

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Guy Stern
May 1, 1990
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PREFACE

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GUY STERN

May 1, 1990

01:00:52

....cause uh Linda, my family uh was, had, owned a uh small clothing store, uh sold textiles and uh my father was, of course, the main one who sold but my mother helped in the business and also brought up three kids. Uh I, I personally was brought up in a Jewish elementary school. Went from there to a uh German Oberrealgymnasium (ph) uh and then uh came my immigration to the United States. Our family was active in Jewish affairs in the in the city. My father belonged to the Hillel lodge and uh my mother uh likewise and we were active in the Jewish community. Uh but also took a very intensive interest in in Ger...in the German cultural life. My parents belonged to the uh uh theatre group, Freie Volksbuehne, which was a sort of uh a club that attended theaters once or twice a week, so uh that was the, were the premises under which I grew up.

Q: Tell me about you as a child. Uh where did you go to school? Something about your friends?

A: In fact I was recently back at the elementary school when when there was a commemoration of Kristallnacht and my uh and I was invited to give a uh dedicatory speech to the uh uh to the uh of stone that was left there, an artistic re...re-creation at the place where the uh synagogue had stood and they started a monument there, so I went back into that school room. It was a uh one pers...a one class school room, with where kids from the age of six to sixteen were all housed in the same school room and the teacher there was a master of time engineering. He was able to keep the everybody occupied and differently uh except for choral singing or something like that during the entire school day. I have, I've, I'm a teacher myself and I don't think I would have half the skills to do what he had done in giving us all a fantastically good education. Uh all the children who went on, later on to high school, uh were uh prepared as virtually nobody else and excelled then in high school. Uh my activities also centered around a Jewish club which was called Jugendgemeinde. It was headed or instructed or conducted by our cantor, a man by the name of Sisnook (ph) and I've written about him and uh so that was the supplementary education. I think some of my skills if any as a uh as a an analyst of literature started there because we started sort of with ex...exegesis of the uh _____ of _____, the and other and Mishna [ph] and the Talmud and explicated it and this this this uh tendency to read closely was really nurtured in that community. So that was, these are some perimeters under which I grew up and of course in in high school with my uh Jewish as well as Christian friends, and it seemed before 1933 as if some level of integration had been reached. Christian friends came to my house. I to, I to theirs. We were invited to the same parties together and of course it all came unstuck and viciously in 1933.

Q: Tell us about that.

A: Uh in - I'll give, I think I can best illustrate it by one example. I had known one of my friends in high school even before I got to high school, which starts, of course, started of course even

as it does now in Germany at age ten, and uh uh his name was Heinrich, Heinrich Hennes, and uh he uh when the first nasty things happened in the school yard, he be...he uh out of conviction became our stoutest defender. He would, he would, he would en...he would engage in fisticuffs in order to protect us. He was highly intelligent and then the, he was also of course in the Nazi youth organization as everybody in in the class was, and uh finally uh he was taken aside more and more by his youth leader and this youth leader and the propaganda managed to turn him around completely and he became our worst enemy. He became the attacker. He became, uh because he was so highly intelligent, he would uh he would shout very hurtful catcalls when one of the Jewish childr....uh we were three boys in this high sch...in this high school class, and he would uh interrupt by catcalls. He became our worst tormenters. Uh he uh from the reports I have received later from my home town, he became such a fanatic that when the German fortunes turned around in in the Soviet in the Soviet Union, in the war there, uh he shot himself. And that is, I think while he is an extreme example this type of turnaround is, turnabout is is really very much significant and and characteristic of those times. There were few who either surreptitiously or openly kept contact with us, but we, we became as the years progressed ever more isolated. To uh, an incident which has no great significance but which uh just shows uh we were on soccer teams together and then all of a sudden you were not. You uh, I was kicked out of an athletic club. Uh I uh I I was fairly decent athlete and I had won the requisite number of points to get some sort of medal and that of course was denied. These were small little incidents, but they linger because they're childhood memories. Of course they are compared to the horrors that followed, they pale but nonetheless these are memories, and that's also part of that process of growing up an adolescent in the Hitler in the Hitler years.

Q: Tell us more about that. Uh how did uh the tightening laws, for instance, affect your family?

A: Uh of course the Nuremburg laws uh immediately uh ma...we were forced to dismiss immediately the uh uh very nice young lady, young girl who had worked as as the household help of my mother and we had to take a woman uh I think over forty-five because that was a law that only uh women uh supposedly uh safe from the hyperactive Jewish male sexuality uh would be protected, and so she immediately left our household. The tightening laws also meant that my father had fewer and fewer customers. Uh he had, he would uh travel uh during the week to various customers in the nearby villages and uh have samples of his uh textiles and then ship them out. And more and more and more often there were signs on these, uh on these farms - we don't want Jews in here. "Juden ist der Eintritt verboten." Uh and so there was diminished income. There were worries. Uh and uh these were the first signs of a of a major catastrophe coming about.

Q: How did things begin to change for you? When did you decide you knew you wanted to leave? Or were going to try to leave?

