

Joseph Scaglione

WWII

When did you enter the military? How old were you when you entered and how long were you in the military?

“March of 1943, 19, until October of 1945”

What boot camp did you go to?

“Miami Beach. I was in the air force and that was where you went for basic training.”

How long were you in boot camp?

“A couple of months I suppose. I think it was thirteen weeks actually.”

Did you fly a plane in the air force?

“Yes I was a radio operator on a bomber, and as far as basic training goes, I had to go to radio school. Then I went to a gunnery school in Arizona and then I went to Crew training in Texas. There were a lot of basics before we got overseas.”

Did you go to a second boot camp?

“Well look at all the schools I went to, like the radio school and such.”

Did you join the military voluntarily?

“I was drafted”

What equipment did you use on a daily basis?

“Do you mean overseas?”

Yes

“I was a gunner, so I used a machine gun, 50 calibers”

What rank did you achieve?

“Deck sergeant”

Where you wounded while you were in the military?

“I don’t know how to answer that. Slightly, I was a gunner on a plane that was shot down. So I was slightly wounded when we got shot down.”

How were you shot down?

“German anti-aircraft hit our plane so we had to bail out”

Did you use a parachute?

“Yes, when we bailed out. I ended up a POW in Germany.”

Where were you when the plane crashed?

“Our target was Mannheim Germany. Our plane was hit it was on fire and we had to bail out.”

How long were you a POW?

“Well I was shot down in January of 1945, I was liberated the end of April. So I was a POW for four months.”

What’s POW?

“Prisoner of war”

So the Germans held you prisoner?

“Yes”

Was it good conditions? How did they treat you?

“Well the food wasn’t the greatest. They questioned you a lot and after they questioned you they sent you to a regular camp where you were just a prisoner. We didn’t have anything to do of course. They didn’t exactly heat the barracks and they didn’t give you any good food.”

When you crashed, did any of your other men make it?

“There were ten men on my plane. We were all bailed out, we were all captured and we all ended up POW’s”

Were you all set free?

“We were set free when the Americans took over the camp we were in”

Were you in any famous battles?

“The whole air-force was a famous battle if you ask me. Whenever you could, you flew a mission or whenever they wanted you to. The eighth air force was run, were you fought for three or four months. You were flying maybe twice a week or a three times a week. “

Were you in Normandy?

“No”

or England?

"I was stationed in England, at an air base. We flew all the time."

Did you receive any awards or medals for service?

"The air metal with about five oak leave clusters, do you want to know what that means?"

Every time you flew five or six missions they would give you an air medal so they gave you one. And then every time you flew another five or six they would give you a ribbon with an oak leave on it. so I had about five of them. And the Prisoner of War Medal, good conduct medal, that's about it"

Which one means the most to you?

"The air metal and the POW metal"

What was a normal or average day while you were in the military?

"If we weren't flying we just hung around the barracks. They would give us a little extra duty to do around the camp and we would do little odds and ends. Like every time a plane was shot up or banged up they had to put a new engine in, they had to fly the plane a little bit. They called it slow timing an engine. Someone had to take the plane up and fly the plane for four hours. They had to have a radio operator in the plan whenever it went up so I was involved in that."

While you were in the air force when you were a POW?

"From January 1945 to the end of April 1945"

What was an average routine when you were a POW ?

"You were a prisoner like you were in jail. I'm gonna give you a little bit of what we did. In the morning they called you out for roll call and they counted everyone and you could walk around outside if you wanted too or you go back in your barracks. For breakfast you got a cup of coffee and a piece of bread. A piece of bread was a loaf of bread about as big as a sheet here (8x10 paper). They cut it into about twelve pieces and you got one twelve of that loaf of bread for the day. At lunch time you got, they came around with what looked like a garbage can on wheels. You had your plate and he would dip a bit of soup into it. Then you got a coffee again. That was it. That was the diet. I lost quite a bit of weight of course. During the day we didn't have anything to do, any work because we were noncommissioned officers supposedly they did have a lot of reading, I spent lot of time reading."

Were the books you read in German?

"No, no they were sent over by the Red Cross. As a matter of fact the Red Cross used to send over some food and we would get extra. They called it a Red Cross package. It usually had a can of stew, like Dinty Moores beef stew. It had a candy bar in it, crackers a couple of cigarettes. You got that once in a while, not too often."

