

**John Thurmon:**

Thurmon and his crew flew a bombing mission over Berlin on 1944-06-21, and they were shot down by flak. Thurmon landed safely and hid his parachute and tried to get off the streets as the Allies were still conducting a bombing run. An air raid warden was patrolling the road and motioned for Thurmon to walk with him. Thurmon asked the air warden about the gray particles that were falling from the sky, to which he replied it was from the flak the Germans shot at the Allied bombers. The air warden took him to a home shelter where he briefly interacted with several sixteen and seventeen-year-old girls. He mentioned that when he talked to them, they told him they were slave laborers from Eastern Europe, doing menial tasks for the German Wehrmacht. A German officer and female interpreter later interrogated him; she spit on him, and the officer hit him in the face since they considered him a traitor (he was of German descent). A young soldier then took him outside the building, most likely to shoot him until a Luftwaffe officer came and took custody of Thurmon. He was taken to Stalag Luft III.

**Guy Marinello:**

Marinello was a radio operator in the 487<sup>th</sup> BG, 836<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, and their plane was named "Forever Amber." The crew was flying a mission on April tenth, 1945, when the plane was strafed by a Messerschmitt Me 262, which caught the plane on fire and killed the tail gunner.<sup>1</sup> Most of the crew landed in Allied lines after bailing out, but Marinello and two others fell in the German lines. He was then attacked by the German Home Guard (the Volkssturm) and civilians who were hitting him with anything they could find. A rifle butt hit him in the face

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<sup>1</sup> The Messerschmitt was the world's first operational jet-powered fighter plane.

and knocked one of his back teeth out. A German Luftwaffe officer drove up and shot a round into the air and ordered the Germans to stop, saving Marinello from a lynching. He was then taken to a jail where he received no treatment or food for several days.<sup>2</sup>

### **Carelton E. Gillmore:**

Gillmore was a navigator on a B-17 whose plane was hit by a Me 262 during the crews' nineteenth bombing mission. They pulled out of formation and started to bail out as the plane started going in a crash trajectory. Gillmore managed to land, but he did so upside down in a tree. By this time, German soldiers began searching the area for the crewmen, and they moved directly under him. He tried to pull out his Colt .45 to defend himself, but after weighing the odds, he decided against it. The Germans discovered him in the tree shortly and cut him out of his parachute cords, making him fall on his head. While the fall did not injure him, he had to take several moments to relax as he was shaky from the fall.<sup>3</sup> Once he recovered, the six Germans marched him to an interrogation center. During his march to the center, a young fourteen-year-old guard was trying to operate Gillmore's gun. Gillmore noticed that the kid was getting frustrated as he could not get the safeties to release, and he showed the kid how to do them. He also explained to the guards what the dye in his pocket did, as they noticed it seeping out of his suit. Perhaps thinking it was some kind of secret Allied formula, Gillmore disappointed them when he showed that it was merely dye that interacted with the water.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This story is further expanded upon on pages five through seven in John A. Thurmon's oral history transcript, June 6, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The remainder of this story is on pages nine and ten of Carleton's oral history transcript, October 21, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> The dye mentioned was often used by airmen in the case of a crash at sea; the coloring made it easier for rescue crews to see their position in the water.

As the guards marched Gillmore into Celle, he was greeted by German civilians lining the streets to see the captured American airman. Gillmore noted how dejected the civilians looked, which didn't surprise him considering how long the war had been going on. The people did not treat him too harshly, as they only threw some stones, and kids yelled at him in German. Once they arrived outside the jailhouse, the Germans attempted to convince Gillmore to divulge information about the air force by tempting him to stay with a young pretty German woman rather than the jail. Gillmore politely declined the offer, and they took him into the center where he was interrogated extensively.<sup>5</sup>

At one point during the questioning, the German captain ordered Gillmore to be dragged out of the room to be executed; this was a ploy to psychologically scare him, for he was taken back into the interrogation room after a few minutes. Gillmore experienced firsthand how effective German intelligence gathering was for the captain proceeded to tell him intimate details of his life back in America. One story that got to Gillmore was when the captain asked him how was his motorcycle ride with his best friend; this was a story that he had not told anyone back home. Gillmore recalled how uncomfortable this session made him, for he had no idea how they could know any of this information about his life.<sup>6</sup> He was kept in solitary confinement during his time in the center at Pinneberg, where he kept himself busy by making a checkerboard out of a Wrigley Spearmint gum wrapper and played nearly 400 games against himself, by his reckoning. He also began to hallucinate during his time in solitary as he kept seeing heads of lettuce, Hershey bars, and jars of green olives. At the time, he did not know what the

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<sup>5</sup> A fuller description of this interaction is on page eleven of the oral history.

