Transcription: Morris Barker

Today is Friday, April 30th, 2010. My name is James Crabtree. I'll be interviewing Mr. Morris Barker, and Mr. Barker is at his home in Waco, Texas, and I am at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board, Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us. I guess the first question, best question to always start off with is tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the service.

Morris Barker: All right, I was born in Electra, Texas, which is a small town just 28 miles west of Wichita Falls, on January the 26th, 1925. I attended high school there in Electra, but eventually graduated from Harrell High School at the age of 18, and then I went into the service in March 1943 at the age of 18. I was inducted in the service in Mineral Wells, Texas.

When you were growing up, sir, did you live on a farm?

Morris Barker: I lived in town, but after the war started and the rationing started, my father was a pumper for Texaco, and we had to move out on the lease because of some shortages and because he needed to be there full time. So that's one reason I graduated from Harrell High School. Then of course as I say I went in the service in March 1943.

And did you have any siblings?

Morris Barker: Yes, I have a stepbrother who was in the Navy, and I have a sister who is currently living in Houston.

I guess tell us then, sir, where you were and what you remember about December 7th, 1941.

Morris Barker: Well, I was in Electra of course, and I recall this happening, and was very interested in it. Of course back then we didn't have the technology that we do now as far as TV is concerned, so most of it was by radio and print, newspaper articles. I recall that in the local post office or some government buildings, they would have maps to keep everybody up to date on the war effort and where our troops were and how they were progressing. So I remember about the war prior to entering it in March of '43.

When you learned that the war had been started, did you think at some point you would be going into the service yourself?

Morris Barker: Of course I knew there was a possibility of it when I reached the age of 18, and of course registered for the draft. I did realize that I would possibly be going in, yes.

When you were getting in your senior year of high school, I guess you registered right when you turned 18?

Morris Barker: Yes I did.

OK, so you registered. How much longer was it before you were heading off to basic training?

Morris Barker: I registered I guess in January 1943, and entered the service in March of 1943.

So had you even finished high school at that point?

Morris Barker: No, I got out early in January of '43.

How did your parents feel about it – you were drafted, right?

Morris Barker: I guess yeah, I probably was.

Either way, you were heading in.

Morris Barker: I went in the service.

Yes sir. What were your parents' feelings?

Morris Barker: Well, of course they knew that it was required, and they hated to see anybody enter the service and go, but of course they knew it was required and I needed to do my part, so they accepted it.

So when you were getting ready to head off, where was the first place that you went to?

Morris Barker: I went to Mineral Wells, Texas at Camp Walters, and of course we went through induction, got all of our shots, and they were trying to determine where we would go and what branch of the service. So several of us boys from Electra went in on the same bus. We decided we wanted to go into paratroops. So we had to take a special physical I guess because of the paratrooper situation, and the other guys from Electra, most of them passed the physical, but I didn't pass the physical for paratrooper. They said I had flat feet and high blood pressure. So I went through basic in the artillery. So I went in the artillery and was shipped to Camp Buckner, North Carolina, and that was in the 270th Field Artillery Battalion, Battery C, which was in the 2nd Army. Like I say, went through basic there and it was a 105 millimeter Hauser battalion, field artillery battalion. The cavalry that trained us, most of them were from Ohio and most of the boys in the artillery there were from Texas and Louisiana and Arkansas. So we had a good basic training and I went through all the requirements of basic training, and then in December of 1943, they came out with a program. They needed aviation cadets, so I went into Durham and took a physical and took a written test and was accepted into the aviation cadet program.

So the paratroopers wouldn't let you in because they said you had flat feet and high blood pressure. How were you able to get past it when you went to the cadets?

Morris Barker: I don't really know, but anyway I did.

That's great.

Morris Barker: And about that time we had finished basic, and the day that I shipped out from Miami Beach where I was going to be in first training in the aviation cadet program, the 270 Field Artillery Battalion was completed and they went to another camp, and I hated to see 'em go because I made good friends from March until December there. So I went to Miami Beach, Florida, and we lived right on the beach in hotels, and I went through orientation and about that time for some reason they needed gunners, so I was sent to Harlingen, Texas, where I went

through gunnery school and of course we fired all type of weapons, and mostly 50 caliber machine guns because that's what we would be using in combat. So after I finished the gunnery school, I was shipped out to Tonopah, Nevada.

