

Interviewer: Your name?

Warren: My name is James W. Warren.

Interviewer: Your date of birth?

Warren: 1/1/24

Interviewer: And your hometown?

Warren: Albertville Alabama

Interviewer: What was your father's profession?

Warren: My what?

Interviewer: Your father's profession at the time?

Warren: Oh, at the time he was a farmer.

Interviewer: And you were farming with him?

Warren: And what?

Interviewer: You were farming with him?

Warren: I was honey I was just a kid.

Interviewer: You were just a kid.

Warren: No I'm sorry, when I was in the service got old enough to go in the service I have to back up. When I graduated from high school in Albertville there was no jobs. So my sister had gone to, two of them had gone to, we were in war. But my sisters were in Washington D.C. because their husbands had been drafted. And my sister said well send him up here there are plenty of jobs when I graduated. And I went up there and there was plenty of them. And I worked in a bank, I never had any training being in a bank but I worked at a savings teller. And I was sent down each morning and about noon to take our bad checks and pick up the bad checks coming to our bank. And I have never seen so many beautiful women in my life. Because Washington D.C. at that time on those parks they had built temporary office buildings there. And women were everywhere in that town I mean that city, there must have been ten million of them. And that's what I did until my mother told me I got a letter wanting Uncle Sam was ready for me. So I came home and I went through four of us went to Birmingham and joined the Air Core.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Warren: And we were sent to first they said they came with this things they said you fill this out and you can pick your own base. So Smyrna airbase was the closest thing for us so we chose Smyrna airbase. Well eventually sent us there and twin base at that time was a B24 transition school. When we got there

they did not have the faintest idea what to do with us. So we laid around there for two or three weeks then they started shipping us off everywhere. They sent me to North Goldberg North Carolina and from there I went from there to Fort Myers Florida to gunnery school. And from there they sent us to Salt Lake City Utah. And from there we were assigned crews. And we got crews we got together and we went to Pao Texas and you talk about a beautiful place. That was a hell hole if there had been one. All it was was just a big big air force base that's was all. And we were flying night and day and you never got to eat anything warm because you never knew when they were going to cook something up. When we got through, am I going too fast?

Interviewer: No sir

Warren: When we got through there after training there we left and got on this train and we ended up in Grand Island Nebraska. So there we stayed there for to pick up a new airplane a new B17 to fly over to England. And this guy said go in there now and you name the plane you'll pick your picture painted on it we'll have that painted on there for you. And we were sorry we were just a sorry bunch and we went to town and drank beer. And we never did name our plane or. But okay when we left to go we flew first to Maine, Presque Maine to refuel. So we refueled there spent the night went from there on to Grand oh if I can think of anyway it was another trip before we refueled there and left for England. And before we got to, we were supposed to have landed at a place called Dutch Corner Ireland. And when we got there it was too it was so fogged in that we couldn't get in so they sent us over to Scotland _____ Scotland. And that's when we landed there and I laughed so much about those the guys and the name of their airplanes and everything. Well they hadn't gotten their B4 bags out and everything before that airplane was gone. Those airplanes went to where they were needed. And we stayed there for a few days and finally we went over to our group which was the 381st bomb group. And that's where we started out missions and we shot I think it was about six or eight missions. And we got on the, it was the second day of that Berlin raid that got us. We made the first one and the second one Hitler had everything in the air that would fly. And our group did too and I've never seen such an air war in my life but anyway. We had been hit crossing the channel with ground fire and knocked an engine out. And we the colonel said come on you can make it on three. Well we could until we got that second one knocked out. So we got it knocked out we couldn't catch up he said go hit the ground hit the deck and go home. We hit the deck and mean we hit the deck. And we flew and all of a sudden we flew right across a German airfield. And they were taxing refueling so it wasn't long before we had about two of them up there with us. And they just sit back and shot their big stuff at us until they set us on fire. And we were at the time we were just at tree top level but we pulled on up then to about 5,000 feet and bailed out. And it happened to be over Holton Holland. And that's about when the time the air jumped and I have never had anything, when that parachute opened everything became so quiet. You were kind of drifting with the wind so you had no sound at all. Until we got almost to the ground and them people running around I said uh oh, they've got us. I thought it was the Germans but it wasn't it was the Dutch underground. And man they had me stripped of my long handle underwear now I'm not kidding you. My long handle underwear and my parachute and all it was gone. And then this guy said come on with me so we did the first barn we come to and went up in the loft. And we stayed up there for oh four or five hours and when a couple of more guys was brought up that was shot down. Then they came up and said well we've got to get away from here. So they brought some of the biggest bicycles I've ever seen I mean they were tall I could just barley reach the pedals. We rode this lady let us, we rode about ten miles that night and then we spent the night there. And we rode the next night they had some girls that came out like we were on a date. And we rode about ten more miles and spent the night again in these barns and if you read where the Dutch had their barns hooked to the kitchen it was right, they did. But anyway they were wonderful people and they were trying to feed us and man I couldn't eat the best

