then they got me through sometime during the night the next day back to Le Mans and then on to -- stayed there for probably about a week. Patton's breakthrough moved us on.

And then the real experience I had with the Germans then, once I left the front -- you were pretty well safe up on the front -- and that was when the -- a lot of experience that I saw from then on, probably what you're more interested in. I went from there, went through Paris, I think, for one day. Then they put us on a train, a prison train going to -- actually, we were headed to Frankfurt on the Main, which is in West Germany, and a prison camp they called Dulag Luft, and that's where they interrogated you.

And it was right strange. Through that whole thing -- I'd been shot down probably about a month, or three weeks, and when I got

there, they knew my mother and father's name. I had never talked to a German. They knew where I had graduated from flight training. They knew my commanding officer's name. And I found out later, possibly they -- you know, we like to say, "Loose lips sink ships," and I thought all they had to do was come over here and get the annuals that we had. Every graduating class, we published it and sold 'em all over. So evidently, all they did was just buy all the annuals of the flight training. They had a list of every one of us as we graduated. I hadn't thought about that till later on.

But anyway, the first real experience I had when I saw what you might call an atrocity was -- and I was real sick. Most of 'em on the train was sick. We had gotten some -- well, it was just our living conditions. And they stopped the train somewhere on the border from France in the valley. I remember them hills. I don't know where it was. And there was an artesian well there because the water was coming up, and they stopped, and all of us were trying to gather around the well getting drinking water out of the pipe. And there was a two-story frame house about, looked like, 200 feet up sitting on the hillside. And someone said, "Look," and this French lady was in the second story looking out the window, and she was doing that, you know, and that was a V for victory. And the German soldier turned around and saw, and he just *p/ttt* with his gun and shot her at the window. At least, it knocked her back. I don't know whether he killed her or not. That was sort of -- it sort of shook you up.

But then they put us on -- took us to Frankfurt and interrogated you in solitary. They didn't interrogate me but about one day. I just -- I'd say, "John W. Drummond, 0686831." And of course the German called me a stupid swine -- I found out later on that was just about the worst thing he could call you -- and let me go. And I understand, if you didn't tell 'em anything, they didn't -- by that time, they'd found out I was just a first lieutenant too. I was not that important.

>> Interviewer: You weren't a general.

>> Drummond: And then they put us on a -- after some -- well, I think I stayed there two or three days and then put on a train and started that trip -- I didn't know where we were going. Actually, we were going all the across Germany, through Berlin, and up from Frankfurt on to Gotha, which is all the way on the, on the east -- East Germany, in East Germany, and up to a peninsula on the Baltic Sea called Barth, B-A-R-T-H, Barth, out in the Baltic Sea. And that's where they had -- they called it Stalag Luft 1, the number one prison camp with all Allied officers, mostly all our airmen. And I believe they had about 65,000 over there, so they had a lot of air force.

But I saw a lot of things in that trip, and I remember stopping. There was not many in the group when they stopped somewhere, and I know we had a lot of...body lice and all, and I guess that's what they were talking about. And they stopped a lot of us and took us to another prison camp. It was a small prison camp, evidently where they held -- and that was when they put us -- it was a wooden building, if I remember, and you go into one room through it, and it was a big room with like a huge boiler with an open door. I found out later, that was where they put your clothes in there and fumigated them and steamed them, evidently to kill any lice. And then they put us in the shower room. It was all sealed, a big -- like about 30 or 40 by -- about 30 by 30 or 30 by 40. And they shut the doors, and then the guard had a peephole, and he could see, and he had told us, now -- we had disrobed out there, undressed and went in. They had big walk boards and a lot of soap all over, just pieces of soap, and they told us to get soap off the floor, and he'd turned the shower on, just get you wet, and then he'd cut it off and then tell you to soap up with it, and then he'd cut it back on.

But when you look up, there were some little nozzles beside each one of those, and some of the guys -- somebody there -- I don't know why it was, but of course this is -- see, this is a long time in the war. This is ten after D-Day. And those were gas, where they would gas those prisoners. I found out later on. Someone in there happened to know more about it than I did. And that was the closest I came to seeing what they did. Evidently, they would let 'em undress outside, put 'em in there to take showers, and then cut the gas on. Thank goodness, they cut the water on with us.

>> Interviewer: When you arrived at this camp, it was empty except for your group? I mean, you didn't see any other prisoners or --

>> Drummond: Not in that camp. I saw -- I saw later on. Not only was it just as quiet as it could be, it was sort of outside of a camp. They just marched us in there and did this to us. I mean, they fumigated us good and your hair and all that and then put you back on the train. And that was when I went on.

The next horrible experience I had, in one of the large cities there, they -- the British bombed at night. The Americans bombed in the daylight. And its air raid sirens -- we were on this prison train that had bars over the windows, and evidently, there were hundreds of us on the train. And they just stopped in the marshalling yards, and then everyone ran and left us locked in the train. And we stayed through that whole bombing, and not one bomb hit that. It destroyed all around us. Not one bomb hit our train. But then the next morning when they tried to move us, there were a lot of mad civilians, and they knew who we were, you know. And I saw some things.