That's out in the desert, isn't it?

Morris Barker: Yeah, it's about 50 miles north of Las Vegas. So it's a very small town, it's a little mining town, mostly gambling joints in town. So I was shipped out to Tonopah, Nevada, where I went through crew training. Our crew was made up there that we would be flying with in combat. So we went through our transition training. Then when we finished that portion of the training, we were shipped out to San Francisco, and we stayed there a few days and then we went down to Hammer Field in Fresno where we picked up a new B-24. Then we flew from Hammer Field to Amarillo, then on up to Prescow, Maine, Newfoundland, and it was on the way to Italy with the 15th Air Force. Then the Azores, North Africa, and then on to Italy. I was assigned to the 15th Air Force, 451st Bomb Group, 726 Squadron.

Sir, when you were in Nevada, you said that's where you went through your crew training. Was that the crew that you would serve with in Europe as well?

Morris Barker: Yes, that's correct.

Tell us a little bit about those men.

Morris Barker: Our pilot was Neil Ramsdale, copilot was Nick Belstella, and of course the navigator was Wallace, bombardier was – my mind is failing me here -

Were they all pretty much the same age as you?

Morris Barker: The officers were older, a little bit older, but the gunners were all about the same age, 18-19.

You were 18 or 19. How old do you think the pilots were?

Morris Barker: About 23.

So still pretty young.

Morris Barker: Oh yeah, 23 or 25. And so after we arrived in Italy, we were stationed near Foggia, Italy with the 451st Bomb Group, and the enlisted men lived in 6-man tents. The officers lived in tents also. There were four of them – best pilot, copilot, navigator and bombardier. And we flew missions of course. There were still enemy in northern Italy then, so we were bombing northern Italy and into Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany. I flew 7 missions. We were shot down on my 7th mission, which was we were on our way to Vienna, Austria to bomb the German oil refinery there. Of course the oil producing facilities in Germany were very well protected because of the fact of such a shortage.

Sure, it was a high value target.

Morris Barker: So on the way to Vienna, in central Hungary, we were attacked by a German ME-109, and I was flying tail gunner that day, and I looked down and out to the right coming in

at the same elevation we were, coming in about 7 o'clock, I saw three ME-109's coming in. They turned in right behind our squadron and right behind our plane. The whole squadron was shooting at them. We shot down two ME-109's, but they hit our number two engine and of course it exploded and the plane was on fire pretty much all over. In fact, it burned the outside off. You could just see through the ribs. And then the pilot's and the engineer's chutes were on fire, so they burned to death in the plane. We were flying with 9 crew members that day. 6 of us got out, 3 were killed. The radio operator's chute didn't open when he bailed out. Of course we were flying at about 23,000 feet. At some altitudes, you're looking at 40 below zero. Of course we wore heavy, fleece-lined flying uniforms. When I bailed out, I bailed out right after the radio operator. When I got to the ground, I saw him lying there and just a very small portion of his chute had bounced out apparently out of the cover when he hit the ground. Then one of the gunners, I got to him and when he bailed out, apparently he hit his head on the side of the plane some way. He had a big gash in his head. One of the Hungarians was bouncing the bicycle up and down on his stomach and I finally got that stopped, and we wore a little first aid kit on our parachute harness, so I bandaged him up, and then they took him on into a small town where they gave him further treatment. We landed like I say near Lake Belton in western Hungary, and landed near a farm where there were two farmers and a small boy working around the haystack. So I went up to them and they took my heavy flying clothes and my parachute and the .45 we wore in our holsters, and hid them in the haystack. Of course I didn't know why. I couldn't converse with them.

So you didn't have any idea if they were pro-German or not, right?

