

MILLER: . . . could rely on. I hung my trousers over the electric heater the first night I was in there and burned them right off (laughs) at the midpoint when the heater came on and I woke up with all this smoke and pulled the signal. And the guard I can remember coming to the door said, "Gottinhimmel." (laughs heartily)

JH: Well, did they give you more trousers?

MILLER: Yes, I got a pair of trousers (continuing to laugh) somewhere along the line. But goodness only knows what ragtag army they came out of. They were . . .

JH: Well now, during this period of time then, you were wearing the same clothes . . .

MILLER: All the time.

JH: . . . all the time . . .

MILLER: Yeah.

JH: . . . which didn't get washed, obviously.

MILLER: Which didn't get washed. Now, they did . . . we did get showers on occasion in cold water with some soap, once we got to the main prison camps. But the picking of fleas and lice was a long occupational thing that we did daily, you know, so that we wouldn't get eaten up by these little pesky var-mints.

And then the prison camp became another thing. You were in a barracks of 40 people, and there was a lot of plotting. And there was a re-establishment of military authority, ranking commander, you know -- that kind of thing. Everybody sort of assuming a position in what will we do if -- you know. If we get liberated, how are we going to protect ourselves? If they try to annihilate us, we might as well die fighting. You know. How will we do this?

JH: You were all together then in . . .

MILLER: Well, there were 7,000 in this camp.

JH: No, but I mean within your own area. How many

JH: of you were together in . . . for communication purposes?

MILLER: Oh, I suppose . . . you know I just . . . I really can't remember that probably very well. I suppose there were 700 or 800 Americans in one thing. And then the British would be next door and the French would be over here, all separated by barbed wire so we didn't . . .

JH: So, you couldn't communicate?

MILLER: Well, we could talk across the fences. But we couldn't get at one another.

JH: Well, now what were your living quarters here? Were these just . . . was this just one huge room?

MILLER: This was one huge room with bunks with screening -- you know, big wire mesh that you sort of slept on. And you slept in your clothes. And I think we had one or two blankets that we'd wrap up in.

JH: You did get a blanket?

MILLER: Yeah. And there was a straw kind of mattress on the thing, you know.

JH: Which was full of lice, no doubt?

MILLER: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: You're still in your same clothes now?

MILLER: You're still in your same clothes, same everything. You know, you don't get a haircut. You don't get shaved. You do get a Red Cross package by this time.

JH: Oh! All right.. What did the Red Cross do for you?

MILLER: Oh, well, it provided a lot of extra food when it came through. I was always surprised that it wasn't rifled. It was . . . they came through fairly intact. They would have . . . it all depends on where it came from. The Red Cross packages from India contained all kinds of strange things that we didn't know how to use. Millet, what do you do

MILLER: with it? You can't . . .

JH: You eat it.

MILLER: . . . you can't chew it. (laughs) It's just too hard.

Our things contained C-rations and they contained chocolate and they contained small packs of cigarettes and corned beef and things like that that were very welcome adjuncts. And the Red Cross from Switzerland was in frequently, you know, to see that the packages were coming through. Now, this really did get disrupted toward the end of the war. There just wasn't any movement of rail, and it was spasmodic at best during the period of time that we were there. It made you feel, at that point, that it wasn't so bad because you began to meet British fellows that were taken in Africa seven years before, you know.

JH: Who had been there all that time?

MILLER: Who had been incarcerated all this period of time and who had probably dug out and tried to escape a number of times and were recaptured, you know. But by the time I got in, why it was a capital offense to steal food. And they assumed that if you were gone more than two days, that you had to steal food. So that at least the threat was that if you were gone more than two days and retaken, you'd be shot.

JH: I see. Did you try to get out?

MILLER: No, there was really no way by this point. And the other forces were advancing sufficiently. Now, the radio operators did make little radios, little canaries they called them, short-wave radios. They made them out of such odd things as razor blades and then they'd bribe a guard for a crystal. And they'd manufacture earphones and they would do all of these kinds of things. And somebody would monitor the canary. And it would be . . . in inspections, it would be passed from hand to hand just ahead of the inspecting forces so that it was always sort of protected. And I suppose it's a game that we played. They knew that it was there and as long as they kept it somewhat under control, it was an outlet.