steak in the world at that time I was so upset. I mean I didn't know what was happening it was happening so fast. And then went on over to another place and we stayed there and they came in and measured me and I said what are you doing? They said we are going out and stealing you some clothes. And that's what they did they went out and stole me a suit and I had a pair of shoes that somebody brought me, they didn't fit good but I could wear them. Oh the first thing they gave me some wooden shoes that first night. Have you ever tried to walk in those things?

Interviewer: No sir

Warren: Oh they, you can't and but anyway I got me a pair of shoes. So now we are going to have to hit the train, oh that scared me to death. We got onboard this train and I guarantee you that I was as close to me and you to German soldiers. Well all of us were in civilian clothing see. And but I was so scared it was unreal they could look at me and tell I was scared to death. But what they were doing they were German soldiers and they were on their way on a furlough. So they were having a great time they weren't paying no more attention to me than if I hadn't have been there. But then we had to change trains and the guy said I won't stay onboard the cars with you in there said but when you see me walk by you get off. Because they wouldn't let of course if they would have been caught with me they would have killed them immediately. And so we got to the end and we had to change trains and going into I forget where that place was, anyway we saw him get off so we got off. And we had to wait around waiting for the next train and boy there was there was a schedule there. I didn't pay any attention to it but I sat right by it almost. But there were two great big I mean those fine looking German soldiers I mean officers. Now when they dress they dressed up and one of them kept looking towards me and I said oh no this is it I've had it. And he kept looking and in a few minutes he started walking over towards me, how I kept from fainting I don't know. But he walked right by me and I was standing in front of the schedule. And we got onboard the train and took off to, got off at the next place we had to take a boat. Wait until night and got on a boat and rode across this river into Belgium. And in Belgium we went on and walked down and got into ____ Belgium. And that's where we were arrested by the Gestapo because the little bastard turned us in. And so that's where my POW days started there. But I had been hiding out it took them about three months to get us. But anyway they once they put us get us and they had ____ and they had a way to get us back to. Well I'll tell you what they were doing what they did. They scared me so bad it was unreal but I found out once they took us to _____ they put us in the prison there the Gestapo did. And we were in prison one of these cells and each night they would read out the names of the ones to be executed the next morning. And of course it was all Catholic and that Rosary would go all night long. And but they would march them out the next morning some of them 13, 14 years old take them down there and shoot them. Then it was time to do us but what happened was they invaded. When they invaded Normandy it scared the Germans to death so they hauled us off in a truck and started us back to Germany. And we got into a I forget the name of the little town, they put us on a train and this was in Germany. And the dag blame Germans boy the Germans they, well I'll tell you what the German soldiers would do, if they were told to get us someplace they got us there if they had to kill one of their own. And but they tried some of those German civilians would try to get to us because oh they hated us. And there was a town called Collude in Germany in France that was bombed so I have never seen anything like it in my life. Those rails it was just like somebody had taken a ribbon and tied them. But we got on in they were headed to Frankford Germany with us that's where their interrogating center was. Now if I'm getting too much of this to you.

Interviewer: No sir you're fine.