<sup>6</sup> Gillmore never says if he figured out how the German officer knew so much about his personal life or expounds further on the kinds of information they shared with him in the interview.

hallucinations meant. However, after the war, when he went to a therapist, they concluded he had them because his body was lacking those particular food groups during his incarceration. This time in solitary also had him thinking a great deal of home and what the future would be like for him. Sometime later, the guards took Gilmore out of jail and sent him to one of the prison camps.

### **Lloyd Nutter:**

Nutter was a member of an replacement crew for the 401<sup>st</sup> and was shot down during his twenty-ninth mission on 1944-05-28. After landing, he was attacked by civilians, getting his face bloodied up until a German guard came over and got him to lead him to an interrogation center. He did not blame the civilians for beating him up, as he knew they were mad at the destruction during the bombing raids.<sup>7</sup>

### **Louis Loevsky:**

On a bombing run to Berlin, Louis and his crew were hit by flak and suffered a mid-air collision with another B-17. Out of the twenty men involved in the crash, only seven were able to jump out of the plane safely.<sup>8</sup> As Louis was parachuting down, he was getting shot at by a nearby garrison, which he tried desperately to avoid landing near. After landing in a tree, he was picked up by two members of the Wehrmacht. Three SS troopers came by, and they argued over

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<sup>7</sup> Lloyd Nutter had a brief interview and, therefore, only briefly described his landing and subsequent capture by the Germans.

<sup>8</sup> According to Louis, two men of the “Rebel Yell” and five men of “Terry and the Pirates,” were the crash survivors. He was a crew member on “Terry and Pirates” but he does not list off the names of the crews in full.

who would get custody over him until the SS finally stormed off. During the argument, Louis hid his dog tags, as he did not want them to know that he was a Jew. As the Wehrmacht took him to the jail, German civilians were closing in around him saying, “String him up. Hang him. Lynch him.” The troops guarding him pulled out their sidearms and began to push the civilians back away from their prisoner. On the train ride to his camp, two German soldiers were assigned to watch over Louis. When the guards were together, they paid Louis very little attention, but the moment one left the compartment for some reason, the remaining guard would offer him a cigarette or a drink.<sup>9</sup> Louis thought that it was intriguing the men did not trust each other, fearing that they would be turned in for showing kindness to the enemy.

#### **Ivan Finkle:**

Finkle was a B-17 tail gunner whose plane was shot down on his twenty-second mission, to Berlin, on 1944-03-06. As he landed, he saw around six civilians running up at him, and he pulled his Colt .45 out on them. He quickly found out that they were members of the Dutch resistance, and they took him and his crew to a nearby village's convent. The sisters tended to their wounds and tried to make them comfortable. The resistance members came back and informed the airmen that since the civilians took them through town, the resistance could not officially help them since they had been seen. The police chief, a German sympathizer, came and took them to jail, where they processed before they moved to a POW camp.

#### **Richard Curtis Greene:**

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<sup>9</sup> These stories are described further on pages eight and nine of Loevsky's oral history transcript, October 18, 2003.

Greene was part of the 398<sup>th</sup> BG as a gunner, whose crew was shot down on a bombing run to Berlin on 1944-06-21. He bailed out of the plane and pulled his parachute cord near 25,000 feet, according to his reckoning at the time. His parachute got caught on a building, and he was captured by two German soldiers who held him at gunpoint until a police officer came to take him. He noted how the civilians came out in the streets, and they were not happy to see him. Greene tried to keep up with the officer, and he got punched in the mouth hard by a civilian; Greene recalled how that punch messed his mouth up for around eight to ten days.<sup>10</sup> He was then taken to a holding cell with forty to fifty other captured Americans where they were individually interrogated before heading to a prison camp. The airmen had their personal effects taken from them at this point; Greene got his watch and ring given to him by his girlfriend confiscated. He also carried a New Testament bible with him, which made the interrogation officer angry as he told Greene, “You carry this, and yet you come over here and bomb us.” After several days of interrogations, Richard and the other American prisoners were then taken to Stalag Luft IV.