What type of fire arms did you use?

“50 caliber machine gun and a pistol but I didn’t have a pistol. You didn’t have to bring a gun on a mission. If you were shot down and you had a gun, the Germans were more apt to shoot you. But you didn’t have to take one, so I never took one. I used the machine gun on the plane.”

While at war what helped you pass the time?

“Before I got shot down, while we were at camp we had a little things to do around camp. If you were on a mission it took up the whole day. You got up at five o’clock in the morning, then you went to a briefing, after the briefing you went out to the plane and took off. You usually took off between eight and nine o’clock. You were in Germany flying over Germany by noon time or one o’clock depending upon where you went in Germany. Then you came back around three o’clock. Then you were debriefed. They asked you questions. Did you see any fighters? and this or that. Then you were done for the day.”

While at war what helped you get through the hard times?

“I really don’t know. How the heck do you answer that? Hard times were when you were sitting in the prison camp. You just read because there was nothing else to do. Once in a while if the weather was nice you went outside and just took a walk. But that was about it.”

Did you ever get any care packages?

“No packages from home, because they didn’t know I was in prison until the war was over. So I didn’t get a care package from home.”

After you came home from war, did your perspective on anything change?

“Well I was just so happy to get home. Life goes on just as it did before. I tried to get a job and just go back to everything.”

Did you bring a picture?

“I dug up an old picture. This was one when I was in training. It was taken while I was in radio school.”

Is there anything you’d like to add that we might have missed?

“I’d like to show you something. Did you need anything from my discharge?”

“No”

“These are letters that I got, I was allowed to send a card home, and this was the card I sent home. These are letters my mother got that the government sent to my mother informing her that I was missing in action. Another one says that I was shot down and a prisoner of war in Germany, and another one saying that I was back in American hands again. This is a picture of a crew I was in. When I was in Germany, the first thing they did was finger print you and treat you like a prisoner from today. Took your picture and thumb print and this is what the Germans had from me. (paper with photo). “

You said you had a written letter from home?

“This is a letter that the government sent to my mother. Saying that I was a prisoner of war”

How did the government know that you were a prisoner of war and not K.I.A.?

“The first thing they did was send a letter saying I was missing in action. Then when they found out that I was a prisoner of war. They sent her another letter saying I was a prisoner.”

How did they find out you were a prisoner and not dead?

“And then later on they sent her a letter saying I had been liberated and was back in American hand. They would do everything they could to get me back as soon as possible”

How did the government know that you were at the prisoner camp and a prisoner of war?

“The government sent them a letter.”

The German government sent a letter?

“They sent a letter” (*he begins to read from a letter*)

“the province Marshall directed me to inform you that the ...it was reported and turned out ..so this is when I would be coming home.Let me read the other one the first one....On behalf of the commanding general of the eighth air force ..bluh blu blu ...tech sergeant Joseph Scaglione has been missing in action since January 13th. I sincerely regret that I can give you no further information. ...Because they didn't know if I was a prisoner of war or not. They say they are sorry and this and that and what not. Then the next one,...This is another one from the major in the air force who said that I was shot down as a gunner on a flyer on a B17 and that we were shot down in the war .

the court review that during the mission at about 125 pm over the target the plane was subjected to enemy anti-aircraft fire and your sons bomber sustained damage. Subsequently, the disabled craft dropped out of formation, and three parachutes were observed.

Now it was ten and they said they only saw three so they really didn't know. So she didn't find out till later on when I was reported in Germany.”

Is this a photo of you as a prisoner of war?

“This is a photo the Germans took. When you get captured they take your picture.”

I Know your grandson, and you look similar to him.

“When I was shot down I did not get captured right away. I walked from the Rhine River to the French Quarter before I was captured. Six days”

Were you in the invasion of Rhineland?

“No”

“All of this took place; I don’t know how much you remember of history, the battle of the bulge. We were flying then and our target that day was a bridge that the Germans were using to bring in supplies.”

I heard there was only two bridges across the river is that correct? That there was only two bridges that led to Germany because Germany had destroyed most of the bridges.

“The target that I got shot down at, we bombed it once and this was about one week before I got shot down. When we went back a second time the intelligence officer was telling us you missed the target the last time so you have to hit it again. So we went after we bombed it and I was shot down and captured, I was taken back into Germany one soldier was taking me back and we went right over the one bridge we were supposed to have bombed. We had missed it again. This was their lucky bridge I guess. About ten to fifteen years ago, I go to POW meetings, and I met a guy that we were talking and he said he was shot down at that target too, one week after I was. The Germans really had ... for that target. He said to me, if you guys had hit it I never would have been a prisoner of war.”