Morris Barker: No, I didn't at the time, but I found out later that they actually saved my life. Shortly after that, about 10 guys came up with rifles and they were unhappy. They showed me pictures of women and children we had killed in previous missions, and they gave me a little rough treatment on the ground and got me up and told me just to take off, of course in sign language. I was not able to talk to them. I feel that if I had started off that they would probably have shot me for trying to escape, but the two farmers wouldn't let me go. Then shortly after that, the Germans came up in trucks and they picked us up. But there were several planes shot down that day. They had anti-aircraft and they had fighters all over the place. So they picked us up and took us into Budapest where we were put in an old prison there, and we stayed there for interrogation for about a week in individual cells.

So what was going through your mind during that time? Were you worried that you were going to be executed? Were you trying to think of how to escape? It's something that's pretty unfathomable to be in the situation you were in.

Morris Barker: Of course at 19, I really didn't know what was going to happen. Of course you have those concerns, but they took us in and put us in this prison, and we were interrogated each day, and then after about a week, they put us on a troop train, one of the small – of course over there, the railroads were in pretty bad shape they had been bombed so much, and they only had those small cars, what we call 40 and 8 cars – and they assigned us, I think we had about 20 or 30 in this one car with the guards, and one of the guards happened to be a graduate of the University of Wisconsin.

And he was German?

Morris Barker: Yeah, he was German, and after he finished the University of Wisconsin he went back and of course the war started and they wouldn't let him out of Germany. So he was very nice to us. He was a German, but -

What things did he say to you?

Morris Barker: I don't remember. Just general conversation about going to school in the States, and the reason he stayed over there, when the war started he couldn't get out. We were on that troop train, went up through Poland, and then on up to northern Germany right on the Baltic. We were just about 20 miles from south of the Baltic and we were placed in that prison camp, Stalag Luft 4. This prison camp was divided into four lagers, A, B, C, and D. When we first got in, and by the way there were 10,000 prisoners in this one POW camp – we were put in compound B at first, and it was full, the barracks were full, so they had what we referred to as little dog houses between the barracks where we had about 10 people in there, very crowded, and they locked us in at night and of course the guards were patrolling the area with dogs. So we couldn't get out and if you had to go to the bathroom, you had a can in there. And we were in compound B for I guess about two weeks.

Were you kept with the other men from your plane?

Morris Barker: Some of them. Of course we were all in the same camp.

I just didn't know if they would split you up.

Morris Barker: Some of us were in different barracks. But we had two role calls a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and they would line us up in 5 deep in a column and they would count us off. They had the lager commandant out there, and of course they would count us off, and when you went out for role call, if you were late, well you usually got a rifle butt. Of course I never did get involved with that. So one day we were out for role call, one evening, and three FW-190s, German planes, came over at tree top level. The first two did a snap roll, and they made fine. The third one did a snap roll but he crashed in the woods, and of course we heard the explosion and smoke and so forth. Everybody was claiming the kill, you know, all the prisoners, so the Germans got mad and ran us all back in the barracks. Then they were in the process of completing lager C. When they completed lager C, those prisoners who were in the little dog houses were moved over to lager C and we were put in, there were 10 barracks, 5 on each side, with an open space in the middle. The compound was surrounded by high bobbed wire and towers on the east corner and in the middle, a guard tower, and they had a little fence inside the main fence that between it and the main fence was more or less no man's land, and if you got over in there, there was the possibility of being shot. So we stayed in this camp and the food was very short. This was in August, we arrived there in August of 1944. I was shot down August 22nd, 1944. Food was very short for all Germans, so we lived on a lot of potatoes and what we called kollerabi (???) soup, the beet, kind of a beet type vegetable, and we got an occasional Red Cross parcel, and they would divide it up, and the cans were punctured because they didn't want them collected so you can start collecting them and maybe escape and have food to escape with. After you emptied the can, you had to take them up to the gate and line them up because they didn't want them used as tools for digging to escape underground. This went on and we arrived in the camp in August of '44, and maybe around the 1st of September, I'm not sure of the date on that, we were in this camp and we heard artillery fire in the distance. Later we found out the Russians were moving in from the east, and for some reason the Germans didn't want us liberated, so on February the 6th, 1945, the Germans started moving us west. Of