01:10:29

A: I think it was the uh atmosphere of hate and persecution and isolation in school, of being

occasionally accosted when uh in public places, you know - people would shout after you - this is a town of about sixty-five thousand people, so people knew each other even if only slightly, so you were readily identified as a Jew and uh so uh my brother was beaten up at one time. Uh at another time uh there was a uh young man whom we knew from the swimming pool and when it was still open to Jews uh we would go swimming there, my brother and I, and uh uh one time uh a young fellow about our age uh started beating us up and if we had really resisted that would have made it worse, and uh as as as a sort of a psychological note, this man's, this young man's name was was Moses. He was not Jewish and I think uh his aggressiveness stemmed from the fact that at one time people thought this was a Jewish firm. They of course immediately changed their name from Moses to Mosel (ph) and uh uh I uh later on, getting back to my home town as a soldier, I found out that he was captured in in Russia and had a real sense of satisfaction about it. (laughter) But these were some of the incidents, the tightening uh at home - things we couldn't do anymore. You, there were many places where you couldn't go on vacation any more. These were mild things, but being beaten up at the swimming pool, I I felt it was getting worse and worse. My parents as well, and so they uh in in 1936 really was when they made serious efforts to contact our relatives in uh St. Louis in order to try getting us out.

Q: The relatives in St. Louis, uh how had they gotten to America and when?

A: Very early. Uh my Uncle Beno (ph), uh my my mother's brother, uh was somewhat of a rebel as a boy and the, my my grandfather whom I loved was also the typical German patriarch, and any sign of rebelliousness was immediately uh was first uh there came stern warnings and when Uncle Beno became, still was not conforming to family rules, they shipped him to another relative in St. Louis, that America was a place (laughter) for for uh disobedient sons and daughters and so he was shipped out. Yes. (Laughter)

Q: So the contact had been made...

A: The contact had been made. It had really never uh there was the obligatory letter of say two letters a year and uh he had gotten to St. Louis, had uh learned how to be a baker, and uh until the Depression had a steady job at at one of the uh bread factories, uh small uh neighborhood bakeries, and uh then with the Depression he lost his job, and uh so he, however, had a good rapport with the union leaders so they sent him on various temporary jobs when somebody was sick or vacation or there was a special uh special demand for bakery goods, he was he was sent and so he would sometimes work three, four day...uh days and nights on end and then there would be uh absolutely no employment for for a month, but he he was able to get his family through the worst times, but he certainly was in no way financially able uh to back up an affidavit even though he made out one. And uh that uh came after I had gone on a bicycle trip with a Jewish group in 1937, I came home and my parents told me uh two affidavits are waiting for you - one from my uncle in St. Louis and one by a children's organization also in St. Louis, both of them in in fact worthless as far as the stipulations of the American government were concerned which wants to make sure by financial backing that the immigrant would not become a public charge. So uh the uh uh two

affidavits were there. The children's affidavit worthless - I was fifteen at the time, hence I was not a child and my uncle had no financial backing whatsoever. So, but I didn't know that these affidavits were really insignificant as far as the American government was concerned.

Q: So what did you do?

A: I (cough) I was uh able to secure a date from the American consul in very rapid order. Uh I had come back from this bicycle trip, I now remember, in about August, and had my uh and two months later had already a date in October with the American consul in Hamburg which uh was, the distance was not very great and I was able to get a ride with a uh another family ready to immigrate and we all went to Hamburg. Uh the next day I presented myself at the American consul's office. It was an encounter that lasted fifteen minutes and obviously changed my life. Uh the American official - I shall never forget his name because uh uh indeed it was the most important fifteen minute encounter of my life - his name was Malcolm C. Burk (ph) and uh he asked absolutely inane questions. Uh in he was it it was apparent that he wanted to have me succeed in getting getting his uh getting the visa and so he asked me questions like uh I guess to ascertain my sanity (laughter) how much is uh is uh 48 and 52. Uh I'm not good at numbers but that one I was up to. In fifteen minutes I had I had his stamp on on my uh identification papers and uh never really wondered...I I thought that was the way routinely matters went. And uh in November of that year I uh was uh informed by a Jewish organization that they had a group of children uh that was going over to the United States and there was an escort, a woman...uh even right now under your questions, Linda, my memory is jogged--uh Mrs. Epstein (ph) and uh she was on the boat going...taking us over and then coming back, having having fulfilled her mission. I uh disembarked in New York. Uh a far-flung relative picked me up, then turned me over to the Children's Committee the next day and uh they determined that my English was good enough uh that I could be sent on that long train trip from New York to St. Louis and so I had arrived in in this country.

Q: Tell us what you did in America in those first years.

A: Alright. I I I guess I'll I'll put myself on that train once more, because there was an interruption. I had to change trains in Chicago, was picked up by a member of that committee and uh the this very nice woman said she could give me a short overview of Chicago uh in two hours until my train to St. Louis was due. She took me in her car and the only thing that I remembered today of course is some of the skyscrapers I had never seen before but also the absolute mad scene at Maxwell Market where she took me and it's...I guess one of my first impressions of the United States uh was was this market and and uh the trading and and the office [ph] all that went with it. Uh then I arrived in St. Louis, was picked up - my relatives, picked up by my relatives, taken uh to their home and five days later I was in an American high school. Uh a very good one. It was considered at that time, Southern (ph) High School in St. Louis was considered to be on a par with some of the eastern prep schools. Uh it uh I must say the education I had gotten in Germany both in high school and and in a one room uh Jewish school was really geared me for what happened. I

graduated within two years in June '39 and that is when I uh it was obvious that my uncle could not support me too. I started working in the high school lunch room. Uh then a teacher of uh a Jewish teacher took an interest in me, even though I had never taken a class with her, and she introduced me to the owner of a hotel chain - uh no, of the biggest hotel or the fanciest hotel in St. Louis, the Chase, and I became a bus boy there uh being trained first as a water boy and uh then in fact uh throughout my uh college career until I had my Master's I worked as a busboy and waiter in various restaurants in St. Louis and New York, so that's what I did. Uh in, I graduated in '39, worked for one year to have a bit of a financial backing and then started on a part-time basis at St. Louis University, uh finished my uh my uh lower division courses by sort of uh the, I I got myself a job at the hotel closest to the University, one block away - the Melbourne (ph) Hotel which in fact today is a dormitory of the University and uh sometimes ran from the one to the other uh coming to class in my bus boy uniform and uh that's uh what I did. And then of course came the war.

