

WWII – POW  
By Louis Huston Gill  
s/o Stewart Preston & Addie (Anderson) Gill  
Interviewed by Audrey J. Denny Lambert  
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In High School I decided, thought I would like to be a doctor, cause I like Biology really well that was my best subject. Before I got out of High School I found out that, through my friend's father who was an accountant at Brigg's, that they were going to take some contracts from Boeing or aircraft companies to build wings, airplane wings here in Detroit. But they didn't have the workers and they were going to have to train them they were even going to have to build the factories for them.

So I went over to Brigg's to ask them about it and I asked for the personnel director and it so happened his name was Gill. The secretary asked me, "Are you related to him?" I said, "No". So she said you will have to wait a while and she offered me some candy. She said, "What do you want to see him about?" I said, "Well it was kinda personal." She said, "Are you sure your not related to him?" Anyhow when I got to see him I asked him about them building airplane parts and he said, "Well you know something I don't know." And I said, "Well I just wanted to get in on the training that you are going to have to give to people for these jobs." He said, "OK I'll put you on the list, you will be the first person on the list.

So the summer before I got out of High School they called me and they said they were going to give a course on aircraft riveting and sheet metal work at one of the local schools. So I went over to it and when I was taking this course this guy had flown with Capt. Edward "Eddie" Rickenbacker in WWI. After the war they were doing barn storming. He got me interested in flying. I thought that sound better than being a doctor, you know. Anyhow, I find out that in order to learn how to fly, I figured it would be a good future in flying, so I found out that in order to make money at it you had to get a commercial pilot license which there wasn't that many commercial pilots. I understood to learn how to fly heavy stuff you had to join the service pretty well because you couldn't afford to do it on your own.

So I went down to the air force recruiting office and they said you had to have two years of college and be 20 years old or something like that. I thought well that alright I would have to go to school anyhow so I figured I would work for a couple of years and save my money and go to school till then. My mother always said when I told her I wanted to go to college that "Oh you just want to become an educated fool, huh?" I said, "It would be better to be an educated fool than an uneducated fool."

So anyhow when I got out of High School I went to work for Bell Telephone and then a few months later Brigg's called me they had built a factory on Connor Ave. and asked me if I wanted to come work for them. I was making about 40 cents an hour and they were going to start me 70 to 75 cents an hour. So my friend that got me in there said, "Are you crazy you got a lifetime job here at Bell." I said, "Yea, but I'm going to get twice the

money and I don't intend to work here all my life." So I went to work for them and the UAW came in because they wanted the auto workers to have priority over outsiders to get the jobs in case they got laid off or anything. So when they came in the wages jumped from 75 cents up to a dollar twenty.

Anyhow when I was working there the army called me and asked if I was still interested in flying and I said, "Sure." They said come on down and we will give you a test. They said we give you a test if you have not had two years of college and if you pass it that will be the equivalent of it. You will let you in providing you pass the physical. So that is what I did and I passed it and I went into cadets and I think I just turned 20 at the time. That was just about the war started 1942. I went through cadets training. They asked me before I ever went in if I ever slept walk and several other things and I said, "Yes" and they still took me in. After I got in I went to Santa Anna, CA and they washed me out for sleep walking. They said, "You sleep walk for we are going to wash you out." I said, "Good let me out of the service." They said, "No we can't do that." So then I went to a Chaplain and he said, "What church do you belong too?" I said, "I don't belong to one." He said, "Well then I can't help you."

Anyway I monkeyed around and finally one day I was swabbing the floors at headquarters and a General came walking in and I stopped mopping and saluted him. He went to the Colonel's office and I thought by golly this is my chance if I ever had one so I put the mop down and went in talked to the Colonel. I said, "I don't think it's fair that they should wash me out on the basis of sleep walking when I told them before I came in. I said, "I think you should reinstate me or let me out all together," and I said, "I think I might even write my congressman." So the General said, "Well", as he was laid back in his chair, "I think this guy's got a good point I think you should put him back in." So they reinstated me.

So then I went to flying school and at that place you had to solo within 4 hours. Now mind you that they check you after 2 hours of flying time in and then they check you after the 2 more hours of flying time and then kept checking you. I finally said, "I am tired of this either wash me out or put me in I don't want anymore of this stuff" They said, "OK we will let you go." Mind you at the time they had Chinese students there, flying students who got 25 hours of flying time to solo in when they were only giving Americans 4 hours. Anyhow they washed a guy out who was in our room. They brought a group of West Pointers in who had two years at West Point and they wanted to be in the air corps. One of these guys was in our room and they washed him out too. They washed 70% of that class out. It so happened that this guy that they washed out that was in our room, this West Pointer, his dad was an Inspector General he came in there and fired all the officer Major right on down.....anyhow that didn't help me.