course we were divided up in groups, about 30 or 40 people in each group with guards. They had long machine guns and they had guard belts so we would march down the middle of the road and they would be on the outside. So this is actually the coldest weather in history in northern Germany, and so we would walk every day, and sleep on the ground or in barns at night, and of course there was snow on the ground being in the wintertime, and we had a blanket apiece, and we'd put on blanket down and cover another, which didn't help much but it helped a little. In the morning the blanket would be frozen on the ground and you would have to peel it off, so to tell you how cold it was. So we were on this march 86 days, and I guess total miles were about 500 because we marched from northern Germany west up to Swinemunde and then on down to Lurenburg down to southwest of Berlin. At one time during this 86 days, they put us on boxcars and took us to another came which was stalag 11B at Falenboskal (???), Germany, which was an international camp. It had all type of prisoners – Allied prisoners – Russian, Polish, or English, and so forth – and they were very friendly to count – there were just people dying in the thing. Every day you would see them pull them out, pushing them out in wheelbarrows to bury them outside the camp. So they put us on these small boxcars. They put 63 of us on one car and you could just barely sit down. We were on it three days with the doors closed, and there were little windows on each end with bars across them, and some guys tied their blankets together and would manage to get up there to relieve the crowded situation a little bit. People had dysentery, malaria, so it was quite an eventful three days on that small boxcar.

Through all this ordeal, sir, the whole time that you were being held as a prisoner of war, did you ever lose hope that you were eventually going to get out of there?

Morris Barker: No, I never did. I never did lose hope.

Why do you think that was?

Morris Barker: I guess it's the way I was raised and of course when you are 19 years of age, you don't care much I guess, but anyway, of course we lost the 7 people in our group. They died, and they would take them out and bury them. Then we were in Falenboskal (???) about a week. While I was there, I ran across a guy I graduated from high school with.

Wow.

Morris Barker: He was in the Army and was captured, and his actual name was Rex Germany, which is a coincidence, so we were there in stalag 11B about a week. Then they took us out of there and we started marching back north, retracing our steps. Then on May the 3rd, 1945, we got up one morning. We were sleeping in barns that night. We got up the next morning and there wasn't a German in sight. About that time, a British officer drove up in a jeep and told us that we were liberated. What had happened, the British were moving through, fighting the Germans, moving through, and they liberated us and told us to report to a certain place and get there any way we could. So we walked there and got rides on backs of trucks, British trucks or motorcycles or any way we could. After we got to this place, they put us on a plane, flew us to, I'm trying to think where it was, I can't remember. Then from there they took us down to Le Havre, France. That was the place where all the prisoners were brought into and they were put on a ship and brought back to the states. So we were able, in this camp and all the camps in Le Havre, France, were named after cigarettes – Chesterfield, Lucky Stripe, so forth – we were in Camp Lucky Strike. Then they put us on a ship, and our ship happened to be the Sea Robin, and so we got back to the States. I forgot, it took us about7 days I believe, right into New York. Stayed there just overnight, and they put us on a troop train and took us down to San Antonio,

and we were there only I recall I think just one night and then they gave us a furlough and we went home. They gave us a 60-day furlough.

If I could stop you there sir and go back a bit, when you were first taken prisoner, how long was it before your family found out you had been taken prisoner and were even still alive?

Morris Barker: The first notice my mother got was about three weeks after I was shot down. All it said was missing in action. Or I've got the telegram, missing in action. Shortly after that, they found out that I was a prisoner of war. They notified my mother I was a prisoner of war, and just about I guess two or three weeks after I was shot down before my parents were notified.

Were you able to get anything from them through the Red Cross?

Morris Barker: Never received a letter, I never received a package, not one thing. We were permitted to write cards supplied by the Red Cross and they received all of my cards, but I never received, and my mother wrote and sent me packages. Where they wound up, I don't know.

I'm sure some German stole them.

Morris Barker: Probably so. And then I was on 60 days leave at home, and then I got orders to report back to Florida, and I was there at Miami Beach I guess about a week or two, and then I was assigned to Cartersville Air Force Base in Fort Worth. I was a service records clerk for about, just waiting on getting enough points for discharge. They had a point system. I was there about three months working in headquarters there, service records clerk correspondent, and then I was shipped to Wichita Falls, Texas, at Shepherd Field where I was discharged, which is only 28 miles from my home. So this was in October of 1945. Of course the war was still going on in Japan there in the Pacific and didn't end until September of '45. But I was discharged then in October. Then I went to work for a company selling dry good clothes that I worked for a while during high school.