Well if he had hit it too he wouldn’t have been a prisoner of war either.

“Here is the card that I had sent from the prison camp.”

Did they let you send that home? Or was it when you got out?

“I was first captured in January and then they send you first to what they call a ... where you go and you are questioned and they might keep you there for a few days. Then they send you to your permanent camp. So this is when I got to my permanent camp in February, February 3rd 1945. So I got shot Down in January so I spent a couple of weeks in the questioning area. When I got there I sent this card home.”

You said you were there six days before you were captured?

“Yeah”

Were you with other people? How did they actually capture you?

“There was one of the other guys from my crew. We just headed in a westerly direction, because we knew that was where France was. Now it was snowing, I don’t know how familiar you are with the battle of the bulge. They said that was one of the coldest winters in Europe in fifty years. We marched, walked through the woods trying to keep out of towns. When we got near Pier Maisons, there was a sign that read Pier Maisons seven kilometers. We walked one other day and we were capture. It had snowed the night before. The guy that was with me, he spoke German. He went to a farm house to see if anyone could help us. He got captured and I went on alone. The next day, when I was walking through the woods, I knew I was near the French boarder. I heard a noise behind me and it was a German Solder and he just took me in.”

Were you scared?

“Was I scared? !!!!! I guess so yeah!!! He is standing there with a gun and I didn’t have any, that’s scary enough.”

“These are just pictures that were taken. These are just

You guys ever see a B17 for real. Every fall they have a B17 and they take it to Teterboro airport and anyone can go and see it.

What they do , they go up in flights and you can get a Flight if you want, it costs \$450 they fly from Teterboro, they go out around the stature of liberty up the Hudson river to west point and back. I was talking to the guy and I said you are never gonna get me up in that thing again. The guy says we take very good care of these planes. That’s why you gotta pay &450.00 to go up in it. Every time we take this plane up just by to west point and back. It costs us &2000.00

What I was always concerned with; over there I don’t know how the heck they did it. They would load the planes at night with gas. Some of the guys from the barracks were very curious where our mission was going to be the next day. So they would go and ask they guys how much gas did you put in the planes. The plane takes 2300 gallons it was a short mission, if there was 2700 gallons it was a long mission. If you stop to think of all the gas that they use on one mission, 2700 gallons that’s a lot. In a squadron there were thirteen planes twenty three hundred x twelve planes. That’s a lot of gas.

The guys would find out how much gas and then have a pretty good idea of what it was going to be, a deep penetration or a short flight to France.

This is a picture of caterpillar club. This is anyone that bails out in bad conditions they give you a little pin I have it with my OPW back. This is from a reunion I went to. This guy was a gunner he got all the guys together and then when I got together with him, we got in contact with everybody.

This is the map of the were all the prison camps were in Germany and were they were in Japan

If you in your travels ever go to Florida, when you get around Savannah Georgia on I-95 there is a town called Pooler, there is an eighth air force museum there. If you go, it’s a very good museum. They have a wall of honor and years ago they had my name put on it. Years ago we had a plaque made and there are a lot of different crews here. The red was the name of the plane. Originally when we named our plane we named it the RED ASS. But they made us take the A-S-S off, because there were other planes with it so we called it The Red. The stone, the piece of marble has ‘crew of The Red” on it and it has everybody listed. When we were shot down it has everyone listed and we were all prisoners of War.”

Can you show me where your prison camp was located?

“It was near Nuremburg, right here. I was in D and they wanted to move us because they knew the Americans were getting close.”

That’s really cool. I have never seen a map like this, of purely just prison camps. It is very interesting.

“They had prison camps in Austria, Czechoslovakia; they had lot in Germany. Japan I am not familiar with really but they have a lot there too every one of these markers is a prison camp.

They have a lot on the coast of China here, a whole lot in Japan (s)

They had a lot of prisoners the Germans and Japanese took a lot of prisoners.

I was in Nuremberg, I was in D. We walked across the Danube River come to think of it, to Moose berg. That was the camp we were in there. General Patton's army marched through there and took us."

Thank you so much sir

Thank you