Warren: When we got to the interrogating center in Frankford Germany they fooled around and said okay we will accept you as prisoners of war now. That made us feel better but anyway they the only uniform they had for me was a British so I had this British uniform and these old hob nailed shoes that the ___ had and man they hurt. But there then they started out our prison camp was in Poland and we were on a train. And we were stacked up so in those cars we called them cattle cars. So many of us we couldn't all sit at the same time. And it took us five days to get to the prison camp. And once we got to the prison camp, you could tolerate the prison camp, it was the other things that got us. You know GIs they will do anything they can to aggravate you know like the Germans. And we when we got to the prison camp it wasn't completed. So when they'd get a barracks built they'd put a bunch in in the meantime we had to stay in tents. And they turned these big ole German Sheppard dogs loose at night and they'd tare you apart if they'd get to you. And so but GIs they'd shake the tent you know here'd come those dogs and as soon as they'd get there somebody would go over there and shake the tent and here he'd come back. Like to run those dogs to death. But then we spent that's when we stayed in the prison camp. But they came in and said they've got to evacuate this camp and that was on February 6th 1945, 44 I guess I don't know. Anyway we've got to evacuate this camp said you'll be on the rode five days but you'll have a hot meal each day and all this bull. Well five days and about two months later we never saw another camp and never saw a hot meal until finally a Red Cross truck got to us and gave us one gave us a hot meal. And there is where we were still on the road when the war ended. And it was a funny thing I'm not kidding you it became comical. Because the Russians were making a mad dive down through there and boy the Germans didn't want the Russians to get them at all. So we were at this barn they had stopped us at this barn the Germans had. Got up one morning all the officers were gone and the men the ole German soldiers they didn't know what to do with us. About that time an ole lady came riding a bicycle in there hollering as she could said Americans in the next city Americans in the next city. We couldn't believe it because I hadn't heard anything any fighting going on. But it wasn't long that day until this German I mean American I mean a British captain and his driver pulled into the barn. And he says okay you guys are free says we've got the whole area surrounded. But says you've got to get to the Ebb River before you get to transportation said get there the best way you can. So where we were staying, now these big farms sleeping in those barns I forgot to tell you that the bigger part of this. We slept in those barns when they would let us because it was warmer. But we were eaten alive with lice oh I'm telling you we were eaten alive. But anyway to make that short the guys these guys at this farm that farm must have had eight or ten big wagons with these big ole Belgium horses to pull them. Well those forced labor workers at these farms they hitched them up got them ready for us. And we took off to the Ebb River got to I was riding along and I saw a pretty horse out there in a pasture and I said there's got to be a buggy there. So we jumped off our wagon went over there and there was a buggy this guy and I told him now you can take us to the Ebb River and bring this back if you want to or we are going to take it period whichever you want. So he chose to he wanted us to spend the night first because he had two daughters there. Boy he didn't want to rush us to get to those and I can understand that because man alive when the Russians moved in at the Ebb River while we were there. I just as soon fight the women in there I mean the men were almost as tough as the women. They were a brutal bunch of people but anyhow. Now what else do you need from me?

Interviewer: When you think of the war what is the first image that comes to mind?

Warren: What

Interviewer: The first image that comes to your mind.

Warren: The first image? God honey I guess it would be when I was hiding out in Belgium because that's where it was I was you have to get used to those people over there and to the way they live. Now they didn't think the men this was my first time to be someplace where the men and women lived together and weren't married. I that was hard for me to visualize you know but that was happening. And things that I saw I still see those. An old automobile would come by and on it would be a big boiler with fire in it and they were burning the gas off that was running into something and that was running that car. I've never seen anything like it. It wouldn't pull your hat off your head but it was running it. And the people that helped me were absolutely wonderful about it. Of course if they'd have been caught they could have killed them. And I went back over to see them a bunch of them later you know after. It's the war was to be I was too young I guess for it to really make the impression on me that it should have. But I can understand now why they always said that an 18 year old was the best soldier because he didn't have better sense than to follow orders and that's exactly what it was. Because an 18 year old a lieutenant tell him to do something he'd do it. There's a lot of guys old guys that would argue with them.

Interviewer: When you were being held you said in the tents there that it really wasn't you know you said it was the other things that got to you but you really didn't talk about what those were. Do you mind talking about them or would you prefer not to?

Warren: No it doesn't make any difference to me. I didn't have anything that really now the only time that I felt like that my life was just hanging because when I was a prison of the Gestapo they kept coming in this guy kept coming in a German. Oh he was dressed hip and he was supposed to have been a Methodist minister. I knew it was a lie to begin with but he said are you prepared to die and I said no. I'm never saying that. But he said well they are having your trial tomorrow and I said will I be there? He said no you won't be there. But that night was when they invaded and boy it scared the Germans absolutely scared them to death.