01:23:01

Q: How did you keep in touch with your parents, or did you keep in touch with your parents?

A: Yes, by letters of course. Uh and uh in fact the last one I got we were desperately trying to help, finding people to give an affidavit to uh a whole family. It uh there's there's something that I I guess I still regret because uh I uh didn't have much money so I hitchhiked all over St. Louis going to movies that I wanted to see or to the uh Botanical Gardens or various places, and one time I was picked up by a man. He said, I have money. I I can do this, and I, he he said but I must tell you, your the lawyers who will draw up this may uh uh may disdain my profession and not do this. I'm a gambler. And he was a wonderful man, and he said I'll go down with you to this lawyer and this lawyer, picked by the St. Louis Jewish community to help people like me uh was too short-sighted to see that all some consuls wanted was a piece of paper. He said I cannot accept your affidavit. You are not in the kind of profession that the government will accept. It would have been, it would have been an easy thing to simply make out the papers. Had they failed, so be it, but he was he he was so conventional and so hide-bound that he refused this man's uh bona fide_ and it was this is one of the things that sometimes haunts me. Uh so I had my, the last letter I got from my parents was from the Warsaw ghetto. I don't know how it, whether that is customary or was still possible at the first uh at the in the first stages of the Warsaw ghetto to write communications from there, but at any rate a letter reached me in St. Louis from the Warsaw ghetto in which of course it was a very guarded letter. I realized how bad things were but uh that was the last time I heard of them and uh, well while I have no absolute proof, the presumption is of course they died there. They were murdered.

Q: _____. Tell me about you when the war broke out.

A: Uh I tried enlisting and at that time they were not uh enli...uh they did not accept uh non-native Americans uh for uh for the Army or Navy. I was ultimately drafted in uh in '42. Uh at first was sent to a uh a medical administrative training camp in Camp Barkley, Texas. Had

my basic there and then was plucked out one day by special orders to join the Military Intelligence training camp at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. Uh most of us were of course because of our linguistic skills, having had college background and the like and uh so I graduated from the eighth class of Military Intelligence Training Camp - it's not too far here from Washington. I visited it again, and uh then was, they put together teams for of interrogators. Uh after some uh additional training and uh being stationed in England, we joined 1st U.S. Army, then readying itself for the uh invasion, and their headquarters was in Bristol, England. Then uh on D-Day we of course were mar...uh we went to the Marshall (ph) area which was Southampton, got on the LSD's and uh took part in the invasion. It was uh it was my first time, even though we had of course had mock interrogations back in camp uh and trained, and be train...been trained in all sorts of things from German army organization to uh terrain intelligence - it was my first real interrogation with tough Nazis on the beaches of Normandy. And uh it was uh an experience that I've written about uh and I think what turned uh turned me uh into a uh removed all my sense of inferiority as an interrogator was that was my fourth or fifth interrogation when an artillery shell came over the uh interrogation tents and uh we, both the prisoner and I, hit the ground and uh he uh showed far greater fright than I did. And then everything went smoothly and I was able to extract interrogation from beginning in Normandy to the end of until V-E Day and uh in fact uh I, my reports uh apparently were well-received. I I got the Bronze Star uh from General Hodges towards the end of the war.

Q: Tell us about some of these interrogations. I know some of them have stuck in your mind.

01:29:28

A: Uh I I think uh most of our responsibility was of course extracting tactical and strategic in..information and uh some of it was very easy because the uh prisoners didn't realize that uh what they were giving away or we bluffed that we already knew uh or we uh tried to uh uh create the impression that a buddy already had told us. Uh that was, that was fairly easy. Some of them, some of the information uh was so uh obvious what we were after and so threatening to the prisoner that it, that we really had to use some very tough psychological warfa...uh uh what we had learned as psychological warfare and really put psychological pressures on the prisoners, and uh most of the time that worked. As uh as a rather neglected but uh byline we told to ferret out war criminals and uh those uh guilty of uh genocide and and so forth and uh the first inklings we got of what really had happened were when we did extract such information from prisoners. Uh we would get a a soldier...a German soldiers, not high in rank, about our age and uh as you bored in your interrogation, he would admit that at one time he had been a concentration camp guard, particularly a guard in the early stages of the concentration camp, before the extermination camps set in. And uh uh they uh what what struck us at that time was the absolute inability to see the enormity of what they had done. Uh I remember one prisoner and in fact I took his confession, in fact have uh have it still, uh where he said uh that he had been a guard at the Oranienburg concentration camp near Berlin and that he had frequently volunteered for execution uh uh squads and I asked him, well why did you volunteer. He said well, if I hadn't done it they would have gotten