### **Sidney Brown:**

Brown was a member of the 491<sup>st</sup> BG, whose plane got shot down on 1944-08-24, on a bombing run to an airfield near Hanover. They were hit with heavy flak, and the pilot eventually called for the crew to “jump ship.” Brown tried to help his friend Bill, who was wounded, and they managed to roll out of the plane through one of the escape hatches.<sup>11</sup> He and several of his crew landed in a plowed field uninjured, and they were quickly rounded up and taken to a nearby

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<sup>10</sup> Page seven of Greene’s oral history transcript, September 23, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Page ten of Sidney Brown’s oral history transcript, June 19, 2003.

village. Brennen, the crews' engineer, had flak wounds in his stomach, so he was taken to the hospital where he was operated on without being given any anesthesia.

The following morning, the crew marched to a train station, and they got off at Russelsheim, where they were assigned two guards upon their arrival. Russelsheim was the site of an RAF bombing the night before, where about 300 people died in the raid. As the crew was marched through the town's streets, the civilians began throwing rubble and hitting them with shovels and two-by-four's. Once the crew got to a narrower alley, the civilians started trying to separate the crewmen. Brown noted that the civilians pulled Dumont, a crewman that sprained his ankle the day before, off Bill's back.<sup>12</sup> While the crewmen were dealing with the civilians, Brown saw that the guards were not doing anything to diffuse the situation. A civilian on a bike stopped near the guards and began talking with the guards rapidly, wanting them to get out of the way in regards to the crewmen. Brown described the chaotic scramble as he and the crew continued to try and protect themselves as the civilians kept attacking them. After a harsh beating, the Germans lined up the crewmen on the sidewalk. The men, too hurt to resist much, meekly complied to the mob. Brown remembered hearing about four or five shots ring out as they fired on the prisoners. The firing stopped once they got to Sidney, and a short time later, a truck pulled up to load the Americans on it.

Brown did his best to pretend that he was dead so the Germans would not finish him off. While the rest of the men were getting loaded onto the truck, he briefly talked to a fellow

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<sup>12</sup> Brown describes the story of the lynching in detail, starting on page eleven and going to page sixteen. Some of his story is hard to follow on a first read-through as these are hard events for Brown to recount clearly.

crewman who was still alive. Being a catholic, the airman said the Rosary to himself, and then he whispered to Brown that he should pray as well. Brown remarked, "I've already prayed enough, pal." At this time, a villager began swinging a piece of wood at anybody showing any side of movement, missing Brown's head as he was covered by the lip of the wagon. Before the Germans had dug the fresh graves at the cemetery, the four villagers left the Americans and cart behind as the air raid siren began to sound off. Brown waited for several minutes before he started moving, and he heard his friend Bill call out to him. While some of the other crewmen were still alive, he and Bill were the only ones that were in any condition to escape the cemetery on their own. The two men made a hard choice and decided to leave their comrades behind as they could not take them on their escape from Russelsheim.

The two men slowly made their way through the countryside, being careful not to be seen by Germans while on the roads or fields. One night they crawled into a haystack to rest after a long and keep warm during the cold nights. The next morning a man and his daughter came to work on the haystacks when she discovered Brown and Bill in one of them. After talking with her dad, they moved onto the next stack, and he and Bill quickly ran from the field. As they continued their trek, they encountered an older man with a gun who began to fire at them, although Brown couldn't rightly remember if he did indeed shoot at them. Eventually, the man found them after they tried to hide, and he held them at bay until a German Luftwaffe Officer came to get them. After the customary interrogation session, Brown and Bill were sent to Stalag Luft IV.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brown's recounting of his escape attempt is expanded upon in pages sixteen through nineteen of the oral history, June 19, 2003.