Anyhow I went back and they gave me the choice of several things so I said, "I'll take bombardier training" and I went to bombardier school. I joined up with a crew in White, CA which is on the Arizona border on the Mohave Desert. Then we went through three phases of training we went from White to Ploater, TX which is also out in the middle of the

desert and then we went up to Dalhart, TX which was just west of Amarillo, TX and then we went overseas.

Our navigator had joined the Eighth Air force in England. Our navigator was on his ninth mission when we went to Swineford. He was a navigator on one crew and I was a bombardier on another crew and they used us to fill in when needed. He bent over to tie his shoelace up and a hunk of ply came up through the floor and hit him right between the eyes. He was in the hospital on the base there and they started poking around and found out that there was a piece of metal in his eye and pulled it out. Anyhow he couldn't fly after that because he couldn't support a oxygen mask. So I sort of inherited the job of navigator and bombardier both.

So on my 21<sup>st</sup> mission, we only had to fly 25 at that time but we would usually start about three of them before we would complete one of them. We would usually lose about 3 to 4 planes on every mission out of 18. So your chance of getting through was very slim. On my 21<sup>st</sup> mission they said, "What would you like to do when you are done with your missions?" They said, "Would you like to be a gunner officer, an ammunitions officer or would you like to fly jeep planes or what?" I said, "I don't care what I do so as long as I go back to the states." They said, "Well, the only way we can send you back to the states is if you take pilot training." I said, "Wait a minute I washed out on pilot training three times." They said, "Don't worry this time we will get you through."

So anyhow on my 24<sup>th</sup> mission I was shot down! Our crew was shot down, our plane was shot down!!! They shot both the wings off the plane I don't know how I got out but I woke up in midair and everything was nice and quiet, no motors, no guns. I looked down after a while, I was on my back and I looked over and I realized I was on my back and I flipped over and I watched the ground come up and all of a sudden I realized I better pull my parachute, which I did. I told myself to hang on to the handle for souvenir and the next thing I knew I didn't have it. And then I realized I should get over near some trees to escape. We were well trained in escape all the time. I directed my shoot near some trees and I finally became hung up in a tree. I realized I was about 60 foot off the ground. I kept pulling branches over and they kept breaking off I was trying to get some footing. I looked down again and I thought I was only about as high as a garage off the ground. So I unbuckle my shoot and dropped.....and I must have been about 60 foot or so and I was laid out in the middle of the snow all sprawled out on my back.

When I came too I heard voices and I realized they were coming to get me so I tried to get up and make a run for it and I realized my ankle was broken, this was common, if you are right handed you would break your right ankle, if you were left handed you would break you left ankle. That is why you are suppose hold you feet together when you come down and bend your knees so it will act like a spring. Anyhow I crawled away in the snow and then I realized that if they didn't find me I would probably freeze to death. So I just sat there in frustration and they soon found me and they picked me up and asked me if I had a gun and I said, "No". So they picked me up and put me on the back of a wagon and hauled me into the village close by and laid me out on a table and the whole village came in to see me, I think, all these people came in. There was pictures hanging

on the wall of different German dignitaries and people asked me different things. They brought a guy in who was an Austrian who was in the German army and he said he was getting ready to be sent to the Russian front in a few days but he spoke a little English and he would act as an interpreter for me. So the people who ask me if I knew who that guy was and I would say, "That's Das Klerey and that's Hitler and they would say, "Ya, Ya. Ya," they were kinda impressed that I would know that.

So they waited until dark and they took me to a place and couldn't get me in, they took me to another place and couldn't get me in they finally took me to a third place and took me in and took me up some stairs on the third floor and put me in a little room. I woke up and I wanted fresh air so I made it to the window and open it, it was a widow that fanned out and I fainted over the window sill and the next morning a couple of sisters came in a pulled me back in. This had been a home for wayward girls they told me before the war but they were using it for convalescent soldiers mostly Germans from the Russian front that had real bad frostbites or amputations. But they had me in a real small room by myself.

They cleaned me up the best they could, I had shrapnel on the top of my head all through my back, buttocks, down to my feet; part of my toe was blown off, my big toe and my ankle was broken and a machine gun bullet had grazed the side of my skull and another one had grazed my knee cap off. They never set my leg or never gave me splints or anything for my leg. They would come in and bring me food one and awhile and after a couple of months they took me to another place and put a cast on my leg but it was already started to heal together so they couldn't set it. So to this day this one leg is shorter than the other and it swells up sometimes.