somebody else, and one of the bonuses if you volunteered for an execution sq...squad was that you got a pass, an additional pass to go into Berlin, and you know, he said, uh very conversationally almost, you know, at that time they still had all the concert halls open and I loved getting to these concert halls and hearing the concerts there, and so I volunteered for the execution squads. He was particularly fond of Beethoven and Mozart. So these were the first uh interrogations were...it came about that we uh ferreted out some of the minor, small-fry criminals. The first uh really significant war criminal or let us say against humanity was a uh a man who who we uncovered in an absolute absurd way - it was not our skill but uh a combination of circumstances that brought about his unmasking. Uh my we uh I I have to give you a bit of background - that day, it was a, it was the day of Roosevelt's death and we were very upset and uh so uh uh one of the MP's brought in that day a prisoner, a young fellow, and uh he said this this fellow has a picture of Himmler autographed in his uh in his possession and so uh Freddie, my friend Fred Howard and I uh saw that picture. We were angry and so we took the picture away from the prisoner who said that he was a nephew of Heinrich Himmler and so we took the picture and uh we cut, cut, cut it out, the photograph and put a rope around his neck and hung it on a goose-neck lamp that was in our interrogation camp, hanging him in effigy. Later that day, very late at night, Freddie ushered in a routine prisoner. He was, had just been captured, a uh Dr. Schuebbe (ph) from Westphalia, and uh this is, this man seemed disoriented. One of our prisoner trustees immediately caught on - he said drugs. And so uh uh this man was under the illusion, seeing the picture of Himmler and we were interrogating in short sleeves - it was, you know, very informal and we were not in uniform - and uh so he had the delusion that he was at a Gestapo headquarters, with the picture of Himmler, of course, prominently displayed. And he said, oh, I'm glad to be here. I belong to you too. And so uh Freddie caught on uh this delusion and he said well, we know who we are - who the hell are you? And so uh he uh under the guise of try...of having him prove his credentials, drew everything out of him, including the fact that he had personally killed upward of twenty thousand people in in Po...in Poland and Russia. Uh you know, in the early stages of mass extermination, they used morphine injections, M Preparat, as he called it, and he had gotten addicted himself, so uh he was shipped out and that's how he landed in our uh in our prisoner of war enclosure, and he retold in precise medical detail - uh I even remember the words - uh how a prisoner died. You know, he said, oh well, we uh injected them with the uh "M" Preparation, morphine, and then he, after a while a certain euphoria was uh present, is, is a state of mind in the prisoner, then - and sort of said it exetentiously (ph) tallis, very medical, and we were uh uh, Freddie, I I uh was putting all this down and then uh he uh uh I I made a mistake. I came, uh it was late at night. I wanted a cup of coffee and Freddie had a little stove there. I came in and I was dressed in a Russian uniform. It was one of the tricks we used in order to extract uh information from the German prisoners of war. They uh, I was supposed to be a Russian liaison officer who would take recalcitrant prisoners uh and and ship them off to Russia. It was a very effective dig...disguise and uh very effective in putting psychological pressure on prisoners. I walked in and that startled him and uh Freddie, of course, caught the drift and immediately pretended throwing me out, that I was a uh a prisoner who was doing menial service and had just wandered in. That gave him pause and then he made a second mistake and that was the uh that he gave him coffee uh in this long interrogation and uh then uh he

came out of the morphine, and he retracted everything. In the next couple of days we did really work hard to break him down. We took no-sleep tablets and it was just the routine type of interrogation that you sometimes see on police procedural detective stories - just hammering away again and again and again and by that time he was so exhausted as were we that he once more uh gave us the whole information. Uh the uh the in the first week of May issue of Time magazine carried the story and so did - we had in the meanwhile uh conquered Luxembourg as you'll recall, and Radio Luxembourg became one of the powerful uh uh radio communication networks for the Allied forces and Radio Luxembourg broadcast verbatim - we took the uh interrogation down verbatim - uh broadcast that both in English and German, broadcast that all over for about two weeks. It was probably my biggest case and uh it was uh a pure accident, so you can imagine had it not been for all these circumstances working together, he would have slipped right by us. And probably be living a short uh living a long life in practicing medicine someplace in a rural town in Westphalia or elsewhere. Uh he was executed by the Czechoslovakians later on. Uh he was turned over to them because he, many Czechs had been killed by him, so uh I could put that into medical terms but shan't.

Q: Thank you. Will you tell us about some of the other prisoners whom you captured?

01:40:37

A: Uh we we had one who was very high in the medical profession. You know, the uh people the doctors without humanity which was of the titles of the books about them. I told you about some of the minor war criminals. Uh the uh one of the cases that stick...sticks in my mind but is really less relevant for Holocaust except for possibly uh the uh stupidity and arrogance of some of our, of our officers, uh not our officers but of the uh...our officers, most of them were very excellent interrogators. Uh uh occasionally uh they were less adapt and they had to call in a certain enlisted man. Uh this was true of a case of Colonel Fundeheid (ph). He uh was a professor of law, had become a leader of parachute troops and during the Battle of the Bulge uh had been ordered to take a paratroop troop uh to fight against us. They were dropped at the wrong at the wrong place and quickly taken prisoner. Uh I uh I uh was ultimately selected to interrogate him, and for that you put on higher insignia in order to be on a par with your German prisoner, and uh so I interrogated Colonel Fundeheid and uh he had had part of his law education under a Rockefeller grant in the United States, and he started telling me that and I paid no attention and then he said, of course I can't tell you nothing but my name and rank. I said, oh, I wouldn't expect a high-ranking officer like you to tell me anymore. Besides, you did such an inept, stupid, dumb uh uh uh dumb attack with your parachute troops, dropping them off at the wrong place - uh we really don't want to know anything about you. He he pulled himself up in his chair and started shouting at me. He said, how can you say that. That's wasn't my fault. That was the Air Force's fault, and I said, "Oh, we heard from your prisoners. You were you were completely out of it even in camp when you trained these troops," and in in defending himself, (laughter) how, what a great field commander he had been, he told me absolutely everything - how the troops were trained, what was their special mission, uh every detail. I egged him on - uh time after time,

uh and I said well, maybe it wasn't quite so bad, but didn't you do this and then he would again explain this, and at the end of the interrogation, I said uh, Colonel, uh uh I uh really I I honor your uh silence and uh I know you can't tell me anything and sent him off. (Laughter) It was one of the funniest uh interrogations I I had uh during the entire war uh and it was it's memorable. He ended up then as a law professor at the University of Wuerzburg after the war. I never looked him up of course.

