https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Quiet, please. Tape is rolling. Kyra, start anytime.

This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Anthony Acevedo. So tell me what it was like the first time you saw the Germans in battle or when you first came across them.

When I came across-- that's with reference to before, being captured?

Whenever-- in battle or after you were captured or your first experience with them.

Well, the experience was when they were being shot at that cave. And then, one of the Germans decided to escape. And yet he had a rifle that he was going to shoot one of us. And one of our fellows happened to be a sharp shooter and at 400 feet away blew his head.

The German's head?

The American blew his head up. And that was my experience of seeing something go up in the air.

How'd you feel about that? What was your reaction?

It was a feeling of-- I says, oh, my God. But it had to happen. It's either he or us.

Mm-hmm. And you mentioned being in a cave. Were you in a cave, or were these the foxholes you were captured in?

They were in a cave. They were hidden. There were six Germans with machine guns hid in a cave. And they were waiting for our group, company.

This was way before you got captured. This is when you fell.

Yeah, yeah.

And after the Germans captured you guys, how did they treat you? Were you worried that they were going to treat you the way that some of your buddies had treated them?

We didn't know the way the Germans would treat us. But we would forced to get our shoes off. And one company commander of the Germans, before I headed to the truck, I didn't know that he had a background on me when he saw me as a medic. Because he says, stick with us, and I'll see that you go to University of Munich. I'll take you to Munich.

Did he say that to you in German?

In English. And it was very strange for him to tell me that, to offer me.

Why did he offer you that?

Because-- I don't know. I didn't know. But I told him I'm a medic, and I'll stick with my buddies. So we headed back. I mean, he sent us to that prison camp called Bad Orb Stalag IX-B.

How did you get to Bad Orb? You rode the trucks?

The trucks.

The whole way to the camp?

To the camp. It was two, three miles from there.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

What were your first impressions when you arrived?

Well, we were scared, yet we were blah, like--

You were numb.

--why did this happen to us? And they tossed us into these barracks. And they interrogated us and gave us a number, a prison number.

How many of you were there, in your group, that arrived at the camp?

I couldn't remember exactly the group number. Because since the German divided us-- all privates into one section, PFCs in one section, and then sergeants and corporals go to another section.

And what was your rank at the time?

My rank was PFC. But I didn't know that I was already a corporal. I found that out afterwards.

So you were with the PFCs.

It was PFCs.

Did you see any other prisoners when you arrived at Bad Orb, at Stalag IX-B?

Yeah. That prison camp was composed of about close to 40,000 prisoners--

But they weren't all Americans.

--Americans, English, Spaniards, South Africans, Arabs. They had all.

OK. And you were first registered by-- who registered you into the camp?

Commanding officers had a table.

Were they Germans who registered you?

Yes.

And what did they ask you when you got up to the table?

Just my name and give you your number, your registered number.

Do you remember your number?

Yes-- 27016. And I have it in my license plate to my car. The six is not in there because it doesn't fit the plate.

And what happened after they registered you into the camp?

Then they selected you to go to one of the barracks. You go into the barracks, and you stay in there until they tell you, in the groups, to come out for feeding or for war indoctrination, what they wanted to do to you.

Such as what? What were some of the things they wanted to do to you?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Just make you stand out there in the cold. And they didn't say nothing-- absolutely nothing, just to control you. And so then, they don't want you to do nothing, to say nothing. Otherwise, you'll be punished if you did something out of order.

Were you ever interrogated while in Stalag IX-B?

Until one day, it happened about a week later, after captured. We were all inside, lying down on the floor. And we heard the chains of the gate, the door.

In the barracks?

In the front door, to open.

Open the barracks or open the camp?

The barracks. And in walks two guards with machine guns and, behind them, a tall official Gestapo. And he looked to me. You thought, my God. We all looked at him, and is he a movie star or something? And we're [FAKE SUPPRESSED LAUGHTER] like that, trying to laugh. But anyway, we acted a little asleep or something like that, that we didn't know nothing about what was happening.

And he walked around. He had a monocle and a cigarette tip and a hat, a big, long, black coat-- leather coat-- down to just below his knees, boots-- very artistic looking type of person-- and with a baton, shaking it and checking everybody on the floor, some with the blankets covered. He flipped the blanket. Until he came to me, and he poked me, and he said, up. And he said, arriba, in Spanish.

Mm-hmm. Were you still wearing your US military uniform?

Yeah. They don't change your clothes.

OK. So he knew who you were, and you had your name on your uniform?

Yeah, only political prisoners or the Jewish they had him change their status. But he told me to get up, and I walked behind the guards into a room with a table and two chairs. And an interrogation started.

What were they asking you about?

And he got kind of close to me, and he says, what's your name? I told him my name. And he says, where you born? I told him where I was born and where I lived. Yes. He says, what do you know what's happening up front? Nothing-- defending ourselves.

He said, what are you here for? I don't know nothing, sir. All I know is my serial number, my name, and that's it. If you want me to give me my social security number. He says, I know that. Social Security number? And he reiterated it.

He told you what your number was?

What my number was. And then he started to tell me about my family, where I was raised. He says, you were born in San Bernardino, California, but you went to Pasadena. You graduated Pasadena City College. And you were in Durango. Your family lives in Durango.

How did he know this?

He slapped my face when I asked him. He asked me so many questions, the fact that he even told me that-- your scoutmaster is the Schrader family, huh? And sure enough, Schrader I tried to ignore the name. But he happened to be the owner of the hardware store in Durango.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

And I kept denying. And everything I denied, he slapped my face. Then he started to put needles in my fingernails. He wanted to ask more questions. He says is your father so and so? Your parents are so and so? He says, and by the way, if you-- he kept trying to tell me-- he put me in a suspense.

And he says, this is the Battle of the Graf Spee in Montevideo. A German battleship with a British battleship fought in Montevideo. The cousins of the Schrader family went to your father, came up to visit. They happened to be a cousin and a Schrader. Mind you, he sold a rifle to your father.

I says, I don't know. Well, I didn't know because I hadn't been to Durango, and I hadn't seen my father, and I hadn't seen my parents. But sure enough-- just jumping ahead-- I asked my father, I says did a cousin of Schrader ever sold you a rifle, automatic rifle? Yes. And he says, can you show it to me? And the way the German described it, it was folded and tucked into a special leather case. And he showed me the rifle.

How do you think, or why do you think, they knew so much about you? Why you?

The Schraders probably were in contact with the Gestapo, the SS. And how come that one captain offered me to go to school if I gave him information? What information would I have? I'm a medic, like I told the German.

I said, I'm a medic. All I know is take care of the sick and the wounded. I don't know nothing. And I gave him the expression, the terminology, to him in military words. I don't want to express it because it don't sound good.

It's OK.

Can I say it?

Sure.

I said, I don't know shit from shinola. That's the expression. And he slapped my face.

Did you ever know the name of the Gestapo officer?

He never gave me the name. And they never wanted to be given the name.

Did he ever ask you other questions about what happened in Durango? No.

No. But what he told me that the two fellows were put up before the wall and shot.

The German spies from the pool.

The German spies, yeah.

Wow. Was that the only time they interrogated you, or were there other times, as well?

That was the only time they interrogated me.

And you were then returned?

Then he finished me, with my hands all bleeding. After he finished with me, I headed back to the barracks. And all my buddies there were surprised to see my hands. And they were yelling at me, what did I say and what did I have to say?

And I yelled back at them. And says, I don't have nothing to say. What do you want me to say? But you start giving words that you don't want to say, express yourself. Because you're in pain at the same time. But anyway, days went on.

What was daily life like in Stalag IX-B? Were you able to write home? Did your parents know where you are?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

No, you couldn't write home. I remember that my wife that's ill, we were just friends. And she would send me things-- food or something. But they never got through. Their letters, they never got through.

Was your family notified that you were captured as a POW?

My family got through-- well, not exactly. My mother. My mother was visiting, came from Durango to Pasadena, bringing my brother to the children's hospital in LA because he had infantile paralysis. And so my mother was staying with my aunt, her sister, in Pasadena.

And my aunt was working then at a defense factory where they built certain rifles for the army. And she stayed home-- my mother was at home. And she received a knock at the door. And the Western Union-- she wasn't supposed to receive that telegram.

It was supposed to go to your aunt.

To my aunt. And my mother, well, received it, signed. And she read it, and she got sick.

What did the telegram say?

That I was missing in action. And she wasn't supposed to receive that. From there on, she turned. She got sick-- her gall bladder.

Why did the telegram go to your aunt and not to your parents in Mexico?

Well, slowly, my aunt would have told her, in a very different way, to prevent her from a shock. But then, coming back to--

Back to the camp. You weren't able to get letters from home. Did you receive any Red Cross packages?

No, no. In the course of time, after this whole thing turned out there at this interrogation, I had a wristwatch. And it was a political prisoner-- Jewish-- and he says, I'll give you four loaves of bread for that watch.

This was in Bad Orb?

In Bad Orb. So I told him, I says, OK. So it was a watch. The name brand was Haste-- H-A-S-T-E. And I got the loaves of bread. So then I divided the loaves of bread with the fellas, and I left one for me. And I used it as a pillow. And before you know it, by morning, it was gone. They nitpicked, nitpicked it. And every crumb was eaten.

[CHUCKLES]

I'll never forget that. Anyway, it came the day--

How long were you in Bad Orb?

Until the 8th of February.

OK. And what happened on the 8th of February?

Just before the 8th of February, just a couple of days, the Germans selected for us to-- well, a week before, two fellas of our outfit-- not my division but from another division-- hacked the kitchen cooks. And they had to steal big salami.

And so we were forced to stand outside until they gave up or, otherwise, they'd shoot us all. So they had the machine guns at us. And if we didn't come up with the two fellas, they would shoot us all. Yet when we were forced to leave the

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
barracks, fellas could not-- they did not, or were not able to, put their shoes on or socks on to stand out there in the snow barefooted or whatever.

They just wanted everyone to go quickly.

And all day, all day. And there was fox-- latrines were standing so they could fall into the hole. So we were there from 6 o'clock in the morning to around 4 o'clock. Finally, the two guys gave up. And that was from the help of the chaplains, a couple of chaplains that were captured.

What did the chaplains do?

They turned the fellas to the police, German Gestapo.

Did they give them up, or did they negotiate an agreement?

No, they gave up themselves because, otherwise, they would see that they would have killed everybody.

And what happened to those two?

They were put in a dungeon. We never knew what happened to them afterwards. But they were punished and put into a dungeon where they couldn't see the light. And so, anyway, about a week later, on the 8th of February, we were forced to come out of the barracks and line up.

And then, the commander said all American Jews with names Jewish, take two steps forward. And a lot of our fellows, started to yank their-- some had a little star medal, and their dog tags carried the H for Hebrew, and started to convert that up to a B by scratching it.

And some, in desperation, threw it on the ground and buried it in the snow and whatever happened to eliminate that situation. In other words, the Germans hated the Jewish totally. And my buddy, I remember, Norm Fellman, he says, I held onto it. I didn't give a shit.

Pardon the expression.

That's OK.

And allowed them to-- they held onto their faith. And so they were only able to get about 85, close to 90, fellas. And then the Germans came, selecting.

Did the Jewish soldiers step forward? Did they identify themselves?

Oh, yes. By name or the way they looked. The Germans pointed their finger or their knives at them and said-- like it or not. Gestapo was mean.

Then what happened.

And then, the commander came by. And then he poked at me, pulled by the-- put me out front as an undesirable because I spied.

What do you mean you spied? I'm sorry.

I spied on two employees of my father, against the Gestapo, the Germans that were spying, connecting--

The ones at the pool.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

The pool, uh-huh. And then the other undesirables-- bad records, whoever had bad records-- they selected them. They knew very well what kind of background they had.

How many Americans were selected?

350. 350.

And what did they tell you after the selection?

Nothing. They wouldn't even talk to you about nothing, absolutely nothing. For a while, they didn't say nothing, until you were to be completely segregated from the whole groups. You are nothing but a little selection here, on one side to leave the place. And the term was that we were to travel to a place that we were supposed to have all the unique-- place to play ball, would have motion pictures, and, oh, beautify our thoughts by giving us good thinking.

So they tell you you were being transferred to a different POW camp?

No, nothing like that. All just to tell us that we were being taken to a place selected with better care. And it was hell.

So did they take you out of Stalag IX-B that day?

The following day.

So what did they do to you the next day?

They put us on a train.

What kind?

A boxcar where you couldn't kneel, you couldn't squat, for six days in those boxcars. And fellas couldn't defecate at all. They had to do it right there. And for six days-- and you couldn't eat nothing. You have nothing to eat, nothing to drink.

The snow that hit from the cracks, you try to lick it or poke your hand through the slot window to get the drops of water from the rain until we came to Berga in the Elster, which is part of the compounds of Buchenwald.

What did you see when you arrived at Berga?

It was so snowy that you couldn't catch the glimpse very well. But you see, like, towers of houses. But we were forced to march, when we got out of the train, and to head to the area. It turned out to be barracks. They were ugly, ugly, falling apart. So in other words, the barracks were-- the cracks, when you were inside, you could feel the wind coming in through the cracks.

And how many men per barrack? Were you all together in one?

One barracks? We were divided into groups to fit 60 to 80 in a barracks with three bunks, three--

How many people per bunk?

Three to a bunk.

Like three per level.

Per level-- three levels.

OK. Were there other prisoners there when you arrived?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

They had them separated from us. They were the Jewish prisoners. They had them separated from us.

What was your first impression when you saw those prisoners? Did you know who they were?

We didn't know. We didn't know until afterwards. We found out that they were being worked in the tunnels. So when they selected our groups into 16 per group per tunnel, there were 11 to 12 tunnels. And each tunnel, they had fellas go in and dig into the tunnels to enlarge the areas inside of the tunnels to-- well, we didn't know why the tunnels were being built.

Did you have to work in the tunnels, or were you given a different job?

Us medics were to only take care of the sick. And then, what I did was I asked the commander, why not, if a fella's going to work in a tunnel today, give him a day off tomorrow and have another group work for him? Kind of liberate him from that.

So what was their work schedule.

They slapped my face. They slapped me. They hit me. Because I was supposed to say nothing and it wasn't my business. But I told them, I said, I'm a medic. I said, don't we have a doctor? They told us they had a doctor, but it wasn't true. So we didn't have a doctor. So what we were doing is trying to take care of fellas.

Norm Fellman, as well as others like that, worked in the tunnels, and they breathed the silt that came out of the rock. And that damaged the lungs. Some of the fellas, like Norm, would tell me what they did was try to weaken the dynamite so that it wouldn't be too powerful to bust. But I laugh when he would tell me about the things-- totally laugh.

Like what? What other things? They tried to do sabotage.

Sabotage to make them-- and then they would sabotage the cars that carry the rock to dump it off to the side of the river. And this damaging the springs of the cart, when you pulled, it would fall apart, without the Germans knowing that it was being done that way.

And what were you doing while they were working in the tunnels? Did you work in the tunnels?

No.

What was your job?

No, I'd go into tunnels very on and off, when they let me, to see what they were doing and that they were OK. And I'd tell them, say, he's not well, or please let him out. Let him rest. He's weak. And you're not feeding him, and he's not eating. He has diarrhea-- the dysentery, diarrhea, everything, he had, the fellas.

So you were still being their medic?

Beg pardon?

You were still being their medic.

Their medic, yes.

And so did you have another job, specifically, at the camp, a role?

No, nothing, nothing. Nothing but just keeping up with the sick, saying that it was taken care of. Sometimes, some of the fellas started to feel that they wanted to escape. And when they tried to escape, they wanted to do something without

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
the Germans knowing about it. But it didn't phase out too well because the Germans were too smart in that respect.

Did anyone manage to escape?

There was two, three of them did escape-- Cohen. Cohen did escape, but then, he was killed. But there's another-- Littell escaped. And he managed to escape. And Cohen, when the German asked me, or told me, to verify as a medic that he was shot because he tried to escape. In other words, you shoot a person from a distance, you're going to hit him in the back.

So the German asked me, I want you to check and to see that he was shot trying to escape. I says, can I turn him over? Can I look at him? And that's saying, OK. And the Germans would shoot him in the forehead with a wooden bullet.

What did they do? They stand him behind the wall, and they shoot him in the head. And then they waxed the hole. What does a bullet, a wooden bullet, do? It's just that it shoots in and splinters inside the head. OK, they were using that as an excuse. They thought that I wouldn't identify the wax that covered the hole. So the Germans were slaughtering our men that tried to escape.

And the conditions were, obviously, much worse in Berga?

Well, they started to force us to take our clothes off and just sleep with their underwear. And they would force me to take all the clothes into a shack just a little bit outside of the barracks to prevent anyone from escaping. So this got worse. Because sleeping without any clothes, it was dangerous for your health-- getting worse, pneumonia, and all the effects, the side effects, that you would get without being able to eat at all.

Right. What kind of food were you provided with? Were the men able to get anything, any nourishment, or did they receive any packages? I mean, some camps, people were able to receive mail or Red Cross packages.

In one occasion, we received a package, a Red Cross package. And it was divided into four to a package, or six to a package. The package was meant to be for one-- one per person. And that's how I got my diary, from one of those packages.

So you received the diary in Berga.

I received the book in Berga-- empty book-- yes, and not at Bad Orb. And I used that for that purpose. But I mean, the Germans had stacks of Red Cross packages stacked up in a warehouse.

So what was an average day at Berga for all of you? Was there anything as an average day? Was there any typical day?

No, no. And the stuff-- tea to drink was nothing but just grass boiled into tea. And the same thing would be if we got a soup, it was a few spuds into it. And to flavor it, we would receive a harsh water, no taste at all, and with cockroaches and rats mixed into it. And it would make you sick from your stomach.

Was there any interaction with the other prisoners, the other political prisoners in the other part of the camp?

We didn't know anything about them but just that they stayed a distance from us.

Did they work together in the mines, in the tunnels?

No, no, they didn't mix in with us. But from underground, we found out why the Germans had these men working in those tunnels. We found out later that those tunnels were being made because the Germans were developing secret equipment-- missiles, buzz bombs, and other equipment that they had in mind-- that they were hiding in these tunnels.

And the physical conditions were atrocious. What were the Germans who ran the camp like? How did they treat you guys?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

They treated us very bad because of the fact that they beat them. They beat them with the butt of their rifle and poked them. They would force, say, to get a railroad tie and carry it into the tunnels to repair the railroad ties. And they could barely carry the weight that they had with themselves because of the fact that the weakness that they felt. Not eating, you're not going to be able to lift anything that is so heavy.

And did you receive any news of the war? Did you guys know what was going on outside of Berga?

Well, underground, there was comments. The one guard, he was an Austrian. And every time he'd see the bombers fly by, he would make the sign of the cross-- and he looked on the side that the Germans don't look at him, what he was doing-- but thanking that our bombers would be heading for-- it would be about 500 B-17s per hour that would bomb the sites.

And you could feel, when they bombed the areas, the windows, the glass would crack with the vibration of the bombing. But things like that. Another thing, what we find out, we got 100 grams of bread per week.

A hundred grams of bread is not much per week. But it was a mixed of barley with sawdust, ground glass, and ground sand and the barley to camouflage and make that black bread black because the Germans loved the black bread. And that caused damage into your stomach.

How did you feel when you would see the Americans flying overhead?

[SIGHS]

The day came when the Germans started to feel the heat. And the Germans started to feel the heat when they found out that the English were coming from one side, the Russians from the other side, the French from the other, and the Americans. Then they decided to put us on a march.

Do you remember what date that was?

[INAUDIBLE] tape.

It happened about, around April-- April.

[INAUDIBLE] Yep, OK.

Wait. Give me a second. I'll give you the high sign.

A few more questions about Berga, to go back. With the terrible conditions in the camp, when did men start being affected by that, aside from men who were killed when they were escaping? How many men had died, or what happened to them?

The fellows were starting to get the effects of the eating and the work exhaustion. I mean, they couldn't move their muscles. they were exhausted. And that was, frankly, from the beginning, at the time when we got into Berga to live.

One thing that just went by me is, when we got to Berga, well, they took us to the cremation center of the Buchenwald to bathe us. Well, we didn't know that that was bathing. We thought they were going to cremate us.

Like, the gas chambers, the showers?

They took us to the gas chambers.

Why did you think that?

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
We didn't know. They took us there, and we saw the tubings, the pipes, up ahead. One was for gas. The other one was for water, with a spray. And when they told us to take the clothes off, it's say that they were going to fumigate us to take all the lice.

Well, fine. But they showed us, and we saw, what the Germans had done. Or they were cremating the people, children and mothers and fathers and all that. But while this affected a lot of fellows, mostly because they started to break down-- strength and the weakness due to hunger. And that was just right after, oh, about a week after we got there.

To Berga.

To Berga. The time that we were to leave the area, there were six fellas that were in very critical condition. And they were to be sent to a British hospital.

To leave which area? I'm sorry. When you were forced to leave Berga? Or when you left Bad Orb?

Berga. I had the names on the tip, but they slip away. But one of them right now is dying. He's still alive, but he's dying. He's in no condition now, even to talk-- Martin [? Wendt. ?] And the other one, he died because the Germans didn't let me do what I was going to do. I had a fountain pen with me that I was writing all the time with it. As a matter of fact-- well, I'll tell you afterwards.

You can tell me now.

That fountain pen lasted quite a bit. I don't know how. God gave me that ink to last. And the fellow that I wanted to-- he had diphtheria, he couldn't breathe. He was choking. And I asked the guard if I could talk to the commander.

I said to the commander, this fella is not going to live. If you don't let me do this, you're going to kill him. And I said, he has diphtheria. All I have to do is make a tracheotomy operation and put that thing so he can make it to the hospital.

And he was the father of-- he was an older fella. It was a funny name. I have it written in the diary. And the German got mad at me and hit me with the butt of the rifle, hit me in the face. And the fella didn't make it. He couldn't breathe anymore. And Wayne [? Windresh ?] gave me as a gift another Sheaffer. I hadn't seen a Sheaffer for a long time.

Now, were the Jewish soldiers that were with you, did they get treated any differently once you arrived at Berga, or were all the men treated the same? Were they singled out again for being Jewish?

Come again?

Were the Jewish soldiers that were with you singled out for different treatment when you arrived at Berga?

At that area, it seemed to me like it was because the way they were being treated.

How were they being treated?

But Norm Fellman, Cohen, Bernard Vogel, he was a young fella, very docile. And he gave up very easy. And they forced him to work in the tunnels. And he couldn't make it. And I asked the guard, the commander, to trade jobs so that they can rest.

And they would poke me with a rifle and they said, nein, nein, nein. They wouldn't let me. I said, but I'm a medic. You'd force me to do these things, yet you don't follow it up. But they didn't care. They did it with hate.

You mentioned your diary and that you were always writing in it. What information were you recording in your diary?

Let's pause tape, please. We don't have enough tape to [INAUDIBLE] at this point. But let's run some bars at the end, please.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.