

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Ernest Thorp

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

*Veterans Remember* Oral History project

Interview # VR2-A-L-2009-042

Ernest Thorp, a B-17 co-pilot and Germany POW in the European theater during WW II, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Dec 17, 2009    Location: Thorp farm house in rural Wapella, IL

Date: Dec 23, 2009    Location: Thorp farm house in rural Wapella, IL

Date: Dec 31, 2009    Location: Thorp farm house in rural Wapella, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, Massachusetts

Edited by: Marianne Lawrence and Rozanne Flatt, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 159 pages    Total Time: 2:50 + 2:06 + 2:27 / 2.83 + 2.1 + 2.45 = 7.38 hrs

Session 1: Childhood on the farm, enlistment and pilot training

Session 2: B-17 combat missions in Europe

Session 3: POW experiences & end of WW II

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 02/03/2010.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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# Abstract

## Ernest Thorp, *Veterans Remember*, VR2-A-L-2009-042

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Ernest Thorp was born on February 3rd, 1921 in Clinton, Illinois, and grew up on the family farm a few miles east of Wapella, Illinois. Ernest's father had invested heavily in modern farm equipment prior to the start of the Great Depression, so the family had electricity, indoor plumbing, a telephone, and other advantages others did not have. Still, the 1930s were hard years for the family. Early on, Ernest developed a strong interest in flying, and upon graduation in 1939, his father insisted he go to college and learn more about the world. Ernest had two years at Illinois State College in Normal, then transferred to the University of Illinois, learned to fly, and enlisted into the Army Air Force in May of 1942. He started his formal military training in March of 1943, going through Basic Training in Texas followed by a series of flight schools in Oklahoma before being assigned to a B-17 crew as a co-pilot and finishing his training in Sioux City, IA.

Thorp's B-17 crew flew to Deopham Green, England, but the crew was soon split up, with Thorp flying missions as a co-pilot on a variety of other B-17s as part of the 729th Squadron, 452nd Bomb Group. He flew missions starting in June of 1944 over both occupied France, and Germany. On August 4th, while on his eighteenth mission, Thorp's aircraft was hit by flak. He bailed out over the North Sea, was pulled out of the water by German fishermen, and spent the rest of the war as a Prisoner of War. He spent several days at Dulag Luft (a transit camp) before being sent to Stalag Luft III (shortly after the "Great Escape"). When the Soviets were approaching the camp in late January, he and fellow POWs were marched to another camp, ending up in Stalag Luft VII-A near Moosburg, Germany. The camp was liberated in late April, and Thorp was shipped home a month later. His fiancé met him at the train station in Clinton, IL. Following the war, Thorp returned to the farm and to his father's thriving seed corn business. Through the entire experience, Thorp maintained a meticulous diary.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Wapello, Illinois; one room schoolhouse; hybrid seed corn; Primary flight training in Chickasha, Oklahoma; Basic Flight Training in Enid, OK; Advanced Flight Training in Altus, OK; Deopham Green, England; 729th Squadron, 452nd Bomb Group; life as a Prisoner of War in Nazi Germany; Dulag Luft, near Frankfurt, Germany; Stalag Luft III near Sagan, Germany; Stalag Luft VIIA near Moosburg, Germany;

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