Q: Before we move on, do you have any other interrogations of people who were either in concentration camps or who were comm...and/or who had committed war crimes that stick in your memory?

A: Uh, no. They were uh, they were all this these kinds of small-fry, people who had been guards uh and who really uh I, in the...I can say in the aggregate, I uh that uh they were absolutely negligible as persons, but in the aggregate, they really had no conscience. They they realized, they had no idea really what they had done. Uh as a matter of fact, under your prodding, I do remember one case - he was a Romanian who had volunteered for the SS, or had been drafted. I can't recall that for sure, but uh under intense interrogation, he told us that he had sort of conducted a personal vendetta against a family in his hometown in Romania, had showed up at their house and simply shot them. Uh uh and so uh if if memories sort of come back and uh he uh said while I went into this house of the Frankels (ph), I think that was their name, and uh simply, I I wanted some of the stuff in their house uh and he simply shot them right there on the spot. And that of course uh is a uh is a story that uh still remains. Uh it uh among those whom we liberated uh one of the more memorable scenes was uh and probably not very well known - uh the Germans had not, had put into prisons but not concentration camps some of the veterans of the Spanish Republican Army, and these uh uh men uh whom Spanish officers we had liberated for the, they had been asked to dig defenses in France, but they had earlier been on the Channel Islands, which the Germans had taken over and built fortifications there. So uh I uh since I had uh studied Spanish in in high school, in - no, not in high school, in college - I was asked to interrogate them, and so I uh they were of course not just uh re...uh reluctant witnesses but they were just so overly willing to give uh everything away and and tell what the fortifications were, and uh the one in fact was an engineer and drew me a very detailed and sophisticated map of all the fortifications on the Channel Islands that he had helped build. And uh if we had ever invaded the Channel Islands, we would have (laughter) had the most detailed situation map that you could have imagined. But of course that never materialized, but that was, is another memorable uh interrogation because of course the higher headquarters saw it and uh that was the kind of detail that was very rare, even though it proved outwardly to be utterly useless. Uh but that is, those are some of the interrogations that I recall, except one of curious coincidence. This was at the uh right after the uh invasion of Normandy. We pushed forward into France and we had virtually surrounded the uh German uh troops uh between the two cities of Falaise (ph) and Argentan (ph). And uh there was one gap - uh there's a new book, just came out - it's being reviewed and this book uh uh on World War II says the gap, had Montgomery acted faster would have been closed and the war might have stopped right then and there or at least in the war in the west, and uh had we uh were unable to close it but we took

thousands of prisoners near Falaise and Argentan and so we had to do uh we had to do uh work very quickly with the prisoners and had no time except pick out some that by uh vir...by the testimony of their of their paybooks were important. So uh, I flipped through stacks upon stacks of paybooks uh which were in, were very detailed. The, not like our identification papers which gave virtually nothing away, but their's gave last leave, and I flipped through and I find a paybook, Gunther H., from my home town of Hildesheim, a lieutenant. And I thought this this can't be a coincidence...it can't be uh a strange...this must be the Gunther H. whom I went went to the same athletic club with. So I waited till it was pitch dark that night, and interrogated him in darkness, of course using his home background uh to extract information and he was peering through the darkness because it was so obvious that I uh knew a heck of a lot about him, and at the end of it he said, uh how do you know so much about me, and I said well, I had also seen I was prepared for that question, that he had earned a high decoration and I said, well we in intelligence keep book on all those who are highly decorated uh officers in the German army, and then sent him out. It was uh this this kind of war coincidence--I've written about this because uh he might still be alive for all I know. It's exactly my age and uh a rather unprepossessing, uninteresting fellow when I was in the Turnverein--Athletic Club--Eintracht in Hildesheim with him uh and he had developed into apparently a quite a warrior because uh that decoration wasn't given away uh to just anyone.

Q: Did he give you valuable information?

01:52:00

A: No. I I I have to be honest. It, since we had this, you know, uh surrounded Argentan and Falaise and I had not picked him for uh his potential as an informant but simply because I was interested whether it was the same fellow and uh just to see him again. Uh he he was, it was not productive, but it was a curious coincidence.

Q: Let's move on a bit...

A: Surely.

Q: ...unless you have other stories of interrogations that you want to add.

A: If something occurs I'll I'll insert them.

Q: Uh, let's start moving across Germany and moving across Europe. Uh at what point did you start encountering your first prisoners of uh, that is concentration camp victims and indeed your first camp?