JH: Um hm.

MILLER: But escape became a thing then that wasn't thought quite so necessary because the forces were coming from the west.

JH: And you had the feeling that things were winding down?

MILLER: Winding down, yeah. Yes, that's true.

JH: Did anybody in your group try to escape? In the area where you were, to your knowledge?

MILLER: Not that I can remember. I think that if . . . probably if people were still plotting escapes, it would have been the British. They just . . . they would save all of their chocolate and all of their cigarettes and when they were marched into town on work detail, to help clean up the town, they'd pull out their chocolate and smoke their cigarettes. So that it would just infuriate the Germans. (laughs)

JH: (laughs) It was psychological.

MILLER: It was really a psychological warfare. (continuing to laugh)

JH: Well, then did you go into town on work detail?

MILLER: No, I did not because by this time my leg was so bad that I just couldn't walk at all. And secondly, officers did not have to do that. This was more for enlisted personnel. They could be asked to do these things under the Geneva convention.

JH: What kind of work did they have them doing?

MILLER: Oh, picking up bricks, clearing streets, rubble from the bombardment -- things of that nature.

JH: Um hm.

Were the guards decent to you?

MILLER: Yes, they were much older men. They were men in their 60s, you know. They were . . . they were the age of Kenny and me. That's what you were

- MILLER: called upon to do when . . . in Germany at that point. So . . . and there weren't that many of them, really. They had very good control by the use of dogs. You had to . . . you had to stay inside your barracks at night because the dogs were loose in the quadrangle . . .
- JH: In the yard, yes.
- MILLER: . . . around in the yard. So you had to get past them first and then get through the fence and then get through the searchlights and then get through the barbed wire before . . . before you got out.
- JH: And this didn't appeal to you at all?
- MILLER: No, I don't think . . . I think . . . well, in the first place, I don't think military discipline would have allowed it unless there was a really well-constructed plan. I suppose if somebody went berserk, why, you know. Part of the discipline . . . part of the toughness of this kind of thing is . . . the part of the discipline is that when people were caught doing things, such as a man was caught in our barracks stealing food and had been doing this for a period of time . . .
- JH: Where'd he steal it? You mean stealing from one another?
- MILLER: He would steal from one another, yeah.
- JH: Oh, gracious!
- MILLER: And this was just . . . when he was condemned by a regular court martial, they just simply pushed him out the door.
- JH: Oh, dear!
- MILLER: Into the yard.
- JH: So that took care of that.
- MILLER: That took care of that.
- JH: Well . . .
- MILLER: And that was our form of keeping people in line.

MILLER: But you didn't make unilateral decisions. You weren't . . . it wasn't a sole thing like in the films where you made a decision to escape, you know. Now, maybe in other areas where there was less discipline -- in the French forces that had no allegiance, you know -- maybe these kinds of things did. The British were very . . . in the early part of the war when they thought that maybe there was such a long period of time that there was no hope, why they really did try some very novel and very well-planned escapes. And some of these succeeded. And I guess some didn't.

JH: Didn't.

MILLER: They tunneled for ages and it gave them something to do as much as anything. It gave them a cause that kept them sane, I suppose.

JH: Psychologically, how did your fellow prisoners hold up? Do you feel that as a group . . . now these were all Americans you're with now?

MILLER: These were all Americans. By this time they were a potpourri of . . . there were quite a few of the what . . . well, they weren't Green Berets at that time. But what were the parachute troops that had been taken in Normandy? There were a number of fellows from the 101st /Airborne Division/ that got so badly cut up in the /Battle of the/ Bulge. /Dec., 1945/ I had made particular friends with a young fellow from . . . oh, Oklahoma. Now, when I say he was young, he was ten years older than me. He was 29 or so; I was now 19 then. And he had . . . he was a battlefield-commissioned officer. He had been part of a company in southern France that really got cut up and there were only six or seven left. And he picked up the bar and commissioned himself because he was a corporal and he was the ranking one. And so he made himself a battlefield commission. And then the whole . . . the group was taken prisoner.

He was . . . he was a good one to know because he taught me a lot about self-defense and was one of the ones that was in on the planning of how do we preserve ourselves if they try to annihilate us, you know. And . . . anyway, life went on in a very

MILLER: sort of tedious day-to-day way. You spent most of your time thinking about cooking, trying to keep yourself somewhat clean, liking it when the sunshine came out, making up funny little games that you could play, and listening for the reports of the oncoming advance.

JH: Through this little crystal.

MILLER: Right.

JH: Did you have total freedom? Were you . . . were there any responsibilities thrust upon you at all?

MILLER: Well, there were roll calls in the morning in which everybody had to sort of line up and be accounted for. Other than that, there wasn't much in the way of responsibilities.

JH: But you could talk to one another so you had a . . .

MILLER: We could talk to one another. That's true.

JH: . . . lot of communication and this is probably what kept you glued together.

MILLER: Yes, I would say so. Yeah, I would say I think it would have been much more difficult if you'd been thrown in with a pack of people with whom you didn't have a language in common. Well, many of these were Air Force, too, because the Air Force was the ones that were taken most. I was with a Jewish boy who'd been a fighter pilot who had been shot down and sort of badly burned on his face but had recovered. It wasn't too pleasant to look at but He . . . it . . . sometimes you would almost volunteer to go out and do gardening just to get out into something different, you know. You'd go out and dig potatoes or something like that.

JH: Did you garden?

MILLER: Well, I didn't because of my leg. But a lot of people did.

JH: But they were permitted to do this?

MILLER: They would take . . . they would call for

MILLER: volunteers for a work detail. And you'd -- even the officers -- would volunteer for this to . . .

JH: Just to get out.

MILLER: . . . to get out, yeah.

And the days passed sort of slowly and then we began to hear about the imminence of the advancing armies. And to make this story . . . to cut it somewhat short, we'd begin to notice fewer and fewer guards around. And then there was sort of a vacuum, and they sent . . . the rumor went through the camp that they had sent a German command car to take the ranking colonel, who was an Air Force colonel, to meet with the advancing armies and to sort of find out how these people were all going to be taken care of.

Well, we . . . we had moved. In between, we had moved further south toward Italy; and the rumor was that they were going to take us into the Italian mountains and hold us forever, you know. And I had been moved by train 'cause I couldn't walk. I then had given my new boots that I had been given somewhere along the line . . . I gave those to somebody who didn't have boots and who had to walk. And the train experience was something else because moving in Germany at that time by train in a boxcar when the /Allied/ fighter pilots controlled the air and they didn't know whether you were ammunition or people that it was It was a very hair-raising daily experience where they would come down and shoot up the train. And then we'd have to get a new engine; and we'd sit there for days, you know, waiting for a new engine to come.

JH: And you just felt you were a sitting duck at this point, I'm sure.

MILLER: Yeah. Yes, I'm sure. I'll say. I'll say so.

JH: So, you were all packed together in boxcars?

MILLER: Yes, we'd be 60 people to a boxcar. And somebody'd be stationed up to look through the cracks

MILLER: of the boxcar, and he'd yell, "They're coming in," and we'd all try to get down on the floor underneath everybody else, (laughs) you know. It wasn't . . . it wasn't the best of human experiences because it was sort of . . .

JH: How long did this trip last?

MILLER: Oh, it lasted 10 to 12 days. It was a long trip.

And then we got to this new camp where we were . . . and the crowd got bigger. By this time we had Russians and we had a lot of African troops, and they were very cantankerous. They were really a ragtag army, you know. And there was little control.

Well, anyway, they . . . one morning we woke up and they . . . the machine guns on the towers were all turned in as . . . we couldn't understand that. It was . . . they were usually trained along the borders. And the word had come out that we were to stay in the barracks because the SS /Schutzstaffel Defense Detachment/ had taken over and they had been told to execute all the prisoners. Well, a couple of Sherman tanks came up on the horizon and just knocked off every one of those towers.

JH: Ah! That was the rescue.

MILLER: And that was Yeah. This was the white horses, you know.

JH: Yes.

MILLER: Coming in. The U.S. calvary.

They came on and they swept right by us, and the infantry followed by. And they were throwing us all these C-ration bars, and everybody got sicker than dogs because we hadn't had any of this for a (commences to laugh) long period of time and it was far too rich. And then /General George/ Patton came in. And he was not more than four hours behind the advancing troops. And he was a large man with sort of a high voice, as I remember.

JH: Oh, really?