I was there for a couple of months and they sent me down to Frankford and the first day we were there that evening they were going to put on a little show for us. This is when they gather prisoners together from all over. And the Americans who came over in the daytime knocked the electrical installations out so they didn't have any air raid sirens so that evening we could see the search lights going on but we didn't think it was a air raid because we didn't hear the sirens. The British comes over at night and they do area bombing they don't do precision bombing they come over and do area, kick em out like the Germans do because they bomb at night too. They figure like the Germans and British think daylight bombing is too riskily so that's why they didn't believe in precision bombing and why they fly at night. And their right too! So anyhow they dropped a bomb; we were right next to a railroad yard factory which we weren't suppose to be a military target at all. They dropped a bomb right smack in the square of this little compound and put a hole big enough to drop a two story house in. This is what the British call a "clunky bomb" about a ten thousand pound looks like a big oil tank. The next day it killed a few guys so the next day the Germans banded our parole to take us down to the train station. On the way down there a guy come running out between two building with a two by four and knocked one guys head off, the top of it.

We went across German then to Stalag Luft Three that was where the Great Escape was made, ever heard of that? That was a good camp they had several others, I was there for

nine months. And then the Russians came along so they had to move us again so back across German we went. We went around **Nurnburg** for about a month and then they moved us up north to a place called Osberg. I was sleeping on the ground a lot it was so crowded on the daytime we would go out and lay on the ground. We figured when the Americans came along the Germans would take us down to Austria which would be mountains. I teamed up with this paratrooper guy a Major and he was captured at the Battle of the Bulge just before that and we figured we would try and make a escape on the march. So anyhow I got sick and they had a British doctor there and he a TB expert supposedly and so he got the Germans to let him look at me through a fluoroscope I think they called it and they figured I had TB. What they were seeing was the shrapnel in my back – got some about this big.

So they separated me in a isolated barrack right near the gate and it was fenced off by itself. There was some Russians in there and part of the barracks were free fighting French and I was off by myself. After a couple of days a Russian came over and introduced himself. He said, “They call me Stalin, if there is anything we can do for you let us know.” The next day a Frenchmen came over and he said, “I studied English in school and I would like to talk English with you.” So I said, “Fine,” and we talked quite a bit. He said, “You got any food you can put in with us we can hook together.” Which we always did anyways so I showed him I had a few cans of stuff, so anyhow I hobnobbed with him.

After a couple of weeks of being there I felt good enough to go outside the barracks and use my kriegie stove, “kriegie” short for “kriegesgefangenen is the German word for prisoner. We called everything we had “kriegie” stuff. We would take two tin cans and punch holes in it for a oven and then put another one on top of it and heat water up in it or something. I was outside next to the barracks doing this I had some splinters of wood I was putting in there and I was sitting on the ground to break the wind when a bullet hit close to the wall near my head. I looked around because a fence was behind me and the guard tower. I looked around to see what the guard was doing but he wasn’t even looking my way. So I just figured it was a fluke or something. So I didn’t want to lose the water heating so I kept on and then bang bang a couple more bullets hit. Well I jumped up and ran inside the barracks I wasn’t gonna horse around there any longer.

So I peeked out the window after a while to see what the hell was going on if I could and there was a big mound of dirt on the other side that they had out there on the other side of the fence. And I noticed that the guard was looking the other way over towards that mound of dirt instead of looking at the camp. So I was watching and pretty soon a G.I. came walking up over there on top of the mound and the guard threw his hands up and the G.I. motioned for him to come on down. He came down. Then I heard a big uproar on the other side of the barracks where the road came in from the gate down to from where the flagpole was and on the other side was a row of barracks there at the entrance where they had a whole bunch of different prisoners from different nationalities there and the Germans were always exact about keeping each other separate, the Americans the French the Italians they always kept everybody separate. And they had all these guys in different barracks. So I went over to their barracks and we all ran up to the fence and

here comes a tank real slow rolling down and I was looking at it, you know it was the first I heard about it. Guys were yelling and guys up on front were throwing out sea rations from the tank. You know sea rations are don't you, its food you eat when you are on the move. So someone is yelling, "Where's the flag, where's the flags, on the other side. And a guy would come up on a barrack and someone would throw him up a flag and unfurl it and it would be a different kind of flag for each barrack all the way down. And the second tank and he was rolling around real slow and then a jeep come running in ran around the tanks and up, he had a mounted machine gun. Some guy hauled off in one of the towers and tried to shoot one of these guy's on the tanks. One of the guys on the tank, pow! shot him, the man in the tower that was doing the shooting, he fell out of the tower and his helmet rolled down on the ground. This colored guy ran over and picked it up and he still has it. Another jeep came in around the tanks and it was George Patton. They went up to the flag pole and they lowered the German flag and rolled up the American flag and saluted. Patton got in back in the jeep and was gone.