Interviewer: So even the Gestapo was scared when the United States invaded Normandy?

Warren: Oh yea they were they wouldn't let you know it but they were scared to death. They figured well we talked to some of them they said well the war will be over in two weeks. That's what they thought. But it was long time before it was over.

Interviewer: Did you have experience with both Gestapo and regular German military or were you strictly held by the Gestapo?

Warren: The we were turned back over the regular Germans.

Interviewer: What was the difference did you

Warren: Well the Gestapo was they were dressed in civilian clothing. They were just like our FBI. And but they are the only ones that were that way and like I said they were as nice to us as they could be until they got us turned over to somebody else and they started that interrogating bit. Which they knew more about me than I did myself. But it's and it's so much of it that's happened now that I've forgotten it. I'm glad I did but. But anyway that's when I was when you think somebody really let's see I think I turned 19 and right out of Albertville Alabama. Well I was so scared I didn't know what to do. I mean it was my will to have gone but I don't know I didn't know what to think about it. But once they got us all together it was okay but when they separated you and started interrogating you and you didn't know where your buddies were that's when it was hard on you. But other than that it was alright.

But the Germans I would say this to about the Germans they once they were told to do something with us they did it. And when we got into the camp we had some of the soldiers German soldiers you had to feel sorry for them really. They came in and took their uniforms away from them and their side arms away from them the guards in the war because they ran out of everything. They didn't have any guns or ammunition or uniforms and gave these poor ole guys just patched clothes. I felt sorry for them in a way but you didn't long because one of them was as mean as a snake one we called big Stew. He was about seven feet tall and he was the only one that I saw that they did away with him they cut his head off because he didn't (tape skipped several seconds) it was off. But I don't know now it just seems like at my age and all kind of like a dream. That it didn't all happen as far as like I said as far as the prison camp was concerned you could tolerate the prison camp (skipped several seconds) that's when it got rough. They didn't have any food the Germans themselves didn't have any food. See at the end of the war everything had been cut off to them. And we'd be walking along with these forced labor workers at these farms and we passed one of them if they one of guys could run out and hand you an egg they would. And we had a little ole can that we cooked potatoes on our own potatoes in we could boil an egg. Because at the end of the war when this guy at the jeep this British captain said get there the best way you can we started hitching up like I said hitching up the wagons and everything and taking off. When we got to the Ebb River it looked like the California gold rush. I've never seen horses and wagons were just roaming around. Of course the minute the GIs got there they just turned them loose. And horses and wagons were roaming around everywhere. And the German the Russian tanks moved in while we were there. Like I said I would just as soon fight the men as the women. But the war was over at the time and I don't think I would have shot anybody. It was funny because we got back and had to get we had to get to Lahar France that's where we had to catch the ship home. And we were there and we kept seeing our airplanes our C47s coming in actually they were Dakotas the British called them. And they were flying they were taking them and flying their soldiers home and we were sitting there. Boy this captain came home and he really raised some rear ends. The next day they were flying everything in that would fly and taking us out. And but the butte part of that was when you got that good _____ they deliced me I know six times. Because I had lice everywhere even into my eyebrows. It was just we were loaded with lice. And one time I can see them now we were out cooking our potatoes and this guy he was stirring his potatoes and what not and his nose was just running right in it out of his nose into that. Well somebody said well you idiot your nose is dripping and running into your soup. Just more soup that's what he said just more soup. That's all it meant.

Interviewer: I knew that the Germans had taken everything from the civilians to give it to the army or to the military.

Warren: Oh yea the Germans they I really and truly don't know why if somebody had been smart enough to have gotten to that German commander that they had in charge of us and could march us right back and turn us over to our troops he could have been a lot better off. But didn't do that and we got to the Ebb River there must have been 250 I'm telling you there was 250 at least German soldiers there trying to surrender to the allies. They wouldn't let them. They wanted to let the Russians have them. Well honey don't let me keep you.

Interviewer: You're not keeping me at all. So how did you finally get home?

Warren: We got to the Ebb River we got to France to a boat and got to ole darn the name of the place.