But then I went on up to what they called Stalag Luft 1, and I stayed there for -- and the Russians came in about -- right at the end of the war. The Russians -- actually, they said they

liberated us, but kept us prisoner. They took our fingerprints. They took a snapshot of every one of us and a history of every one of us, all officers only. So I felt right then, these people are not our friends! They wanted the Allies to take us back through the Black Sea, back through Russia, now. But evidently, the Allied troops -- I mean, our officers prevailed, and they flew in in B-24s and B-17s and flew us out.

But during that time I was with Russians, I did get to see downtown in another -- after they released us. And that was when I saw some of the prisoners. I saw a lot of dead in a prison camp. But I saw people in those striped, you know, the black-and-white striped. I actually saw some walking, and I couldn't believe that a human being that was just like a skeleton walking. And then we went to one camp, and then I saw a lot of 'em. I thought they were sleeping on the beds, and they were all dead. They were just dead.

>> Interviewer: You don't remember the names of any of these camps?

>> Drummond: No, I don't remember that. There were a lot of -- but they said there were a lot of Polish workers up in that area. See, we were up in the, up in the Baltic section.

>> Interviewer: By this time, the war was over --

>> Drummond: The war was over.

>> Interviewer: -- and you had been released and you were working your way --

>> Drummond: We were being held by the Russians. I was with the Russians. I went on up on the -- I've forgotten the -- "zincs" [phonetic] I believe they pronounced it. I may be -- that's just -- it's sort of a summer playground for the German hierarchy up

on the Baltic Sea. I went up there with the Russians. That's when one Russian soldier took my wings. The Germans had let me keep my wings all the way through, but a Russian sort of put his little, what we call a burp pistol and told me he wanted my wings, and I gave 'em to him, gladly. But I saw -- some of the prisoners were walking. They were released and walking on the streets. In fact, a lot of them. It was...it was not a pleasant sight, but evidently, the human body can take a lot.

>> Interviewer: Did you see men, women, and children, or was it mostly men?

>> Drummond: Mostly men. I don't remember seeing any children. I don't believe I saw any women. I saw mostly men, but even those men were emaciated.

>> Interviewer: Were they in --

>> Drummond: They were still in the prison garb, so evidently, they had just --

>> Interviewer: Where were they being housed?

>> Drummond: I don't know. There were probably labor camps up in that area.

>> Interviewer: But they -- I mean, they had been released?

>> Drummond: Oh, yeah, the Russians had released them. But then one of the camps that I had gone to, a lot of 'em -- that's when they were -- when they opened the gates, you know, they were just released. Now, see, this was the Russian territory. Now, when the Americans opened them, I think they came in and fed 'em and clothed 'em and probably put 'em in a hospital. But from what I saw, the Russians weren't doing anything, just let 'em go, turned 'em loose. Of course, the Russians didn't have

anything, really. I actually saw Russian troops on bicycles and anything they could commandeer to move. I saw 'em on horse-drawn wagons and piled up in there, most of 'em drunk, a lot of 'em on vodka. And of course we were getting out of prison camp, and we were looking for anything to eat and drink also. But it was quite an experience.

But the German soldiers -- I found out the German soldiers were really professional, professional soldiers. I didn't see too many of 'em, although I know they did it. A lot of our soldiers did some of the same. But, now, the SS boys, that was the tough ones, with an SS on his collar. Even the other, the Luftwaffe -- the Luftwaffe was the -- and especially the ground troops of the Luftwaffe -- mostly young, well-trained, but they were all deathly afraid of the SS boys.

>> Interviewer: When you were flying your missions prior to being taken prisoner yourself, did you have any knowledge of the concentration camps or the way that people were being --

>> Drummond: No.

>> Interviewer: -- shuttled off to these places? Had you heard that, or did you have any --

>> Drummond: Not to my knowledge. We -- you know, 21 years old...enjoyed the war, as far as flying and strafing anyway. But getting through and then going to town. And we lost -- we were losing so many of our friends. It was, it was -- what's tomorrow, you know? We didn't look forward to it. And I think 28 went over in my squadron from Walterboro, and I believe 25 of 'em shot down at least one time. You can find out the turnover. I have a wingman who was shot down seven times, and Billy just planed in every time and never had to bail out and still living. Just lucky.

>> Interviewer: Is there anything else you want to add to this or anything else you can think of that would be helpful?

>> Drummond: No, just the one thing that impressed me more than anything else was looking up at that shower and seeing the gas nozzles. It didn't really hit me much then, but to think of it later on. All that guard had to do was just switch 'em, and we'd have all been -- they wouldn't have to worry about us either. But evidently, they maybe put a little more -- knowing we were under the Geneva Convention, they may have remembered that we were, we were...we were all officers and all airmen, and probably they knew that the Red -- the Red Cross, I'll never be able to thank enough for the Red Cross. The International Red Cross kept us all living. Germans didn't have much to feed us either, but the Red Cross got a lot to us. Germans had potatoes and rutabagas and things such as that in quantities, but not much other. But I'm glad that you're getting everything you can about the Holocaust, and maybe it'll never happen again.

>> Interviewer: Thank you. We appreciate you doing this for us, Senator Drummond.

>> Drummond: Thank you.

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