I was pretty tired by that time so went back into the barracks to lay down and about 15 minutes later some guys came in and said, "We are going to delouse you." They had DDT so we open up our pants and they sprayed us all over with DDT because we were lousy we had had everything, fleas, lice whatever. So I laid down again in about 15 minutes some other guys came in and said, "Were taking you out on a stretcher." OK, I got up and I said, "I can walk." They said "No, No, get on the stretcher." So he took me to a field hospital just a few miles away. So they must have been moving this field hospital up pretty dam quick is all I can say because they were right behind the front lines. The few nights before that we could hear at night trucks and tanks coming through the woods at night with no lights on, this was the German army pulling back.

After they put me in the hospital there I was there for a couple of days and at night I would hear a roar and I would get up and look and the American army was moving down with their headlights on, all day and night. They didn't worry about cover, I mean they were right behind each other, of course the German army was all spread out. Anyhow, when they put me in this field hospital they wrapped me up and got me warm. They said, "You want anything to eat?" I said, "Yea, sure!" They came and they fed me and that just knocked me out, I just fell asleep. Pretty soon they woke me up again and said, "You want something to eat?" I said, "Yea," so I would eat some more. This went on for several days.

Then they came in and took me and put me on a stretcher again and put me on a C-47 this old army cargo plane. They flew me to Reams France and put me in the hospital. They had a schoolhouse they had there about big enough for about 20 children, a big one room schoolhouse. They had about 15 – 20 guys in there. They fed us and gave us all the chocolate malted milk we could drink. I figured they were trying to build us up or something. I would get up and walk around and stuff and after a few days of that they put us on stretchers and put us on took us to a train. There were passengers on this train but we were put on board on the stretchers. They took us across northern France to Sherberg, which was near the invasion site, in fact the invasion site was there, part of it. Again they put us in another field hospital. We were there about a week.

While I was there after a couple of days a guy came by and wanted to take our dental records, he wanted to know if we needed any dental attention. Some of the guys said, "Dental attention! How about sending a doctor around to see if we need any help." They said all they did was take dental records. So the doctor came around a couple days later, we had to laugh at them the way they would see what was wrong with each guy. This guy right across from me was laying there and he had a terrible rash on him just terrible and he was doctor himself in the paratroopers, I don't know where he picked this rash up at. A doctor came up to him and said, "What's wrong with you?" He said, "Well, I got this rash," he showed the doctor and he said, "Well we will take care of that in a couple of days." He said, "Your full of shit." The doctor said, "What!" And he said, "You are full of shit, I telling ya!" He said, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "Look I'm a doctor and I don't have a clue what's this is and nobody else does!" The guy next to me was a paratrooper and was captured at the Battle of the Bulge and this guy would break down and start crying once and a while. He would be talking to you and start bawling like hell.

We asked the nurse if there was a officers club there and she said, "Yea," and we said, "Where is it at?" She said you can't go to it and we said, "Why not?" She said, "You are a patient." We said, "That discrimination." She said, "Well, that's the way it is." So that's the way it was. This Captain and I got up and started walking around and one day we said we will just go to town and take a hike down the road tried of laying around there. So we started walking the road and we came to a road crew there and asked if they had any Calvados, that's like a bootlegged liquor. We walked down and came to a country church, no body was there, beautiful Catholic church. We went on and walked into town and was walking around and came to a latrine right in the main street but the wall was only so high. We went there and was standing at the urinal and the guy next to me was talking to a woman on the outside on the sidewalk, standing there talking to each other. We left and walked on down and came to a PX in town and we went in there and I had paratrooper pants on big pockets on the sides and these old GI shoes turned up on the end, you know, never polished they were rough cut leather and I had a British REF jacket on that was cut off here and no cap, I had a brush cut. I was standing around looking around. This guy came up to me and said, "Can I help you?" I said, "I don't have any money!" She said, "You don't have any money?" I said, "No" She said, "You're an American?, how come your not in uniform?, your in the military." I said, "Yea". She said, " What were you in?" I said, "The Eighth Air force." She said, " Where's your uniform?" I said, "I said I am a RAMP", that means a returning American prisoner. She said, "Oh, it that case all you have to do is sign for it, you can have anything you want." So I said, "In that case I think I will get a couple of uniforms." So I took my clothes off and put on the new uniform on and left my other clothes sit there! And then we walked back to the hospital.