A: Uh, the uh guards were sort of strewn across our path as we advanced into Germany, and more and more of these uh small-fry prisoners who had been guards and who told us something of the horrors of the concentration camp. Then Schuebbe, that came right after we

crossed over uh across the Rhine. I think it was in Bad Andernach that we uh our prisoner of war camp was when we encountered Schuebbe. Uh then at the end of the war uh when uh we had uh linked, uh almost linked with the Russians, uh were in that sector going through Hesse-we were at Hersfeld and then we came upon the concentration camp Buchenwald. It, uh we were not among the fir...the troops who came there the first day and I heard from some of them uh there uh utter horror and uh completely uh overwhelmed by by the sights. We came one day later and yet uh not much had changed because we could not, there was no way of evacuating uh the prisoners to a to another place. We, of course, sent in physicians. We sent in food, clothing and the like and uh uh what uh the way these faces looked - I don't mean simply emaciated as you see, but some pie...one person whose jaw was hanging virtually loose. A tall man, emaciated with a loose-hanging jaw. I mean you you - these are details that stick in your head and in your mind and you uh you don't get over that very easily, and uh uh I I talked to some of them and uh they uh it it was, you know, they embraced you uh and you you felt why do I, I'm not a liberator. You know, I I wasn't in the camp when it was liberated but there was this uh curious uh immediate heart-to-heart meeting. Uh and one of the...we were, the prisoners of war contingent was there at Buchenwald but so was our uh MP outfit, a platoon of MP's that had served virtually from the very beginning, had accompanied all us all through France and Germany uh and we had of course worked very closely with each other because when you uh interrogated you needed the safety of of the prisoners uh the the guards and you told them what you were doing and there was a real wonderful working relationship. The uh in charge of uh, nominally in charge was a captain, but the real disciplinarian of that MP company was a Master Sergeant Hadley from Steubenville, Ohio. And uh uh I uh had, I was of the same rank for much of the time and uh so we had struck up a real friendship. I have, he was the prototype of the tough, read...and ready to fight U.S. Sergeant and an MP besides. You know, they have additional uh set of calluses all over their body. And uh uh Sergeant Hadley, I, we didn't arrive at the same time, and uh I was looking around - I I I guess the uh emotions were so overwhelming that I looked for some sign uh maybe that's mental cowardice, that I was looking for some sign of something normal, so I looked for buddies uh who had come to the camp with us, and I saw one who had sort of cradled his eyes with his arm like this, and uh I I recognized him immediately - it it was Sergeant Hadley, and he was bawling like a child. Uh it it was it was getting to all of us. And uh in in my case that was all the more understandable, because, you know, it was a very personal crusade, the war, and a very personal uh involvement with my parents and my brother and my sister over there, and uh I didn't know their fate at that time but I could surmise and but this, for generations we had talked about our uh heritage and the like, at one time this Sergeant Hadley and I, and he was for generations in in Ohio and uh his family and but and he was not personally involved but he just uh uh broke down completely and I I was told by other members of uh who came to Buchenwald at various times that the same thing had happened to uh General Eisenhower when he came there.

Q: I want to pause and change tapes.

A: Alright. Fine.

End of Tape #1

TAPE #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: We're back. Will you take us around the camp? Take us around Buchenwald, please, and tell us what you saw.

02:00:17

A: Uh, we had hung up uh these uh big containers of water and prisoners were clustering around them because they of course didn't have even an abundance of water during the time of captivity. And uh uh then we had set up uh a uh a a uh station where we had, were dispensing food. And uh our physicians who were treating some of the worst cases uh had came to uh came to the chow line. We had given them uh little containers where they, you know, uh field kits and uh what the physicians were fighting the prisoners was that they took very small portions at first uh and I remember one scene where a medical officer, a captain whom I had seen because at one time I also had to interrogate prisoners in the field hospital where they were being treated, and uh I had seen him before and met him there again at uh Buchenwald and I had seen him at his, in the field hospital and he was one of those spit-and-polish officers, despite the fact that he was a physician, but he was running that field hospital. I I I think I only had one or two encounters with him before and there he was, again a a person who in the months between the invasion and uh and uh the end of the war had been toughened by combat, and there he was standing with a a with an emaciated - well, they were all emaciated - with a man who who had who was ready to eat ravenously and and he put his arm around him, and the, he was in a spit-and-polish uniform and the prisoner was dirty as they were all, and he put his arm around him and he he said to him, I heard him...he said, take a little now. We will take you back later, but to eat a lot now is very dangerous for you, and so he led him away. Very gently. Uh what uh uh what also impressed me is that uh the prisoners were not able to shed, to I I think deep down inside they weren't all that sure that a new, that all that was behind them, and so they would still uh walk to that chow line in somewhat of a make-shift formation. It was pitiful because they were free now, but they would still gather as though there was an SS uh SS guard hounding them. And uh uh they uh didn't walk erect uh and they uh were, there were some who uh came to attention when an American officer came, as though there was, you know, it was apparently at that moment not quite comprehensible that they they were free, they were there, that the the oppression and the horror had ended, and this was not Day 1. This was Day 2 uh and it still in some, they were uh so shaken and and so uh uh still enwrapped in in the environment that had been their lot for so for so long a time that they could not shed the uh image of what or or the experience that had lain before. Uh I walked around uh once uh. There was, oh yes. There was a small cr...sort of not even a creek, sort of a uh a little bit of a puddle running through uh through the camp and one prisoner was getting ready to stoop down to uh drink this uh muddy water which he obviously had done before, and so uh not I but somebody else just sort of put his hand under his elbow and said uh, over there. You know, he couldn't speak the, it was it was I guess one of our MP's who who uh uh couldn't speak German uh and just

pointed to the water containers and then then the man uh who had already stooped down came up again and walked over to the water container, so the, it it you are what what to summarize it, it was almost as if you had to unlearn the concentration camp experience. These are some of the memories. Uh I I must admit that we didn't stay long. It it was, uh I I think some uh some threw up at that sight. I didn't, but uh I was very queasy and uh we we left with our our captain, Captain Kahn (ph) uh had had gathered us and said back to the, back to our quarters, and we left.