All in all, how much time did you spend as a POW?

Morris Barker: 11 months.

11 months.

Morris Barker: I was a little over 9 months in the hands of the Germans but they count it until you return to the American military. So I was 9 months in the hands of the Germans and a total of 11 months.

How did the other 6 members of your crew that survived the crash, how did they fare as POW's?

Morris Barker: They did fine.

They all survived?

Morris Barker: Yeah, in fact I corresponded with most of them. In fact, we had the 451st Bomb Group reunion so I went for several years and I saw a lot of my crew members there. Of course most of them are dead now. But I did see 'em.

You mentioned when you were first shot down that they interrogated you for several days. What were the things that they wanted to know?

Morris Barker: Oh, they wanted to know the mission we were on. Of course they already knew this. They had a very good intelligence system, what outfit we were in, and just I mean we weren't brought in several days and they interrogated us. We were there about two weeks, but they didn't interrogate us every day. In fact I was interrogated I think only one time at that time. But I got out of the service in October of '45 and then I started college in January of '46, just three months later, and I finished Texas A&M in January of '51. Then I went to work, do you want this other information?

Sure, whatever you want to share. The crux of what we're trying to get is your memories of your time in the service, and things that you think are important that future generations listening to this, that they get out of your memories, things that you want them to know.

Morris Barker: After I got out of A&M, I went to work for U.S. Gibson and worked there 7 years, and then I worked for General Tire & Rubber Co. and worked there 30 years and retired, and lived in Odessa, and while in Odessa, we have a branch of Texas University there, it's the University of Texas ___ out there, finished my Masters in Personnel Management. I was in personnel work all the time. Then after I finished 60 hours, the military came out with a program if you had 60 hours of service in current military service, you could take some written tests and a physical, and if you passed them you could get a commission. So this was in, I believe this was about December of '48. They came out with this program if you had the prior service and 60 hours of college you could get commission. I found out later they would be training us for Korea which started in 1950. So my wife and I packed up the old '47 Chevrolet coupe we had, which we didn't have much then, and moved to my home in Electra. I was to report to Fort Seal, Oklahoma, which was just across the river from where I lived. So my wife and I went up to Fort Seal to look around and I was to report up there and I would be assigned to the artillery group. But before that, a couple of service men came in and swore me in as a second lieutenant. Then I went up there and when I got back to my home in Electra from Fort Seals visiting up there, I had a letter from the government says your reporting day has been moved up. So I could either report on the new date or resign my commission. So I was already in Texas A&M, so I resigned my commission and went ahead and finished Texas A&M. Then I retired in October of '84. Of course lived there in Odessa and then we moved to Waco. I have a daughter living there. By the way, we lived in Odessa 50 years and my wife and I were married 62 years. She just died four months ago.

I'm sorry to hear that.

Morris Barker: And here in Waco. So that's pretty much my life.

I wanted to ask you some more things about being a tail gunner. I know that was a very challenging position. What did you find, I guess two-part question, what was it you liked the most about being a tail gunner, and what was it you liked the least?

Morris Barker: Well, I flew both tail and nose, and flying nose gunner, I recall seeing when we would be in a heavy flack area, you see the flack out in front of you bursting and you know you're gonna be up there just a few seconds. You didn't know whether they were going to fire another round and hit you or not, but that was one of the things that would give you problems. Then the fear that you also saw flack and you saw fighters. We had pretty good coverage. We