Interviewer: LeHara

Warren: Yea LeHara to LeHara France and they separated us there from Georgia, Alabama, Florida all of that bunch this way and the other by state. And we got onboard but before then though we had been there over a week and we were told we wouldn't be there over a couple of days. And Eisenhower came through, boy we clobbered him. He says I'll see that you're gone tomorrow if you have to sleep on deck. We said we don't care about that. And he did it was but the whole thing just turned comical it really did especially when you were trying oh I want to tell what the guys that wasn't riding in these wagons they were riding these horses. There'd be three or four of them on the back of them big ole Belgium horses going down the road. But it was comical but the war was over then and everybody was happy. This British captain said now if you can get a vehicle that can cross that pontoon bridge we'll give you fuel and you can drive on into Paris. Well we didn't have any vehicles that could cross anything. But the only thing they were letting come across them were tanks. One thing that made me mad was when I got there to the Ebb River and _____ outfit was there and boy one of his guy slapped he knocked me down, what were you doing a prisoner? You know how and the hell could I keep from being a prisoner? Of course I could understand him he'd been fighting all the way through Europe and here we were. But there's a lot of them that way but it was a right now it's a horrible dream to me than anything else really and truly. It seems like each day it's just like I dream things now that happened to me when I was just a little bitty kid. The other day I dreamed about my father back when I was raised I mean it was hard times. And he was working for the county running one of these graders and my cousin was he was running the ole bulldozer. And I begged my dad to let me, I couldn't have been over four or five years old I begged my dad to let me go to work with him that day and he did and I rode those things all day long. And probably got a I know dad told me one time, he had four children, and he was working for a dollar a day. But you know we raised everything we raised everything we ate except coffee and sugar. That's the only thing we had to buy we didn't have to buy that we could do without it. But we had trees of all type for jellies and things like that. And we rose cane and my mother had a garden that would have fed Tullahoma.

Interviewer: Do you feel like the training you received before you went to the war was adequate that you were well trained?

Warren: You mean

Interviewer: In basic.

Warren: Honey I guess as far as for my type I guess it was. I couldn't complain we were a good crew that's all I can say. We were a good crew and we didn't but we were in such a different thing from the guys in the infantry. Of course when we got to England we had our own little huts that we lived in and it was different. And the pilot was from Nashville Tennessee he and I were the only two southerners on the crew the rest of them were Yankees. But they were good guys and we but it was at the time I know my dad worked at the time I got out of the service he was working at the post office. And he said son I've got you a job at that time they were hiring everybody at the post office. And I said no I'm not going to work for one year. Oh see I had so much money I thought I never would run out. But I ran I spent all of that and about five thousand for dad. Then I had went to school went to the University of Alabama and couldn't do anything. Went to Auburn couldn't do anything so when I was growing up I lived at a funeral home and helped the guy there. So I said well I'll just go to embalming school. So came up here to John A Gupton and went through embalming school. But I worked that for about four years I guess but you couldn't like on it but you couldn't live on it in Alabama. Brother you can now. A good buddy of

mine of mine owns the new funeral home he's a graduate of John A Gupton he's got two beautiful daughters. I told him the other day I'd get those girls out of there that is not a business for women.

Interviewer: No I'd say it's not.

Warren: But they've already graduated from embalming school. But I just

Interviewer: When we were talking before we started filming you were talking about what being underground for four months cost you.

Warren: Do what honey?

Interviewer: We were talking about what you being underground for so long cost you and how long it was your family

Warren: Oh when I was in the underground it was over a year before my family found out that I wasn't dead. And so my girlfriend had married on me and had a baby that's made me mad more than anything else. Well she came down I don't know why she did it because if she'd have known my mother my mother it's a wonder she hadn't thrown her out of the house. But she came and wanted to know if she could divorce her husband and marry me. And my mother said I don't think he's going to want a readymade family so that ended that. But a lot of things like that happened. But we didn't see it was over a year my being in the underground it was over a year before they found out I wasn't dead. Because I know what dad thought about it I was the youngest one and he lost a he lost his youngest brother in World War I but I got news for you people we could be right on the verge of another war unless we get somebody in Washington D.C. that knows what the hell they are doing.

Interviewer: Yes sir. I thank you for your time sir.

Warren: Well I hope I got what you wanted