Q: Before you left, did you go into any of the barracks? Did you see any of the living conditions?

A: No. I I I just, I I I must say I walked around the grounds but I did not go into the barracks because uh most of most of the prisoners were not in the barracks. They had come out, I guess to greet every more ever fresh visitors because once that first uh wave of visitors was over uh others came and they were, they showed the same gratefulness again and again and again. As we were leaving, another uh troop - I don't know who they were, American troop - came to Buchenwald just to see it, and uh uh again the same scene of coming to the fence and greeting the Americans and uh and no - I did not go in the barracks.

Q: And did you at any point see any of the burial areas that took place?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us about it?

A: Uh as you know, they were mass burials. They were uh simply uh taken and uh as I recall, uh we had, they uh - oh yeah, the the commander who was met, who came to Buchenwald the first day had gotten some of the local villagers uh to come to the camp, and they were helping in the burial detail. And there were mass graves that I think the uh uh I wasn't there when they were dug. They were there and uh it was obvious that some of the people who were still walking would not make it. Oh, I I did talk to one of, to that same physician whom I knew slightly - I said Captain, what are the chances here of survival of these people. And he said, well I can't give you statistics or anything like that, but a good many won't make it, even now that we have the medic...the medicine here. Uh he said uh my commanding officer has asked for more medicine and uh we'll have it but I am afraid it'll be too late, so I'm uh by his testimony uh many more than already were were dead would join them before we could do a darn thing for them.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add about Buchenwald?

A: One of the things that uh uh struck me, as I said I wasn't in the barracks, but the ground was so muddy, you know, with all the people walking around, and these these, many didn't have shoes and so the the mud and the grime was all the way - this seems a silly thing to remember because, you know, but you know as a soldier you are trained to be always, you

know, completely neat even even (laughter) if you are going to battle or whatever and and uh I I was not a front-line soldier but even those uh had, the first thing they were asked is to and it struck me at the incredible filth and dirt and each time they put their foot down, that water from that mud would once more uh send sprinkles up on to on to their pajama uniforms and to their legs and uh uh this is an image that also you see as they were sort of stomping around the the campsite - it's a little detail but it it's again something that sticks with you.

Q: Thank you. Alright. You left Buchenwald...

02:11:29

A: I left Buchenwald and uh then uh we sort of carried on for a short while and in those uh couple of days after the, after V-E day uh where we all celebrated of course, uh our captain said well, we haven't had any orders not to interrogate any more. (laughter) So uh curiously enough, even though the war was over, and at this time uh we did concentrate more on those people who had been guards and the like, and we were even asked by uh some of the people already designated to be in military government, to see whether we couldn't come up what were called black and white lists. In short, uh trying to interrogate people who had been particularly helpful and had left, had led lives of some virtue during the Nazi period and some of the uh uh some of the villains. We turned these lists over to uh military government later on. I don't think much happened with them, or that they were taken very seriously but that we did and perhaps they should have been taken more seriously, because our our job was done, and we could only pass on. Uh one of the stories that remains, and that happened earlier while we were in Belgium - it was the interrogation of my friend, he's still a friend of mine - these friendships have lasted from these uh compacted years of three years of interr...or two years of interrogation, uh the most intensive uh intense days of our lives really, cause we had a mission, and Carley (ph) had the most curious case. He wrote about it later on for commentary, but I know some of the details because I saw part of it, and that was the case of the Jewish SS girl. Uh and I uh I think it it's uh it's so again uh so convoluted that and the coincidences that this that this came to our attention and that we uh, that this girl got to that stage. She was a Belgian girl from Brussels and her parents, after the uh Germans had taken uh Belgium, managed to flee to France. Uh uh they got uh they got as far as the uh city of Montalbon (ph) and here the uh Catholic bishop in Montalbon uh took it upon himself to save some of the Jewish children, and what he did is he placed them with Catholic French families, cause they all spoke French being from Belgium, and he placed some of these Belgium children with uh uh with uh Catholic families and then uh the Germans of course came as far as Montalbon and they started first to deport Jews, and uh she still saw, by her testimony uh she saw her parents being rounded up on one of set of trucks that uh gathered in the uh in the uh city hall square of Montalbon. Uh then the Germans started recruiting French laborers to work in German armament industries and one day she, of course taken as a Catholic girl from Monalbon, was also told to report for duty in Germany, and was shipped to the LUNA-Werke in Leipzig, and she was, as she told us, she was so scared that she performed at with greater eagerness than even the, well certainly with greater eagerness than the other forced laborers who were of course also asked to work at top performance, and so