had P-38 flying escort with us and P-51's. In fact we had a black P-51 group that flew with us. They were very good at keeping the Germans away. But on the day we were shot down, I recall seeing some P-38's and FW-19's in a dog fight up about 8 o'clock high, and I was watching them have a dog fight and I looked down and saw these three planes coming in behind us. So that's when we were shot down. I was on a B-24, and on a B-24, the turrets are hydraulically operated and on a B-17 they were electric. Just as a sideline, I kept my suit right outside my turret, of course a little bit crowded in there, you know, so I got out when we were hit. Black smoke was trailing us from our engine and the side of the plane was on fire. I put my chute on. Of course we didn't have any training in bailing out. We were just told to delay opening your chute as long as you can to keep from getting shot from the ground. I put my shoes on and I had saw where I had to pull the rip cord with my left hand. So I stayed over the opening of that plane and turned that chute around where I could pull it right-hand. I thought about that a lot, gave me a lot of nightmares in fact. If that plane had moved a little bit, I could drop that chute right through that hole, and so that's one thing I remember. But like I say, I was on 7 missions and I was shot on the 7th on August 22, 1944.

What was it like on your first mission? What are your memories of your first mission?

Morris Barker: My first mission was only about a four-hour mission. It was in northern Italy. I forget what we were bombing, troops or installation or something.

Did you feel nervous?

Morris Barker: Possibly, I don't remember, that's been a long time ago. Of course most of our missions were never more than 6 hours, or 8 hours normally, and it was just bitterly cold all the time you were at the ___. Were you in the service?

Yes sir, Marine Corps.

Morris Barker: Marine Corps. What branch of the Marine Corps?

Well, the Marine Corps as an officer and before that I was an infantryman. So pretty much the combat arms side.

Morris Barker: Well, that's about all I know.

I still have a few other questions for you if you don't mind answering. When your plane was struck and you had to bail out, did it seem like things happened very quickly? A lot of times you hear people describe an incident as things seeming to slow down or be in slow motion. Do you remember what it was like for you during those moments?

Morris Barker: Well, I wasn't just real rushed, I recall. I got out and I was talking to our radio operator and we were checking our chutes and so forth. He bailed out right in front of me. He had one his chute didn't open. And he bailed out right in front of me. Then it seemed like maybe another one or two bailed out before I did. I just don't recall. But I don't recall just getting out of the turret and jumping right out. I put on the chute and of course we didn't linger long with the thing on fire.

After you returned back home, did you ever have a chance to meet with or talk to the families of the crew that you lost?

Morris Barker: Yes, I talked to the radio operator that his chute didn't open, he was from Canton, Ohio, and I talked to his parents. In fact my mother and the other crew members corresponded by letter. I've got all those letters. In fact I've got I think four thick books of everything that happened in the service.

Well I'm sure, too, that with the radio man's family probably appreciated being able to talk to you since you were the last one that saw their son alive and they probably wanted to know what exactly had happened.

Morris Barker: Sure. Well of course we only lost 3, and now it would be expected, a lot of times you didn't fly with the crew that you trained with in the States because if somebody had been shot down or somebody finished their mission and moved in, you filled in. I was filling in that day. The only two original crew members on that flight was me and the bombardier. We were flying with another crew. So I didn't know the pilot or the engineer very well. In fact I didn't know them at all. I had not flown with them. I always flew with my regular crew. But like I say, I did talk to the radio operator's family.

What were your memories of the B-24 as a plane?

Morris Barker: I thought it was a good plane. We had a little further range than the B-17 as I recall. And it was as you know the B-24, the four-engine plane, it's a high wing as opposed to a low wing in the B-17, and it was a tri-landing gear, it had a nose well, and the B-17 was what they called a tail dragger. It had of course two front wheels and the tail wheel. I had no complaints for the B-24. They get hit, they're gonna all burn.

Sure. You mentioned you served time as both a nose gunner and a tail gunner. Did you find that one was more challenging than another?

Morris Barker: No, they had turrets about the same size. The nose as I recall on one mission, we were in fact just approaching the target area, and you could look down from the nose turret down to the bomb bay, and so I was flying nose that mission and I happened to look out to the right and there was a plane sliding under us with an engine on fire, and I found out later it blew up right under us. I didn't think there would be a chance of anybody getting out of that plane, but some of the guys that were sent to the same camp I was in, I was talking to them and they were treated pretty badly by the Germans when they got to the ground. In fact the whole crew got out. I don't know how they did it.

That's amazing.