They put us on a hospital ship and brought us back to Charleston, South Carolina. They put me in a TB ward and they had me in a little room down on the end I guess because I was a officer all the rest of the ward was a big open room. Guys were coughing and spitting blood and I thought Holy Christmas! Oh! back on the hospital ship they put me

in a room with a doctor and he been in the paratroopers. We started talking and he asked me what was the matter with me and I said, "Well they got me down for TB but I don't think I have it. He said, "I don't think you have it either." I said, "Maybe I should go to the ship doctor and see if I can get my diagnoses changed. So I tried that and he said, "No I can't do that because you have four or five doctors saying that you got TB and I don't have any equipment to diagnose you." So when I got to Charleston, SC here I am in this room here's all these guys coughing and spitting blood and everything and I thought, boy! if I don't have TB yet I am sure to catch it. I knew what they were going to do with me they were going to send me to Pitt Sims Hospital over in Colorado, that's what they did with those guys.

So I asked the nurse to see the doctor and she said, "Oh, he'll be in." So the next day he didn't come around so I asked the nurse where the doctor was? She said, "Oh, I don't know he'll come by." So I just went on a sit-down strike. I wouldn't eat, I wouldn't any pills or anything. The nurse said, "What's the matter with you?" I said, "I told you I wanted to see a doctor and I'm not doing squat till you let me see him!" Well in about a hour a doctor came in. He said, "What's the matter?" I told him what I thought. He said, "What do you think is the matter with you?" I said, "Well they looked at me through a fluoroscope and they seen shrapnel in my back and they think those are spots on my lungs." So he said, "Well what would you want me to do?" I said, "Anything, get me out of here because they are healed up now." He said, "Well I'll change your diagnoses to abscess of the lung, is that OK?" I said, "Then I can leave?" He said, "Yea, as soon as you get a room for yourself." I said, "There's air base here I can hear the planes taking off all the time and can I get orders to go back to a hospital near my home, Battle Creek, MI instead?" He said, "Sure, but you will have to get your own transportation because they are bringing all these guys back and its taking all the public transportation." I said, "Well I'll see about it."

So I went over to the air field there and went up to the tower and asked them. I said, "Do you have any planes going through here that going back towards Detroit where I can get a ride?" The guy looked and said, "Well we got a A-28 coming through in a couple hours." I said, "OK." So when it came through I talked to the guy and he said, "Well all the room I got is in the bomb bay." I said, "That's OK I can ride in the bomb bay." He said, "Are cleared for flying?" I said, "Yea, I'm a bombardier." So he said, "OK, I'm leaving in a hour." Good, so I went back the orders cut and was back there and he flew me up to Columbus, OH. I took a train and then a bus that took me up to Battle Creek, MI. I checked in there and the next day I went down to Headquarters and I was looking at the bulletin board and a gal came along and she said, "Can I help you?" I said, "No". She said, "Have you been paid lately?" I said, "No". She said, "When was the last time you had been paid." I said, "Well about 16 months ago, 17 months ago!" She said, "17 months ago, where the hell have you been?" I told her I was a prisoner of German. She said, "Oh then come along with me, I'll make your pay voucher out." So she made my pay voucher out and I got paid.

She then sent me in to see the doctors, she said, "You better go see him right away." So I went in and he said, "What's the matter with you?" I said, "Nothing." He said, "What do

you mean nothing?" I said, "Well they had me misdiagnosed as having TB and they changed it to abscess of the lung." He said, "What do you mean they changed it to abscess of the lung?" He said, "Are you spitting blood or anything?" I said, "No." He said, "Where's your home." I said, "Detroit." He said, "Would you like a two week leave?" I said, "You bet your life." He said, "Well you can't have public transportation." I said, "Don't worry about that I can arrange that real easy." So he gave me two weeks leave and I went out on the Hwy. and hitched myself home.

I came to the Federal Building, which used to be the Federal Building it is the courthouse building now downtown that's where the post office was where my dad worked. That was the main post office, my dad worked at the main post office in parcel post. They had counter so big and here's the window. I went in there and I asked the guy at the window, I said, "Is there a guy here by the name of Gill." He said, "Yea, he's around here someplace." I said, "Could I see him?" He said, "Yea." He went back and pretty soon my dad came out and my dad looked at me and he jumped right over that counter!! He hugged me tight. He told the guy, "I'm taking the rest of the day off!" Then we came home together on a streetcar. So that is the way I came home, my parents didn't know I was coming home. No parades for me.....

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