she came to the attention to uh one woman foreman. She said wow, this woman, she really puts her heart into it. We're going to make her an SS auxiliary. And she had, there was no way she could protest this, and uh so she uh, we found her together with another SS auxiliary woman. Uh we uh took her prisoner in France, in I beg your pardon, in Belgium, uh on the German, near the German border and when she, when Carley was interrogating her, she said, uh I'm Jewish. And he, he he, of course, you know, with with all the skepticism that we had heard all, every kind of story of exculpation and every kind of story of phoniness, you know - that was our job and uh and Carley said, you are what? Come on. Uh and uh then she explained what I have just told you, and Carley still didn't uh believe a word of it. He said it's a very clever uh clever way, and then he called over - we had uh a, we had a young Belgium working with our CIC detachment, and he was from Brussels, so Carley called him in and said come on here, and of course the uh Belgian, Jacques, didn't believe it either, so uh he uh they both were sort of kidding and uh so uh she he uh asked her, at at this point I I joined them, uh and he asked her uh - OK, you you you're from, you're a Jewish girl from uh Brussels. Uh OK, name some of the uh name some of the suburbs of Brussels.? They started off like that, and then she just rattles them off. And uh then he said, where's the big synagogue in Brussels. She knew that. Then he asked her about uh some of the Jewish rituals. Absolutely solid. And uh then uh he said what was your name in Brussels. And it turned out that he knew her brother. So the story was true. Not a good friend or anything like that...

Q: Quite a story.

A: Yeah.

Q: What is, what is Carley's full name?

A: Carley Fr_____, and uh he lives in New York, and uh we sometimes talk about these days.

Q: What happened to the girl?

A: We sent her off with the next transport because we really didn't want to know.

Q: Did she tell you any of the things that she had done as an SS auxiliary?

02:19:59

A: No. Apparently she was most of the time a uh forced laborer and uh as the SS auxiliaries, you know, they were used in uh as clerical help. I I don't think she ever did anything that would uh truly be war criminal or something like that. Uh but I don't, I don't know that and I I think once we had identified her uh it it went so deep that we, that we we really didn't want to know. We really didn't. And that's how Carley's story, if you ask him, would end. We never know what happened to her.

Q: Are there other stories you want to share with us of during this period?

A: I, of the wartime period - uh I, I don't think so. I I think I I've really uh come up with with those where my, where where memory speaks and uh where I uh, which which stick out. Uh much of it is is lost wartime stories. And uh they are, perhaps in another context might become interesting, but by and large, I I've seen uh many of the people again with whom I served, many of them Jewish, many of them sharing or having shared the same experience. Uh and uh curiously enough, it, whenever we do meet -as happened only day before yesterday while I was at the University of Massachusetts, and somebody who was in the same unit with me for a while, Professor Henry Lee, and I shared some of our memories. That's inevitable. But I I think uh these are some of the more impress...memories that impress me today in looking back.

Q: Thank you. Tell us what happened then when you came back to the United States.

A: Uh I uh I had the, my my ambition was uh to become a journalist, and one of my uh officers in Military Intelligence had been uh Sheppard Stone (ph) who was on the staff of the New York Times. He had given me a very warm recommendation uh to the Managing Editor, and uh so on the strength of that I left St. Louis, came to New York, and uh started working in a restaurant, introduced myself to the Managing Editor who on the strength of this letter saw me not once but several times. Couldn't find a spot for me because they were uh double-platoonned so to speak because many of their correspondents were coming back and had a claim on their old jobs and then those who had done wartime service also had uh still had their jobs. There was no uh uh opportunity to to start at the New York Times then, so I decided to keep on working uh as a waiter and start college again, and I uh uh started, in uh '46, I started at Hofstra (ph) University, then Hofstra College, graduated in '48, uh went on for graduate work at Columbia uh and uh then uh got my first job uh and ultimately became both an administrator - I was, I wrote uh on on the field of Germanistics (ph), and here is where really the experiences where I had to make a personal decision, and it was sort of a watershed and I was at Columbia. Uh I could, uh could have entered of course a variety of fields. I found to my satisfaction and that of my professors that I had some gifts for German literature and for German cultural history, and so they encouraged me to stay with it. I had really looked at it as as a transit to comparative literature, but they offered me an assistantship and an instructorship uh and so I stuck in Germanistics and then uh the existential question came - uh if you, I said to myself, if you stay in German studies, you obviously will have to deal with Germany and Germans. And uh so I asked myself whether that, whether I could do it, and I uh came to the recognition that I indeed had a gift and to deny it or to uh let it lie fallow would be an act of self-amputation, very much like the one they were going to inflict on me. It was doing the work of enemy, so uh I decided to stay in German and this came somewhat later and I also thought that if I could uh analyze literature and if I could uh write about German literature, I could certainly do that work for those who had been exiled from from Germany during the Nazi period, and I became in somewhat of a scholar of uh exile literature and of those who and the writings of writers who uh perished in the concentration camps, and I've written on that uh and uh last last year a book called

"Literature...", or in German, Literatur in Exil, which was published in Germany and I think looking back, I've made the right decision, because uh I've lent, lent voice to some writers who possibly without me might be forgotten or not remembered very often, so I have uh in a way uh kept their memory and the memory of their writings alive.

Q: One cannot ask more than that perhaps.

A: I hope so.

Q: Thank you. Is there anything else you want to add?

A: I suppose the kind of work you do here in keeping the memory of of those of the Holocaust alive touches very closely on my work as well, and uh so I have frequently interviewed, of course from a literary and historical perspective, uh those who uh either survived, for example H. D. Adler (ph) who survived in Theresienstadt and has written a book about it - I've interviewed him. I've uh interviewed some people who were hidden in Berlin uh and are writers today. I've interviewed many of the exiles who came to the United States, so I I think uh in a way this kind of oral history, whether yours or mine, uh may help to resuscitate some people from being forgotten.

Q: Thank you very much.

02:28:57

A: Thank you, Linda.

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview