Michael F. O'Shea
Veteran

Michael Russert
Interviewer

New York State Military Museum
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MO: Before we start, you said you were interviewing Pre World War I veterans?
MR: No, we have done three World War I veterans.

MO: Oh, three, okay, World War I.
RO: How old were they?

MR: They were in their hundreds.
MO: Yeah, I was gonna say. My God, still around, huh? That's great.

MR: This is an interview with Michael O'Shea at the Hampton Inn, Commack, New York. It is February 25, 2003, approximately 2:30pm. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?
MO: Michael Francis O'Shea, born in New York City, born October 5th, 1924.

MR: What was your educational background prior to military service?
MO: I was still in high school. In fact, I left high school in my senior year to join the Air Force.

MR: You enlisted?
MO: Yes.

MR: Why did you pick the Air Force?
MO: Well, they came around to one of our assemblies at high school. They were recruiting right in high school, and they promised anybody who flew would get a commission and you'd make so much flying pay. It was a very glamorous offer and I bit

on it. President Roosevelt at the time was going to build fifty thousand planes. So he was going to have plenty of planes to fly and man. Actually, I guess it turned out that he built ten times that number during World War II. However, that was the interest I had in it. Before I was eighteen, I had a hell of a fight with my mother and father. They wanted me to stay and finish school, and I said, geez, I want to join up before they stop enlisting and I would be drafted and go into the infantry. So I finally broke them down and joined.

MR: I'm going to go backward a little bit. Where were you and what was your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?
MO: Oh, I guess like every American, I was incensed that the Japanese bombed us like that, and I just wanted to seek revenge.

MR: Where were you when you heard this?
MO: I guess at that particular time I was with a friend of mine and we were hanging around his house and his mother stuck her head out the window and said, boys, they just bombed Pearl Harbor, that's over in Hawaii. The Japs attacked all the American ships over there. It just took us completely off guard. It was a complete surprise.

MR: When did you enter service?
MO: As soon as I was eighteen, in November of 1942.

MR: Why don't you start with your basic training and tell us about that.
MO: When I first enlisted in downtown New York, they put us on the enlisted reserve because they didn't have enough facilities for training. Our country was so caught off guard, we had no preparation for war whatsoever. And my God, they didn't even have uniforms for us. However, about two months later, they called me up. I was still in high school, so I left and we went down to Atlantic City. They had no training facilities for us, no place, no camps or anything else. I was a part of the Army then. The Air Force was a part of the Army Air Force at that time. They put us in hotels down there. In fact, they didn't even have uniforms for us. I went down there and drilled at the hotels along the boardwalks in Atlantic City, marched up and down. We were eating in their old big dining rooms, our mess halls. We still had our civilian clothes. Finally, after two weeks, they got enough uniforms for us. I packed up my belongings and sent them back home.

MR: When did you start taking specialized training?
MO: It took a few months before they got organized and they sent us to special schools, college training detachments and everything just to start us on some sort of a routine. Then it took about four or five months before they ever got us into classification centers.

They classified you as a pilot, a navigator or a bombardier. We were sent down to Texas for that. But that was about four or five months later. We were sent down to San Antonio, Texas. That was a big training ground. By this time they were a little more organized and they got things going. But for months, oh, a year, I guess, after the war started, there was very little organizational training. Not like we have today. We're well prepared for war. We're prepared for all the things because we're internationally involved. But it wasn't then.

MR: So you went in to be trained as a navigator. What was some of the specialized training you received for that?
MO: We had the special pre-flight school, and then they sent us to Advanced Navigation School, which lasted about five months.

MR: Where was that?
MO: Down in San Marcos, Texas. They needed quite a few navigators at the time. Apparently they were short of navigators, so our whole class was sent to navigator school. Most of that time we were out night and day learning the different stars. It was celestial navigation that we concentrated mainly on. For I'd say four to five months, it was all navigational training and mostly all navigating by stars. Naturally, you stayed up all night practically, and slept in the daytime.

MR: When did you join a crew?
MO: After we finished advanced navigation, we were commissioned as officers and went to the Rotational Training Units Reserve. I've forgotten the name, actually, but RTU. In any case, we were sent out to west Texas. It was a bleak place, desolate airfield out there. In fact, the place was called Rattlesnake Bomber Base. [laughs] They trained us. We got a crew out there. The pilot, the bombardier, the navigator, the tail gunners, the ball turret gunner, the top turret, the engineer, radio operator. The whole crew came together. There were ten of us. All the rest of the crews, of course, formed at that time. We got our first taste of what a B17 was. That's a flying fortress.

MR: When did you receive your first plane and go overseas?
MO: We received the brand new plane right off the line, just as we were about ready to go overseas. This was about three months later. We had about three months training at this RTU. When we were ready to go overseas, they flew in a brand new plane. Just about every crew that was trained got a brand new plane. We took off from a place called Kearney, Nebraska, which was sort of a center where the trained crews got their plane and headed off overseas. This was an invasion time too. There was an awful push, as I

look back at it now, which we didn't understand. Because this was just before the invasion and we were on our way then. The invasion started as we were going across to England.

MR: Could you describe the different legs of your flight?
MO: It was mainly navigation. Incidentally, I hadn't done any of that type of navigating before. My job was to direct the pilot to keep them on course. We flew across the country. We had never flown anything like that before. It was all training flights around Texas and the states around Texas and out over the Gulf of Mexico and even down into Mexico. But this time it was entirely different. We were given long hops from Nebraska to the east coast of the United States and then up to Newfoundland and then one direct long hop back over to England. From there we were assigned to a bomb group.

MR: What group were you assigned to?
MO: The 351st Bomb Group. That's Triangle J.

MR: Did you keep the same plane?
MO: No, they pulled that plane away from us and they equipped that with special equipment outfitted for combat. In other words, the plane that was made in this country, the plane we got to fly across the ocean with, was not the same plane that we ended up in combat with because they needed further work to do on it to prepare it for combat.

MR: Did you keep the same plane in all your missions?
MO: No. They switched you around, whatever plane that they could use you on.

MR: Did you ever get a plane that you named?
MO: Yeah. Oh, yes, we did. We finally got one of our own. We named it, but we never put a painting on it.

MR: Never painted it. What did you name it?
MO: It was Seventeen and Misled. It was supposedly a picture of a naked young girl, seventeen years old, flying high, looking up at it. Her name was Miss Ledd. M, I, S, S L, E, D, D. That's the seventeen and Miss Ledd. That's two words. But we never got the painting, though. It was just a name.

MR: Did you ever decorate your jackets in any way?
MO: Yeah. Oh, yeah, sure. We painted them and what have you.

MR: Did you keep your jacket?
MO: Oh, sure.

MR: Do you still have it?
MO: Yeah, it's pretty well shot now, but my daughter loves to wear it.

MR: Did you keep your same crew together?
MO: Yeah, well, for most of the time, we flew with the same crew. However, the two times I was shot down, I wasn't flying with my regular crew. See, when they needed spare parts, or spare men, they took one man from one crew and put him in another when they needed them. So unfortunately, both times, the unlucky times, I wasn't with my own crew. Just one of those unfortunate things.

WC: Did you have to bail out?
MO: Yeah. It was shut down twice. Both times by flak.

WC: So you were a member of the Caterpillar Club?
MO: Oh, yes. Yeah. I'll show you on the plaque, the display case I have here.

MR: How many missions were you on the first time you were shot down?
MO: The first time was fourteen. I was shot down on my 14th mission.

MR. What was your first mission like?
MO: That was a particularly scary one, I guess, if you want to put it that way. We had to abort the mission when we were deep in Germany and fly back by ourselves. No cover, no fighter protection from deep inside of Germany. We couldn't open the wing tanks, which were called Tokyo tanks. We were going to bomb Berlin and our Tokyo tanks wouldn't open. I don't know where they got these names from. I guess when they were long distance, they called them Tokyo tanks. Anyway, on the way back, the engineer was working with it and got it going. However, we were far away from the formation on our way back home. So coming back over Germany, that was a scary time because if we had been bounced by any German fighters, they could have shot us down easily. A raw rookie crew and just breaking in. But we got back thank goodness. But after that, we got in the swing of things. You know, you learn a lot from even your first mission. In our case, that was what happened.

MR: On any of your other missions up to your fourteenth, were you ever hit by flak?

MO: Oh, yeah, yeah. Flak was very common over Germany and they were very accurate, deadly accurate. Don't forget, we used to fly over five miles high and they could pinpoint that flak right up to there. Of course, they had very accurate radar.

MR: Did you wear a flak jacket?
MO: Yeah, we had jackets and vests.

MR: Did you wear them?
MO: I did. Oh, yeah. When I saw how accurate that flak was, I put it on.

MR: Could you describe your fourteenth mission? What was your target?
MO: We were bombing Munich. It was terrible weather that day and it broke up the formation. We had to turn back, and even though we had most of the squadron with us, we got a very bad flacking. Once it cleared up, we got out of the weather front on the way back. I don't know if I made that clear. We were on our way to the target, but the weather front just broke us up. We couldn't see anything, so we turned back. Going back, it cleared up again and that was when the flak guns hit us and we got a very bad flacking. Which was a delayed flaking in the sense that we thought we were okay. We were flying back and were halfway over the North Sea, just about in the middle of the North Sea, when we had a sudden wing fire that was caused by the flak. Probably a piece of shrapnel or anti aircraft artillery got into one of the wing tanks and exploded. The fire was deadly. The pilot realized this and he called bail out. So we bailed out. We were about two miles up and we bailed out. I had to break down the navigator hatch in the front and was the first out. On the way down, I counted all ten chutes. All parachutes got out and opened up safely. We had a long way to drift down so we counted them, but we were all spread out for miles. You saw them from miles away. The plane exploded finally. The pilot put it on automatic pilot before he bailed out and it exploded. So [bailing out] saved our lives. Had we continued flying that plane with the wing on fire, we might have all been killed. We descended into the water. We had some training while we were in England by a paratrooper who told us how to land, if you ever had to land on water, how to get rid of the chute and swim out from underneath it. Because otherwise you would come up underneath it and drown. He gave us some good tips on that. That was how I was able to get out and most of the others did too. However, we lost two men, [they went] missing. Never found any remains of them. Apparently they drowned out there. We never heard anything. But don't forget, the closest land was sixty miles from the English coast. I figured it was about sixty miles from the enemy coast and sixty miles from the English coast. It was a long way to get lost.

MR: How long were you in the water?
MO: About three hours. Yeah, my watch was working all that time and [the water] was cold. Luckily, this was about the middle of August, and luckily the water was the warmest at that time of the year, but the temperature was fifty six degrees. That's pretty damn cold water. We were cold.

MR: Who rescued you?
MO: We were finally rescued by a P47, that was one of our own fighters attached to the Air Sea Rescue Squadron of the Royal Air Force. They used to fly out over the water if there were any crews that went down. Our pilot didn't even get a chance to radio. It was such a hectic bailout. But luckily a P51 saw us and circled around us and they got a fix on him from England and they knew a crew was missing. One crew was missing. Luckily they had that much information about us, otherwise we would have been completely lost. It was two hours and fifty minutes, my watch was working all that time. I suddenly heard a roar over the water. In the meantime, I had given up all hope. I didn't think there was any possibility of staying alive. I was so damn cold and [I was] just treading water. By this time I was losing all my faculties just to keep up my body heat. But you just had to do it. You just had to keep treading water and that was all you could do. We had a Mae West [life preserver] to keep us up and a complete flight uniform underneath that. And if we didn't have the Mae West, I guess we would have sunk. We had enough heavy clothes to drag us down. That might have been the reason the two, who didn't make it, drowned. Incidentally, we had nine men flying with us that day. Seven were rescued. But here's the story of the rescue. These P47s flew out and I heard this tremendous roar of the water. I just couldn't believe what had happened. With every bit of strength that I had, I splashed the water. [speaks very animatedly] And honest to God, sometimes when you got a fear like that or a last minute desire, I must have put up such a terrible gush of water out of that sea that he spotted it. He turned and roared over to me and circled around me. I couldn't believe it that someone had seen me. Don't forget, this was thousands and thousands of square miles of water. And there was only a little part of your head sticking up. That's all. He saw the splashing and flew around me and he must have been calling his buddy at the time. He dropped a smoke bomb and, oh, my God, I was just flabbergasted. I was dead here almost before that. I just came alive and I couldn't believe it. But he then kept continuing and then he dropped a dinghy. I realized these were special Air Sea Rescue planes that were equipped with this kind of stuff. They were equipped to drop smoke bombs and dinghies to anybody that had to be rescued. I had a hell of a job swimming to the dinghy. By this time, I was so exhausted. He dropped it about a hundred yards away. Incidentally, before that, a buddy [flyer] came, the two of them were flying together. So he came over and when the first smoke bomb went out, he

dropped his. The buddy dropped his smoke bomb and the first guy flew away. The second guy just continued to circle around me and dropped his smoke bomb. This was to get some sort of a position, the smoke rose from the water for the Air Sea Rescue boats. These were manned by the Royal Air Force and they patrolled all the North Sea and the English Channel and picked up crews like that. At that time, it was crews that were in dinghies. Normally when a plane went down, they crash landed in the water and pancaked. The crew got out from one of the top hatches and they had special dinghies just prepared. They inflated the dinghies and got in. But anybody that ever bailed out, there was no hope for them. I don't know how, but we were…luckily, it was not our day to go. They spotted us, dropped the dinghy. I finally got to the dinghy, inflated it and I couldn't get in. It was just such a job. I just had to hold on. I figured to myself, my God, if they don't rescue me in a few minutes, I'm going to have to let go and just sink. It was only a few minutes later that someone hollered behind me and I hardly heard him. Hey, get your [unclear] 25.21 in, Yank. [laughs] I looked around and I couldn't believe the shadow in the water, a boat was coming towards me. There was a guy standing on the prow of the boat with a big rope in his hand. [He said] catch a hold of the rope. It was fantasy, honest to God. He pulled me around to the side of the boat and I couldn't get up. There was a rope bladder hanging on the side. I couldn't get up. I had no strength in my body. A couple of the crew members stripped down and jumped in and grabbed me by the legs. A couple of guys from the top of the boat just yanked me up onto the boat. I laid there in a lump. I couldn't move. Then they cut all my flying clothes off. I don't know what the hell kind of shears they had, but they cut everything off. Then they started working me over with big heavy towels. You know, apparently they had this experience before and they knew what to do, these special rescue crews. They got me up on my feet moving around. Held me under the arms and started walking and said, move your feet, move your legs. It was difficult to even think. At that time, I started shivering. Just a normal function of the body, I guess. I was just shaking all over. I couldn't even talk. They got me down in the ship and said, how about some rum? I said, give me some. [laughs] They gave me a great big drink of rum. God. I didn't last very long after that because I hadn't eaten in about fourteen, fifteen hours, you know. And, boy, I went out.

MR: Did the same rescue unit rescue your entire crew?
MO: Yes. I was able to tell them that I was the first one out. And therefore the rest of them should be in a line behind me. They went down and they picked up seven of the nine of us, including the pilot, the co-pilot. We lost the radio operator and the waist gunner. Thrilling experience. Later on, it gave me qualifications to join the Goldfish Club. Anybody rescued at sea by the Royal Air Force, Air Sea Rescue, could be a member of the Goldfish Club. I'll show you that in the plaque later on.

MR: Were you hospitalized after that?
MO: No, luckily I was in pretty good shape then. I was able to get up and get around. It was just an unfortunate experience, but I pulled through it all right. As soon as I sobered up the following day, boy, I had a terrible hangover. The following morning they brought us back to a base in England. And, God, they must have just thrown me on some sort of a bed there. I woke up the following day, and didn't know anything about what had happened. I just completely forgot it. But the rest of the crew got around. I guess they also had some rum, too. We all reminisced on what had happened. We were very sorry about the two that we lost.

MR: What was the next mission? Did you go out on a mission right away after that?
MO: They gave us two weeks, what they called flak leave, and we were sent to a rest home which they called flak homes, for want of a better terminology. I hated it. Most of the guys that went there were guys that had finished their missions and were on their way home. But I [was only] half finished. I had to go back and fly the rest of them. But we had two weeks leave and then went back.

MR: So you went with your regular crew then?
MO: Yes, I was with my regular crew after that, until the second time I was shot down.

MR: What mission was that?
MO: That was the twenty fourth mission.

MR: Where were most of your other missions besides your fourteenth and twenty fourth, what were some of your targets?
MO: We bombed everything from Berlin to…incidentally, we were briefed to bomb industrial targets. When I say Berlin and the biggest cities, we didn't bomb indiscriminately. At least we didn't think we were bombing indiscriminately, going over the city and dropping bombs on the civilian population. That wouldn't sit well with any one of us, you know, and we were never briefed for anything like that. What we were briefed for was industrial targets. Some of these targets were around large populated areas and you had to go get them. I'm sure a war today is going to be the same way. If we hit big targets, industrial targets around Baghdad, there's going to be a lot of civilian population that will be hurt. But we don't set out to do that. At least we didn't do it back then, and I'm sure they don't do it now. They go out to destroy the industrial targets, the targets with war potential.

MR: Was your plane equipped with a bomb sight?
MO: Oh, sure, sure.

MR: So you were a lead bomber?
MO: Towards the end of my missions, I was always flying lead planes because I had the experience and I was flying with a lead bombardier, so he always had the bomb site. But some of the planes at the back, even though they might have the bomb site in them, they didn't use them because we bombed all at once. We bombed [when] the lead plane [bombed] to keep a pattern of bombing.

MR: Do you want to describe your 24th mission?
MO: I was over Germany then. It was the second biggest synthetic oil refinery in Germany. Politz was the name of the target. That day we lost forty planes of all kinds. Not only B17s, [also] B24s. We lost a lot of fighters and everything else that day. It was a terribly rough mission. It was clear weather and everything, making it an ideal situation. It was a maximum effort mission. We must have had well over a thousand planes bombing. They not only bombed Politz, but other big oil refineries the same day. But Politz was the big target. That day, and I didn't find this out until much later. The Germans finally perfected their radar so that they could pick up on our radar. This was the first time they had ever used it, on the mission to Politz. We had radar in our lead planes. They called it "Mickey" H2X radar system [AN/APS-15], it was for picking up targets. If there was a cloudy day, you could pick up a city, a coastline with those Mickey sets. They were something the British developed, I believe. And we refined it in our planes. The British needed it because during bombing at night, they had to have some sort of good identification system for navigating. Otherwise you never found the targets. Everything was so black over Germany, there were no lights, naturally. Even though we bombed in the daytime, we developed it for bad weather bombing. Anyway, these Mickey sets were radar sets and they sent out a radar impulse. The Germans found out how to pick that up and to use it to their advantage so that they could hone in on our formations much more accurately than they did before. God knows they had plenty of accuracy before. They just pinpointed our position and that was why the flak was so deadly accurate, especially at the end of the war. They picked us up. We lost seven of our twelve planes of our squadron that day. Three of us were shot down in Germany. Four others were lucky enough to get to Sweden. They were badly damaged. They landed in Sweden, but they couldn't get back to England, so they were interned in Sweden. The three bomb crews that went down over Germany were almost all captured. Most of the crews got out.

MR: Were you hit by flak?
MO: It was flak again, yes. Both times it was flak. We had fighter attacks during all the time we were flying, but the main cause of our losses at the end of the war was due to flak. At the beginning of the war, it was due mainly to German fighters.

MR: Did the entire crew get out?
MO: The second time, the entire crew got out. To my knowledge, I've only met a few of them [in person] but we kept in touch with one another. As I said, this wasn't my regular crew. If it was my regular crew, we'd be much closer. But we still did keep in touch with one another. I've gone to their places; they came to my house here in Long Island. We had different get-togethers. We have group reunions every year and get together there, some of us.

MR: So you bailed out. Were you injured at all on this?
MO: Yeah, I hurt my back when I bailed out a second time. I came down over a little town and I was barely lucky enough to slip my chute enough to get away from a couple of the buildings that were very close together. But I landed on a fence running in between and hurt my back very badly. But I wouldn't let the Germans…I didn't lay down, I got up on my feet. They were surrounding me. The people saw me coming down. It was a perfectly clear day, like today.

MR: So you were captured by civilians?
MO: No, there was a German policeman there and there was also some sort of a militia. They had the guns pointed at me when I got down, but luckily I held my hands straight out to show them that I had no weapons. I wasn't going to make any kind of an offense there. I was not a paratrooper, you might say.

WC: Did you ever hear any stories about civilians killing airmen?
MO: Oh, yeah, that was very prevalent even in the far suburbs, far away from the big cities. These people were so brainwashed with the propaganda that was put out by Goebbels at the time that we were terror flyers. Tiefflieger was the name, a German expression. And luft gangster. They were frightened of us, I guess, so much so. And we were doing so much damage to Germany that they came after you and killed you. So many of our flyers were pitchforked to death by farmers, especially if they were wounded and laying on the ground. They came after them. However, I suspect that was a minority. I don't want to paint any broad brush that was all terrible German catastrophes. They were brainwashed by Nazi propaganda.

MR: After you were captured by the German police and militia, what did they do with you?
MO: They rounded up the rest of the crew and shipped us off one place after another until they had us pretty well focused. That evening they sent us to a military camp a few miles away. And some of the crude vehicles that they had then, my God. They had horses and wagons and charcoal burning trucks which they put us on, and buses too. They didn't have fuel then, believe it or not. We found out how effective our bombing was because they had lost all their fuel. Not like in this country. We have so much fuel, it's unbelievable. You wouldn't think of not being able to go to a gas station on a corner and filling up anything you wanted. Whether it was a lawnmower or a little boat, anything at all. You could always get gasoline. Well, they had nothing.

MR: When was this that you were shot down?
MO: October 7, 1944. About seven and a half months before the end of the war.

MR: What kind of camp did you end up in?
MO: Stalag Luft 3 was the name. Before that, we were rounded up and sent to the first interrogation camp which was on the other side of Germany. We took these old boxcars and trains through Germany. We went through Berlin and we saw the destruction of Berlin at that time, which was in shambles even then, due to the bombing. This was long before the Russians ever came anywhere near it. The Royal Air Force was bombing it, especially at night. That was one of their big targets. Later on in the war, the American Air Force started bombing. The destruction was terrible, not only to the railroad stations, but as far as your eye could see, as we rode along in the railroad cars. But anyway, they took us down to the interrogation center and they kept me in solitary for about twelve days. And boy, that was a hell of an experience too. Bread and water, starving us practically. They called you out about every third day and interrogated you. They wanted you to fill out a form. Now, we were told that all you had to do if you were ever captured was to give name, rank and serial number. And so consequently, being good soldiers…well, I can only speak for myself. That's all I gave them, name, rank and serial number. But this so-called officer who spoke wonderful English, was a Luftwaffe major. He said, lieutenant, please, you've got to fill out the rest of these ten simple questions. [He] Just asked a few simple things about where you lived in America, and things like that. I said, major, you know I can't do this. I can only give you my name, rank and serial number. He kind of pleaded with me in his softest voice. He was the kindest looking guy you ever saw in your life. But I knew he was a cutthroat behind all his facade. He offered me a cigarette. I didn't smoke. I said, no, thank you. In any case, things like that. Three times I was called out. Three times he pleaded with me just to fill out the ten questions.

[He said] We'll send you off to the permanent camp. And I said, I'm sorry, Major, that's all I'll fill out is my name, rank and serial number, and you won't get anything. He said, we know a lot more about you, than you possibly can imagine. We probably know everything that you can tell us there. Just fill it out for the sake of the Red Cross. I said, I'm sorry, all I can give you is name, rank, [and serial number]. Well, anyway, he threw me back in solitary. I had twelve days of solitary and it was killing me. I swear. This was a room about four feet wide, eight feet long and seven feet high. It was nothing but a slab, padded and everything else. It was just a pit. A few slices of bread to eat and little barley soup. The purpose was just to get you to fill out the ten questions that they asked. They had all kinds of means. I remember one time when I went in there, I guess it was the second or the third time I was being interrogated, the major said, why don't you fill this out? Be sensible, your pilot filled it out and he is on his way to the permanent camp, but you're sitting here in solitary. All you have to do is fill it out and you'll go, too. Then he showed me the pilot's form. He must have figured it was my regular pilot. I knew enough about him to know where he came from. He was from California, and he had some other things that were listed down there. I looked at it, read it and said, no, Major, I can't fill this out. I don't care what anybody else did. I'm going to give you my name, rank and serial number. I thought to myself later on, how could the pilot do that? You know, how could he betray his own cause. But they had enough information about him that they could have filled this out and pretend that he did it. See, this was the way to break us down. They had ways of doing it without torchwares, but they even had torture while we were in the solitary confinement. They had a heater in this lousy little thing. It was October, a mild time of the year. But they turned the heater on at night so that you just fried in there. They got the temperature up to about one hundred twenty degrees, it seemed like to me. When they did that, I took all my clothes off, whatever clothes I had, and laid flat on this board that they had inside the cell. Finally they turned it off. But that was a kind of hidden torture. If anybody came around to inspect, they would have said, oh, that's just a heater to keep these prisoners warm. If there were any International Red Cross, which did come around to inspect the prison camps, this was all according to the Geneva Convention. But they had ways of torturing and they did torture us by this heat method. But in any case, after about twelve days of solitary confinement, they finally let me know that I could finally go and we were sent to the permanent camp. A long trip across Germany to the east of Germany to Stalag Luft 3, that was the permanent camp. That was another railroad ride, of course. Crowded in these dingy, not a boxcar, it was some sort of an old railroad train they kept us in. It was a hectic, lousy trip. Still hungry. We had very, very poor food. Whatever they gave us, I can't remember now. But nothing like we had when we were flying out of England.

MR: When you were in Luft 3, did the food improve any?
MO: No. We got Red Cross parcels. It was much better than what we had during the interrogation camp. They called the interrogation camp Dulag Luft. The other was the Stalag Luft, if it makes any sense to you.

MR: Did you receive the cigarettes in your Red Cross parcels?
MO: Oh, yeah.

MR: Use them for trade, since you didn't smoke?
MO: Yeah, I didn't smoke them, but I gave them away.

MR: You didn't trade, use them as barter?
MO: No, I didn't have a chance to very much, just gave them away. But at the very end, I was able to get a few. The only times I was ever able to use them was when we evacuated our camp. We were in the camp there for over three months at Stalag Luft 3. That was the time the Russians started their advance on the eastern front and they were crushing Germany from the east as we were putting the squeeze on them from the left from Normandy and northern France and Rhineland. The Russians were coming all the way through the western part of Russia, through Poland and the low Countries, into Germany from the east. We had Germany in a vice. If they were sensible at all, they could have seen that the war was lost for them. There was no way to defend. The Russians started their advance and they overwhelmed our camp. But Hitler gave the order that we would be evacuated. We had thousands of flyers in this camp. We must have had damn near ten thousand, maybe. At least eight thousand, I don't know the exact figure. We had to evacuate the camp and march across Germany in the bitter winter. One time we reached twenty nine below zero, I heard. I didn't have a chance to check and often wondered how accurate that was. The day we evacuated our camp, there was a bitter blizzard; it was terrible. None of us were equipped for anything like that. And boy, we started marching across Germany, day and night and day and night. We endured the blizzard and there were so many guys that fell and guys that died on this trip. They picked up the sick ones and threw them in horse drawn carts. It was such a disgusting trip. It took me a long time to describe it. But the order was to get these flyers and keep them all together, don't let them be recaptured by the Russians. Frankly, we didn't have any much use for the Russians. I think we would have just as preferred to remain prisoners of the Germans than be recaptured by the Russians. We didn't have a choice, so we marched and had some terrible experiences on the way. They finally got us into a place south of Berlin crowded us into these boxcars. Fifty or fifty five men into a tiny boxcar. Their boxcars were about one quarter the size of an American boxcar. Now you have some idea of what

an American boxcar is, but because their tracks were narrower and the boxcar was smaller, they crowded these men in. On top of that, they had a guard in there with us. We took turns standing up or crouching down in the closest possible way. Inside the boxcars was hellish. So many of us were sick. All of us had diarrhea or dysentery and no means [toilet facilities]. They locked the car doors, jammed them shut before they took off. It was miserable inside there.

MR: Did you receive any medical treatment at all?
MO: No, no, nothing up until that time. I complained after I was shot down, before we ever got to the interrogation camp. This was the day I was shot down. Late that night, somebody came around who spoke English, one of the guards in the military facility. He said, are you hurt? A doctor will come and look at you. I said, I hurt my back. I landed on my back on a picket fence. He said, take your clothes off and the doctor will see you. I waited around there. It was a cold night, even though it was in October. I waited for the doctor. He finally came and said, bend over. He couldn't speak English. The interpreter said, bend over. And he just looked at my back. All he did was rub his hand on my back, turned around and walked out. That was the entire medical help, my God, from Germany. They didn't give a damn whether my back was broken or anything else. I don't say that's terrible, you know, they had their own men to look after. I will say they must have fulfilled some sort of a Geneva Convention protocol by doing that. But that shows you how crude things were during the war. Did I answer that?

MR: Yes. When you got out of the boxcars in Berlin, where did you go from there?
MO: After the boxcars, we ended up just outside of Nuremberg. We got out and they marched us to a camp that was the most desolate looking place we ever saw in our lives. It was formerly occupied by Italians. We saw that by the stuff, the newspaper clippings and things like that in the buildings that we were crowded into. These little huts. These poor Italians were rounded up by the Germans when Italy surrendered. They were treated even more miserably than we were. I really felt sorry for them. They must have cleared them out and gave us their places. What they ever did to them, I don't know. But it was miserable. The first time we came across fleas and lice was in that camp. It was miserable. We had these little, what would you call them? We had fleas and lice crawling all over us. What is the word, I can't think of. But anyway, within a couple of weeks though, they got DDT, which I had never heard of before. Little cans of DDT they brought into us. It must have been American made stuff that came in through with the Red Cross parcels. We sprayed this on us and fortunately were able to control some of the lice and the fleas. But it was a very, very unfortunate experience there in Nuremberg.

And during that time we were bombed not only by the Royal Air Force, but by our own American Air Force. They had no idea where this camp location was. When we first got there, the Germans naturally didn't notify them, [so] we were bombed. Boy, I'll tell you, that was a frightening experience, being bombed, especially by your own planes. Heavy bombs dropped all around the camp. Thank goodness they didn't hit directly on the camp, but a few of our own flyers were killed. They were away from the camp at the time. The camp itself wasn't located. About a half month later, we again had bombings by our own Air Force and by the Royal Air Force. The Royal Air Force bombed at night. We bombed in the daytime. I guess we had about four bombings altogether. A terrible experience. We dug trenches. The Germans allowed us to dig trenches. We finally got shovels. We tried to dig trenches with the ordinary little cans that we had, like milk cans and corned beef cans that came in the Red Cross parcels. [We tried] To dig trenches six feet deep. It showed you how desperate we were to do something to get away from the bombing. The Germans finally gave us some shovels. But it was a terrible experience to be bombed, especially by your own Air Force. Later on, though, I will say the second, third and fourth time we were bombed they had our position. We saw whatever they bombed. Especially when the Royal Air Force bombed, they sent out a line of flares and the planes always bombed on the other side of the flares, away from the camp. So they didn't hit us.

MR: How long were you in that camp?
MO: We stayed there for about two months. We were on the Western Front then and didn't know exactly the position we were at. However, this was when General Patton and his 3rd Army were moving towards Nuremberg. And of course, the Germans evacuated us a second time. We started on a march from there down towards Munich, which was farther south and away from where the front was. On the way down there, we had a little better time than the first time. The weather was better. It was in April of the following year. Even though we were in very poor conditions, all the time we were in Nuremberg, we had very bad conditions. We had no food then and we didn't get any Red Cross supplies or anything. We were eating whatever the Germans gave us, which we called Black Death and Green Death. The soup and whatever it was. The potatoes were all rotten, mangy. They sent in cheese every once in a while, which was moldy as could be. Just grimy. We were so hungry, we ate just about anything at that time. The soup they sent in had the bugs floating all around in it. We ate the bugs. We kidded ourselves, this was our source of protein. It's a joke now. [laughs] When you were hungry like that, you ate just about anything. Thank goodness we didn't…nobody came to cannibalism or anything like that.

WC: Let me stop you right there, because we have to change tapes.

MR: After you left, you marched toward Munich. You were talking about marching to Munich.
MO: Yeah. And the weather got better. It was so much better than the last march we had in a bitter winter. Red Cross parcels came through on the trains and were finally delivered to us. I remember a little bit of coffee and cigarettes that I had, I traded with the civilians. I remember I picked up a nice dagger one time from a German civilian on the road.

MR: As a POW?
MO: A POW, yeah. Oh, my God. If the German guards knew I had it. But I was looking for a knife and this was a beautiful little dagger. The guy pulled it out of his little sack. He was riding a bicycle. He was a businessman riding a bicycle. He pulled it out of his sack and gave it to me for about ten cigarettes. He was so happy to get those cigarettes. [laughs] I was happy to get the knife. So it was an even barter, as far as I was concerned. Our powdered coffee, which we couldn't use much of anyway. But in any case, the Germans had no coffee. They had this ersatz stuff. We got bread, potatoes and things like that. Just enough to stay alive on the march. We marched for about two weeks, I'd say. I can't remember the exact days. It was down through Bavaria, which was a nicer part of Germany. It was early spring, and everything was nice and green. When we got to the final camp…but in the meantime, the Americans as well as the British found out that they were transporting thousands of POWs on the roads. And of course, our planes flying then, especially the fighter planes, were all equipped to strafe, and they strafed anything, any column of soldiers. They strafed a lot of American POWs as well as British POWs, whoever was in line marching. But they got the understanding that these were [our] POWs. In fact, one time we were on a march and I grabbed a big armful of hay and I ran out into the middle of the field and wrote PW with the hay on the field itself so that the planes flying over saw that this might be a POW column and recognize that we were Americans and not to shoot . Because they were strafing anything they could. I remember after I had done that, a P51 came by and rocked his wings to say he understood. So then they got the message out to the Germans not to move any more POWs, get them off the roads. By this time, the war was coming to an end, and the Germans listened to whatever they could. Whether they sent radio messages to Germany or pamphlets they dropped [which said] Do not march any more POWs on the roads. Get them off the roads. Get them in the camps and keep them there. Do not move them. It saved a lot of lives, I'm sure. I have one of those forms at home. In fact, I might have it in that booklet there, if you care to look at it later on. [It] told the German [soldiers] in German [language] and printed in German, signed by Winston Churchill. And apparently it must have been Joseph Stalin and the new President of the United States, who we didn't even know. That was Harry Truman. We knew that Roosevelt died. In fact, we showed him great respect.

We all lined up, to the chagrin of the Germans who wouldn't allow it. We stood at solemn attention the day after we heard that Roosevelt died. Just in honor of Roosevelt.

MR: What was your reaction when you heard this?
MO: Well, we were pretty saddened. We were hoping that he'd be around to the end of the war. But by this time, the war was coming to an end, and it wasn't going to stop the momentum of the Allied Forces crushing Germany. Well, anyway, I don't know. I lost the gist of what I wanted to tell you. We respected Roosevelt and were hoping…he was our leader, no matter what politics anybody might have had at the time before that. He was our leader at the time. Most of us were so damn young, especially the flyers. We were all young guys, you know. Hell, when I was shot down, it was just two days after my twentieth birthday. And we had guys in there that were still teenagers. Everybody was very young. They had no political feelings at the time like you have when you get older. But in any case, everybody was sorry about Roosevelt dying.

MR: How were you liberated?
MO: General Patton's 3rd Army came in. He sent out two divisions at the time. One armored division, one infantry division, just to liberate our camp. We had thousands at the end of the war; well over ten thousand at our camp. Finally liberated in a place called Moosburg, Stalag 7, or 7A, maybe it was. It was a concentration place for all... I shouldn't say concentration, it sounds like a concentration camp, although exactly what it was. But they got all the Americans and the British and all other allies who were POWs, mostly all flyers. They got them all together in one camp towards the end of the war, and they wouldn't move them after that. Especially after they were notified not to move any more POWs on the roads. But this was where Patton came in and the Air Force, of course, and shot the place up. They killed a lot of Germans making their last ditch stand there. I understand they killed about fifty Germans. These were fanatical ones who were still willing to fight and hold on to whatever was left of Germany. They were either SS or Gestapo. It was foolish.

MR: Who were most of your guards at this time?
MO: Mostly old men. Oh, yeah. If they were young at all, they were fighting on the front lines with some military unit. The guards were poor old guys. I remember some of the marches that we went on. We had to hold the guards up, carry them along. They were old men. We carried their rifles, we slung them over our shoulders. Our intention actually was to stay together. We felt so sorry for them because they were in a worse situation than we were. They might have been eating a little better than us, but the conditions were terrible for all the people.

WC: Were any atrocities committed against any of your fellow soldiers that you know of?
MO: They didn't abuse us, any of the guards or anybody like that. They didn't. Not overtly. Now, we might have had atrocities against us in ways that we weren't aware of, but they respected us as we would respect them if they were captured. We Americans completely followed any Geneva Conventions as far as POWs were concerned. We did a wonderful job taking care of theirs [German POWs]. But then things were good in this country. We had no reason not to follow everything right down to a T. Follow the rules. The Germans at the time had just about nothing. At the end of the war they lost everything. They couldn't even feed themselves. So naturally they were not going to bend over backwards to feed us. We were all mostly flyers who were destroying their country and they didn't have much sympathy for us, but they didn't hate us or anything like that. But I will say that they had no overt atrocities against us.

MR: Did you need any medical treatment after you left?
MO: Oh yeah, yes, when I came back. We finally were liberated by General Patton. He came around the following day to our camp.

MR: You saw Patton?
MO: Oh yeah. He was quite a distance away from me, but you could hear him. He had kind of a squeaky voice. I was surprised. Nothing like George C. Scott who [portrayed him in a movie] But he was a tough old guy and he was vulgar. Oh, gee, some of the things he said and he didn't give a damn who was around. What he thought of the Germans. He thought they were worse than dirt and [said] kill those sons of bitches. He could curse something fierce.

WC: Did you hear any stories about Patton shooting any Germans or anything like that?
MO: No, I never heard that, [him] personally shooting anybody, no. But then I didn't know much about Patton, except that he liberated us. I'll always be fond of our liberator for that. It's hard to say anything bad about him, as far as I'm concerned, if that makes any sense. But he was a rough customer. Just about every river that they captured all the way through France and Germany, he gave everybody a personal display of pissing in the river [to show that] he was a hero. And everybody took pictures of him while he was doing it. I'm sure that these pictures never got back to the general public back in America. But everybody laughed like hell. He was a vulgar guy. Don't forget he was a high ranking officer, so they respected him.

MR: I guess after you left there, you were talking about your medical treatment.
MO: Well, after that we were still confined to that lousy camp. They tried to keep us together, confined there. It was like the Americans took over where the Germans left off. But they tried to keep us together so that if eventually they could evacuate us, they wanted to evacuate us all at once. But we used to take off. We cut the wire and got out into the towns and whatever. By this time, we got a few more Red Cross parcels. And Patton, when he took over the town nearby, he took over the bakery and he started making white bread. Any of the German bread that we had was like a brick, honest to God. You could use the things for bricks themselves. They were hard. They used to make it with ten percent sawdust, for bulk, apparently. During the war, things were so bad over there that they used these conditions. The bread was not wrapped or anything like that. They were just baked in ovens and came out. If we were lucky enough to get any bread, not only did we eat it, but the German people themselves ate that. When Patton came in, he took over the bakeries and brought in carloads of white flour. We had white bread for the first time, in my case, about eight months. It almost tasted like cake.

When we finally got back, they shipped us all back about two weeks later. They were able to get enough planes. They flew them into a nearby airfield and evacuated us by truck to this airfield. We flew back to Camp Lucky Strike, which was in northern France. It was a big POE [Port of Embarkation]. By this time, they deloused us. We took all our uniforms and burned them. Whatever we had, the flying clothes that we were shot down with. Completely deloused. Got chances for good, clean showers and cleaned up. Got enlisted uniforms, but they were good clothes, once again, clean uniforms. They had good food, naturally. On the way back, though, I knew there was something wrong with me, but I didn't want to say anything at that moment. I wanted to get back to the States as soon as possible. They told us they were going to get us out as soon as they could get a ship for us, and take us back to America. So I didn't want to do anything to disturb that. I didn't want to go to sick corps or anything. On the way back, I was put aboard a big ship. I guess I was only out for three or four days. I complained. I went to the doctor. We had a doctor aboard the ship. They had the sick corps there. In the morning, I went to him one day and I told him I was sick. He examined me and said, you have some sort of virus pneumonia. You're going to go into sick bay. It was a big liner, an ocean liner that they had taken over and used as a troop ship. It was called the [USS] John Ericsson. It was from the Norwegian line. They used it as a liner that ran back and forth between Norway and America before the war. Anyway, there were nurses there and everything else. They couldn't diagnose anything at the time, but they put me aboard the ship. I was pretty damn sick at the time. All the war I seemed to be all right. It was only when I started eating well once again that things then turned bad against me. I began to realize how sick

I was. They took me off on a stretcher when I got back to the States. The trip took two weeks; it was a slow convoy. And it was still in darkness at night. They kept it dark out because the U-boats were still operating and they would sink any ships. We went under cover of darkness completely. When we got back into New York, I was taken off the ship and whoever else was in the sick bay. Taken up to Camp Shanks Hospital. That was a port of embarkation, debarkation, I guess, at this time for anybody who was sick. They had a special hospital up there. They kept me there for a month and diagnosed my trouble as tuberculosis. I had tuberculosis on my whole right side. We weren't even aware of it at the time. But, looking back, our little cell in Stalag Luft 3 was thrown in with a guy who had tuberculosis very badly. And it spread. The conditions were terrible there. We were hungry all the time. That was how I got it. It took them a month to diagnose the TB because I guess they had primitive ways then. In fact, what they did was aspirate some of the fluid that I had in my chest around the pleura, around the lung. They injected it into a guinea pig. It killed the guinea pig and they were able to tell that the cause was tuberculosis. They sent me from Camp Shanks, which is upstate New York. Maybe it's where some of you people come from. I don't know. Have you ever heard of Camp Shanks?

WC: I've heard of it, yeah. I'm not sure where it is
MO: I gather it was somewhere up around West Point.

WC: Yes, you're right. On the west side of the river.
MO: On the west side of the river, yeah. It was a big camp then, port of embarkation and also debarkation for all troops coming back from Europe. There were other big camps there too. But Camp Shanks was one of the ones in New York. Anyway, they sent me there by hospital train out to Fitzsimons General Hospital, which was a known tubercular general hospital for the Army. It was an Army hospital in Denver, Colorado. At that time, they used to send tuberculosis [patients] out to the Rocky Mountains. Denver was one of the big ones. And as far as the Army was concerned, they had the Fitzsimons General Hospital. I was out there for a whole year recuperating from the TB. I was finally retired from the Air Force as a first lieutenant with tuberculosis. After that I came back but I wasn't out of the woods by any means. I was then assigned to the Veterans Administration because I was out of the military completely then. I spent five years altogether and most of that time in body casts because the tuberculosis had spread throughout my body. Nobody was aware of it until long after it happened. It spread throughout my body, into my spine. They called this Potts Disease. Now, it's a disease today that's almost unheard of because healthy people don't get tuberculosis anymore. You hear it coming from third world countries; however, very few Americans have it,

who have lived normal lives and eat healthy diets. It unfortunately had a grip on me and kept me hospitalized for many years. During all those years that I was hospitalized in the Veterans Administration, I had five major operations on my spine for tuberculosis. This was before they came out with any kind of a cure for TB, which happened about 1950 or 1951. They came out with what they call a miracle drug for TB, Streptomycin. It was one of the antibiotics which was famous at the time. They tried it on us. We were the guinea pigs, of course. I was glad to get it because it did cure me. I was able to get up out of the hospital, start walking around. Most of that time I was hospitalized. I was in a body cast from my knees all the way up to my neck. It was one body cast after another in all those years. It was a trying time. I was mainly in the Bronx VA Hospital, which is still there on Kingsbridge Road. We used to call it Base-81. I don't know what they call it now. I haven't been back there. It's not one of my fond memories to go back to that hospital. I spent so many years there, from 1947 to 1951. Most of that time, as I said, in a body cast. TB really hit me pretty hard. Then I was able to get out and once again start walking, which took months.. You had to learn to walk again. Luckily I was still young and could do it. I had no ties. I wasn't married. My mother, God bless her, used to come over to visit me practically every day in the hospital. It was a terrible trip [for her] across New York to get out to see me. I was able to get out and they gave me a back brace which fit around much like a flak suit. I was able to improve, it took several months. They sent me up to Camp McGregor. I don't know if it's still around. It's the place where General Grant died.

MR: It's a state prison now?
MO: Is it? Well, it was a nice camp then. Up near Glens Falls.

MR: Between Saratoga and Glens Falls.
MO: I wish I had more of a chance to get around to see that part of the country. Then I got around to see a little bit of it, it was a nice part. I was recuperating up there. And then finally, I was able to get into college. I went out to the West Coast.

MR: Did you use the GI Bill?
MO: Yeah, it was Public Law 16 for disabled veterans. I went out to the West Coast. I graduated from San Jose State College about 1955. That was about ten years after the war was over. I came back here to New York and worked at different jobs around New York.

MR: Did you ever join any veterans organizations?
MO: Oh, yes, I joined at one time or another. I joined almost every one of them. But now the only one I'm really active in is the POW groups. There's a nucleus, a camaraderie amongst ex-POWs, which is so much closer than___

MR: You never joined the 8th Air Force Organization?
MO: Oh, yeah. Yes, I belong to that also, the 8th Air Force Group.

MR: All of you guys belong to that.
MO: Yeah.

MR: You're worse than Marines.
MO: Yeah, I guess so. Yeah. Very often my wife and I go down almost every year, in fact, to our reunions, our bomb group, the 8th Air Force.

MR: Do you stay in contact with any of your crew?
MO: Oh, yeah. Most of them are all dead now. I only have two left of my original crew. The pilot that I was shot down with is still living. He's out in California. The few of us that are still alive maintain contact.

WC: We've got some memorabilia.
MR: We want to do that on tape?
MO: Oh, you want to show it? Okay. I can pull those things off. I just put that tape on there, but I can get that off in a hurry. [unwraps framed glass display case with medals] By shoving it in the back of the car, it might have broken. This was on my wall at home.

MR: Maybe you can focus on that while he's doing that. [refers to a scrapbook album with a photo of O'Shea on the front]
MO: Yeah. Incidentally, my sister, God bless her, she was wonderful. She made this album for me and asked me to take care of it. I never kept it up to date. I just threw things in there.

MR: I think we know who the guy is on the front. When was that taken?
MO: That was during my time in England. That was taken by an English photographer. That was just after I was shot down the first time over the North Sea. I went to this little photography store somewhere in England and I said, gee, I'd like to get a picture taken so I could send it back to my mother. One of the best pictures I ever had taken, honest to God. He respected me for it. And that was about the only good picture I ever took during a war. I didn't get very many pictures taken at all. At least I have that one to show.

MO: [continues unwrapping display case] I should have had more sense.
MR: Well, no, I don't blame you for not wanting to have anything happen.

MO: I'm a little afraid because I was only cautious, though.
MR: You can leave that there.

WC: Do you want to explain to us what each and every item is?
MO: Start off with the medals? I'll start with the Purple Heart. [points to medals in the display case] The Air Medal. This is the Victory Medal. And this was the POW Medal for ex-POWs. This was a French Medal given if you participated in the Normandy campaign from the time of the invasion right through the end of the campaign. This was a French medal. A very lovely medal, a very colorful one. And I don't know if very many Americans know [about it. Those who participated] It came out very late. It's only been out about five or six years, apparently, and you had to be living to get it. They also had a citation, which I have in this book here. I'll show it to you. This is the European Theatre Ribbon. And I have five battle stars for that. This is the American Theatre Ribbon. And this here is New York State. They call that the Conspicuous Service [Medal]. I guess you're familiar with that. [directs question at interviewers] And these are some of the patches that I wore during my time in the service. This is the general Air Force Patch. This is the big 8th Air Force patch, the Mighty 8th from England. This is an Aviation Cadet Patch when we were training as cadets. This is the patch that we wore on our sleeve. And this is something I picked up after I retired as a first lieutenant from the Air Force.

MR: Now, what is this?
MO: Oh, that was my bomb squadron that I was in. It was called the Ball Squadron because the original commander was named Ball, and everybody called it the Ball Squadron. They got the baseball as sort of the motto.

WC: That was with the 8th Air Force.
MO: The 8th Air Force over in England with the 351st Bomb Group, yes. [continues to point to medals] The Ball Squadron was the 511th Bomb Squadron, just to make it technical. This was the patch that we wore on our shoulder, usually on our flying jackets. The triangle J was also painted on the tail of the B17. The dorsal fin of the B17 had the triangle J on it. Every group had a different letter and designation, whether it was a triangle or a square or a circle on the back. That was the way they marked them.

MR: Tell us about your Goldfish Club.
MO: Oh, yes, the Goldfish Club. If you were rescued by Air-Sea Rescue of the Royal Air Force, you were entitled to a membership in the Goldfish Club. So I still get information

from them and I still write them. They're over in England, and it's a very active organization over there.

MR: There's his Caterpillar Club.
MO: Yeah. [shows club ID card]

WC: That was for anybody that bailed out, right?
MO: Yes, if you bailed out under emergency conditions. See, a regular paratrooper wouldn't be entitled. It would have to be an emergency condition that you bailed out. And I did it twice there. [continues to show medals] Incidentally, this is the German dog tag we wore. The Germans gave us this when we were captured. I don't know if all POWs got it, but we did in the Air Force. We had to wear that thing, too. If we escaped or anything, we had to have that with us. If we were recaptured again, at least they knew we were POWs. If we tried to ditch it or throw it away and were recaptured, we could have been shot as spies. So we wore that along with our regular dog tag. This little gadget here, the wings; I made that in a prison camp. This was supposed to be a ball and chain there. This was one of the things we used to [do to] kill time in a prison camp. Incidentally, as officers or as sergeants, which everybody was who was shot down, they were either one or the other, they couldn't work. Under the Geneva Convention, an officer could not work. A sergeant could work if he volunteered for it, and none of them did, naturally. So, consequently, we had free time. The Germans followed that convention that way. They worked all the poor Russians, or killed them if they wanted to, and they did. But they respected us in that respect.

WC: Is that your military ID card down there in the left hand corner?
MO: Yeah, that's right. That's what I had during the war, issued from the War Department. Now they call it the Department of Defense.

MR: Did you get everything?
WC: Yeah.
MO: Okay, I'll open this up and I'll run through some of the things that might be here. My sister did such a wonderful job making this album. It's several years old now.

MR: It's beautiful. Maybe it'd be better to hold it up.
MO: [shows a large scrapbook] Sure. I have such a lot of junk in here. I don't know whether it's worthwhile showing everything. There are some things in here that could be very interesting to you. Pictures taken when I first___

MR: Who is? [points to a page with multiple headshots]
MO: When I first went in the Army. These are these pictures that you take in a little machine.

WC: All those pictures are you?
MO: Yeah, I guess they are. And a friend of mine here in this one. That's all. [They were] just to send home. I am surprised they kept some of these things. [shows newspaper article] And while we were training and first got our uniforms, we were sent up to Syracuse University in New York. I don't know if you know anything about Syracuse. That building is still there. It's developed quite a bit since then but it was still a university then. It was a college training detachment before they sent us down to Texas. [shows postcards of the college] These are different buildings around the campus of Syracuse. [shows newspaper article] That's one of the papers they had there. My name was mentioned there. My sister kept all this stuff together. We even had flight training while we were up there. They wanted to see if we could take the training. [shows newspaper article] During the time we were there, they had a terrible windstorm that destroyed all the planes. I sent that picture back. [shows photographs]

These are some of my family. I lived in New York City at the time, on the outskirts of the Bronx. This is my mother and father and this is my sister. Both my mother and father are dead. My sister is still alive and she still looks after me. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have any kind of an album at all. She kept all these things together for me. [shows more photographs] I only had one leave in all the time before I was sent overseas and I was able to come home. This was before I went to cadet training, I guess I came back from Syracuse University then. These are some of the letters that were published. [turns pages of scrapbook] Let me see if I can… I went down to San Antonio, Texas for cadet training. Here are some of the pictures taken there. [shows a hand drawn sketch of himself] This was taken afterwards because I already got the commission. [points to insignia on his hat] Somebody drew a picture over in Mexico. But these are just pictures taken of training periods and the airfields and what have you. [turns pages of scrapbook] Some of them are mixed up, they're not quite in order. [shows headshot in uniform after getting commission] Now that's that same picture again. Let me see if I have anything here that might be of interest.

WC: Is that your graduating class?
MO: Yes, that's right. The flying school class.

WC: Whereabouts are you?

MO: Right here. [points to himself in a group photo, bottom row, third from the right] They all signed it. I wonder how many of them are still alive today. I don't think very many. I wonder how many had the same experiences that I did. Incidentally, this is that French citation that we got. [shows a paper certificate] This was one of their recognitions. You know, we speak so badly of the French today, but they recognized and thanked us veterans for what we did. [shows a letter] This is a letter of thanks from the Consul General in New York. This is the remains of the crew. This was done, oh, I'd say five or six years ago. [shows photo with six people]

MR: 1990.
MO: Ten years ago, I guess. That's me here. [points to faces on photo, he is third from the right] My tail gunner is dead. This guy's still alive. I think these two are still the only ones alive. The others are dead. That's all remains of the original crew. This was the shot down crew. We were captured. [shows certificate] This was the award of the Purple Heart. [looks through his papers] [shows certificate] I joined the retired officers organization many, many years ago. [shows photo of his crew and the B17] Here's a picture taken in Texas in 1944 of my original bomber crew just before we left for overseas. This was early 1944.

MR: Where are you in this one?
MO: [points to photograph, bottom row, second from right] That's me down here. This is the pilot, the co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, and these are the rest of the crew. That's the engineer. He had a very serious accident inside the plane while we were in training. [points to man, back row, with crutches] Almost blew his leg off. But he came out of it all right. He's still living today, by the way. I think all the rest of them are dead, every one of them.

[shows photograph of himself and Miss America] Here's a picture that was just taken recently, a couple of years ago. I don't know if you can get it very clearly, but that's Miss America. She came to our Long Island National Cemetery at Calverton. You might have heard of it. It's going to be the biggest, if it isn't already the biggest cemetery. Miss America came out; her theme that year was helping disabled veterans. I don't know if there's anything else I have here.

MR: You had this in here.
MO: One time when I was in a veterans hospital, they took us and showed us wonderful times. They had a big VFW meeting one time in Madison Square Garden. They got the veterans around, those of us that were in body casts like I was, and showed us a good

time. They had these big performances and we were kind of the hosts. Bob Hope was one of the original performers and I got his signature. [shows autographed program] Along with Jerry Colonna. Do you remember?

MR: Oh, yes. I remember him.
MO: The two of them were buddy, buddy. I don't know where, but I have his signature too. Oh, here. Jerry Colonna. [shows back of program] Some of the other people along there. They had all the Congressional Medal of Honor winners there and I got their signatures too. But Bob Hope, you know, I mean, he was such a big name. I wonder how many people have his signature. It was nice to get that. I don't know what some of these things are. I haven't looked at them in some time. [looks through his momentos] Here's the high school graduation class. I won't bother with that. And diplomas.

WC: Who are those people in that photo there?
MO: This one here?

WC: Yeah.
MO: [shows photograph of a group] When I finished flying school, we had a kind of a big beer session. At that time, they didn't allow much beer on a post, but they broke down every now and then and allowed it for something like a graduation. So we had a beer bust. That was all.

WC:Whereabouts are you?
MO: Gee, I don't know if I'm in this picture. No, I don't believe I'm in this picture, but all of these guys around me were my buddies. [points to a soldier] This was my instructor navigator at the time. He was a second lieutenant and we were in training. The officers here were the instructors. We were all cadets at the time, just graduating from flying school.

WC: Is that you there?
MO: [shows his cadet portrait] That's me as a cadet. It was taken down in San Antonio. This particular thing on the cap was for cadet training. I have other pictures here. [shows a page of photos] This was taken out at the western part of Texas. He was the bombardier. We used to go on flight training there. This was taken many years later and when I was in a hospital in Denver, Colorado, well over a year later. These were down in Austin, Texas. That's the capital of Texas. [shows photograph of five cadets in front of the capital] You might have seen that picture. You see it quite a bit now from Bush. That's the capitol building there. There's an archway underneath, which you see with

windows in the background. You can't see it too well there. But anyway, that's where we were. We used to go there on open post. [points to page with drawings of wings] This was the training as pilot, navigator and bombardier. Those are bombardier, navigator and pilot wings. [turns the page on the book] Different things that my sister put together, which we didn't get in order. Some of the things are mixed up. Pictures taken at different times. [points to a photograph] This was taken down in the Alamo, where we used to go when we were down in an open post. During the war, we didn't get much of a chance to get out on a pass on a weekend. You didn't just go out on a Friday night and stay out all weekend. There was very little chance of that, especially in cadet training. My God, we went for eight or nine weeks without even going out or off the post. Some of the guys, when they did get out, they raised hell. Do you mind if I use your gent's room? Excuse me.

MR: [shows photographs, reads inscription] This is his leave in New York City, March, 1944. [shows a plane with a crew]
WC: Okay, we got the shot of that crew.

MR: Looks like a drawing that he made of his plane.
WC: Okay.

MR: [shows images on the pages, turns pages]
WC: There was a picture going back a page or two. It looked like it might have been an ID card when he was a POW. Yeah, that picture right there. Or is that a passport photo?

MR: Passport photo. Okay. Letters. [turns pages] Here's a letter from the Red Cross that he was a. POW. [turns pages and looks through momentos]
MO: [returns to room. Points to a red cross publication] My sister and my mother at that time were in California, and they used to attend these prisoner of war meetings. The Red Cross held [meetings] all around the country to inform any next of kin about anyone who might have been held as a prisoner of war. So they had these meetings and publications. My sister kept these things for me. [shows letters] This was one of the letters or postcards I wrote when I was a POW. Incidentally, this brown paper behind here was originally from the first album we had. My sister says, my God, that's a disgusting thing. So she got the second album for me and. I guess I didn't keep it any better than I did the first time.

WC: Don't try to pull it out.
MR: Yeah. Because it may rip.

WC: It's so faint. I don't think the camera will pick it up.
MO: Okay. They kept the letters. You know, in all my time, eight months in a POW camp, I sent letters out. I think they only allowed us three letters a month. And they had special forms to write the things on. You had to be careful and not give any kind of military information. They were sent from Germany, and they did get home to my next of kin, to my mother and father and sister. However, I never got any mail whatsoever delivered to me. They sent packages and everything else when I was a POW. Never got a thing in all that time. Of course, the war was ending then, and anything that was sent into Germany, it just never arrived. Now, for what reason, I don't know, but it was kind of demoralizing not to know what went on, for eight long months, I had no idea what was happening back home. I was just hoping to God that they were faring a little bit better than I was in the camp.

MR: I would like to take one of these down to make a copy of it so you can have it in your folder [for the museum].
MO: Absolutely. I made different copies there. I made them some time ago. But you're welcome to take one if you like.

MR: I want to put a picture of you in your folder.
MO: [pulls out a pink piece of paper] I have some POW stuff here. Let me see this. This pink one here I think you might be interested in. It was about the only little bit of evidence I have from a German file.

WC: Okay, hold it just like that. [zooms in on an ID photo of O'Shea]
MO: This was a picture taken right after I was captured. I guess I look like a luft gangster, so there was good reason to call us that, I guess. I hadn't shaved in a couple of days. Even though I was a young kid then, I had some sort of a beard. This is some of the information they wrote down here. But that's all German stuff written in German. I was surprised after the war how much information they had about each one of us. That major who interrogated me, he wasn't lying when he told us that they knew probably more about you than you knew about yourself.

WC: Now, how did you get a hold of those German records?
MO: After the war, I guess we got a hold of some of the stuff. However I got it, I can't remember whoever got this for me, but somebody delivered it to me. I guess most of the guys that got back were fairly healthy. I was the unfortunate one that was hospitalized and everything had to follow me some way or another. And that's why I have so few things from Germany itself. But this. This is one particular thing which I do like.

WC: What happened to that knife that you traded?
MO: Oh, I don't know whatever happened to it. I kept it for years and then finally lost it.

MR: You kept it when you reached home?
MO: You said it.

MR: But you have no idea what happened to it. Very interesting.
MO: Yeah. I got it on the road when I was marching from one camp to another. And they searched us. They gave us a thorough search when we went into the final prison camp. My God, if I was ever caught with that thing, they could have…I don't know. They probably wouldn't have shot me, but they could have given me a lot of solitary confinement.

MR: I think this is the item that you said___
MO: [shows a paper copy of a German order] That's right. This is the item here that warned the Germans not to move around the POWs. In other words, keep them. Here are the signatures, Winston Churchill and Harry Truman, who we didn't know anything about, and Joseph Stalin. Here are some of the pictures. [points to newspaper clippings] My family kept some of the pictures of the fronts. They marked the fronts very accurately back in those days. You don't see that much in papers nowadays where the front line is, but they kept accurate ideas of where the front was then, and they were closing in on Germany. These are clippings and papers and stuff like that. [shows newspaper clippings and letters] This was a letter written to me and somehow or other, I never received. It was sent and addressed to me by one of my aunts somewhere in the States. These are the forms that they used for that kind of stuff.

MR: When did you meet your wife?
MO: Oh, this was 19___

RO: [Rosa O'Shea] After he was out of college and started work at Brookhaven Lab where I worked.
MO: Yeah, it was quite a few years. I moved back to New York and I moved out to Long Island. She worked out there at Brookhaven Lab. You might have heard of it.

RO: We married in 1959.
MO: Let me see. I have some pictures here. [looks through his momentos] This is a friend of mine I was with at the Army hospital in Denver, Colorado. He was an infantry officer.

He won the Congressional Medal of Honor. I still keep in contact with him and he's still alive. But anyway, here's some of the pictures. I don't know if you can see these? [shows photographs] When we were liberated from the prison camp and some of the guys. These are some of the decorations. The guy put on some sort of a homemade hat that he had. This is how grimy we looked. And this guy got a German hat that he was wearing. But this is how we looked when the war was over. We were pretty grimy, believe me. The only clothes we had were stuff that came through the Red Cross. American uniforms, GI stuff. But you can see that we were pretty shabby looking. [turns pages, shows letters] Oh, here are a lot of letters. This was the parachute, the company where I became a member of the Caterpillar Club. Membership of the Caterpillar Club, it mentions here. They sent a Caterpillar pin along with that. My mother used to like to wear it. I think they used the name caterpillar because the caterpillar produced the silk which was used in the parachutes. I guess nowadays they use nylon or better, but it was silk then. [continues to turn pages and show photographs] Here are some pictures taken when I was in the Army hospital in Denver, Colorado. Some of the friends I met out there. This man was a full colonel, and he was the first colonel that went in on the China Road. Now, what do they call it?

MR: China, India, Burma.
MO: Yeah. Lido Road. It went into Kunming. He had a very interesting story to tell about how they pushed that road. It wound up the sides of mountains for miles and miles. They just went around for miles. He drove the first caravan of American trucks into Kunming. A very interesting story to tell.

MR: There's only a couple minutes left on this tape.
MO: Okay, well, all right then. [turns the page, shows more momentos] Let's see. This is a paper from the group that I belonged to. The name of the base that we were at in England was Polebrook, so they called this the *Polebrook Post*. When I retired from the Air Force, they retired me for disability. They had proceedings; I had to go before a retiring board. Even though I was only in the service for a little less than four years, I was still retired, but I was retired for disability. Normally you're retired for length of service. In my case it was a disability. [continues turning pages] And these are nothing but clippings of the papers at the end of the war that my mother saved. This one here shows they had a survey at the end of the war about damage the Air Force did. They were showing the damage that was done by the bombings and over five hundred thousand killed during the war. Germany was completely leveled as well, I guess, as Japan was too. Believe me, I wanted to get to Japan. That was the first thing on my mind when I

enlisted in the Air Force was to bomb Japan. That's how I felt. The enemy was not Germany.

MR: What were your feelings when you heard that we had dropped the atomic bombs on Japan?
MO: Oh, I was glad about that. You don't look back. You can't see the damage done to people. You just wanted to see the war over. You wanted to see as little damage done to ourselves and you wanted to see the thing over as quickly as possible. The same as today. So that's the way I felt and I felt at the time. If we had the weapon, why not use it? Even today, I realize that it saved maybe millions of American lives, as well as tens of millions of Japanese lives by using the atom bomb. As terrible as it was, I felt it was the right thing to do, even today. Unfortunately, the Japanese started the whole thing by bombing Pearl Harbor. And, unfortunately, we had to end it using the atomic bomb.

MR: Well, I wanted to thank you very much for your interview.
MO: My pleasure. Thank you for being so interested in it.