Morris Barker: As I said we were approaching the target, and we were bombing a town or a military installation that was near a town, so they killed a lot of women and children, people, so they made that crew dig graves. They thought they were digging their own grave for a while. But they were sent to a prison camp.

When you were a tail gunner or a nose gunner, how would that be decided? Was it just kind of a flip for the dice or did you trade off? How was it determined what day you were going to be a tail gunner?

Morris Barker: They assigned you. In other words, if you flew in your regular crew, well you flew in your position. It was the tail at all times. But if you flew in another crew, you may be a waist gunner or a nose gunner. You flew where the vacancy was. You were assigned.

That makes sense. When you were in camp as a POW and you weren't on those long marches, I know there was a period of time where you were confined to the camp, how would you and your fellow POW's pass the time?

Morris Barker: I'm gonna change phones, I'm just about out of battery. Can you hear me now?

I can hear you fine.

Morris Barker: OK. In these barracks, like I say, it was rows on each side of a long hall, and the rooms, we had 26 POW's in our room, and when we got into a longer stay, they'd give us an armful of hay, put it on the floor, put a blanket over it, and cover it with his own blanket. So we slept on the floor. 13 on one side and 13 on another. And that's where the barracks were. I became good friends with a guy by the name of Joe Grescamp from Indiana, and we would walk around. You could walk around the compound as long as you didn't get over across that little small fence. You could walk around the compound. So we did that, and there wasn't much to do. Like we had two role calls a day and we would be in the room, and some of them were pulled out to peel potatoes to cook, and what they did, we had a pail and we'd go over and get it full of potatoes and we'd come back and divide them out among the people in our room, and anytime you got bread, you divided it out very closely because it was a shortage.

Did you ever get anything to read? Were you given any bibles or have anybody that was a chaplain?

Morris Barker: We had a chaplain, sure did. Like we had two chaplains. One of them was Oliver Guernsey, and then we had two doctors in this camp who had been shot who had been prisoners. I don't know what their circumstance whether they were ground, I don't remember whether they were ground crew or what. We had two doctors and they were with us on the march also. And they testified before Congress after that about the treatment and so forth. If you want to look up stuff on your computer, you just go to Google and type in AXPOW, and in fact this year I was going through the range. I was in a state commander former prisoners of war, and I was chapter commander and state commander, and I was a director on a national level and this year I'm senior vice commander, and I'm a candidate for national commander in September. We have a conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

Well that's great.

Morris Barker: And if I'm elected, I'll be commander for one year.

So you definitely stayed involved with veterans and organizations and prisoner of war organizations.

Morris Barker: I'll tell you, I've got on this information I've written you plucked a lot of pictures that I managed to get from our camp.

We'd love to see those.

Morris Barker: I can have 'em to you. What is your email address?

What I'll do sir is I'll give you my mailing address. Yeah, let me give you my email address if you want to write to me.

Morris Barker: What I'll do, I'll just send this information by email.

Oh that'd be great, yes sir. That would be the easiest. My email address is james.crabtree@glo.state.tx.us.

Morris Barker: OK I'll send this to you.

Yes sir, we'd love to be able to see those and put those on our web site. Well sir, it's been a real honor being able to talk to you. I really appreciate that. It means a lot to us. I know everybody here from Commissioner Patterson to every other employee at the Land Office really appreciates your service and sacrifice for our nation.

Morris Barker: Well I appreciate you calling and giving me the opportunity. I have talked before groups, especially in Odessa, you know, school groups and other groups before. In fact, we appeared before Congress of which this has been several years ago, of which Obama was on the Veterans Commission at that time, and we used to have our mid-winter Congress in Washington D.C. where we would meet with Congressmen trying to get some of our interests passed, and so we did that quite often.

That's great sir. Well again, I'm honored and definitely appreciate your time, and you've got my phone number and my email address, so if there's anything you ever need, please just let me know and then we're going to make copies of this interview onto CDs soon and I'll be putting that in the mail to you soon along with my card and a few other things.

Morris Barker: All right, fine.

Yes sir.

Morris Barker: All right, I'll get this to you in the next few days.

That would be great. Yes sir, well have a great weekend.

Morris Barker: Thank you very much.

[End of recording]