

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011
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PREFACE

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BROOKS MCCLURE

July 7, 2011

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Brooks McClure**, on July 7th, 2011, here at the co – Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, at the m – hol -- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**. And Mr. **McClure**, thank you very much for agreeing to meet with us today. I'm going to start the interview as fairy tales do, at the very beginning. And that's going to be to ask you your – when you were born, the date you were born, what was your family like, and we'll take it from there.

Answer: Well, I was born in – on March 8th, 1919 in **New York City**, and lived there for the next 20 years of my life. I never went back, really. So I – my recollections of course, are of a nearly ra – a disruptive period. We were going through the Great Depression, and I thought for a while I was more or less exempt from the effects of this thing. But my father was an engineer and he got very sick early in his life, and died at 53.

Q: What year was this?

A: This was 1940.

Q: So you were 21 years old?

A: I was 21, that's right.

Q: And had you liv – when you said **New York City**, were you – did you grow up in **Manhattan**, or in the outer boroughs?

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: I grew up in **Manhattan**.

Q: Mm-hm. Had you done – attended college? Had you finished high school?

A: No, that was the thing you see. We were relatively well-off, and also terribly conservative economically. So, we had no debt, and never borrowed from anybody for anything, and the result is that we were relatively well off when things went awry. But, there was a fund, of course, for the future, for my education [**indecipherable**] and that suddenly disappeared, because they knew that my father was mortally ill, and we were going to have to take over in some fashion, and this is – this would be very disorganizing, as it was. And so –

Q: Did he – excuse me – did he have his own business, your father?

A: No, no.

Q: No. He worked for somebody else.

A: He worked for the **New York** state transportation department, and his own job had to do with train wrecks. When – when there was an accident, they had a team that went out and tried to find out why it happened. And he was very good at that business, I guess, because he went right through from – he was a very young man, almost an office boy when he arrived, and worked his way up. And the thing is, he had no education either. He – he was born in **Ohio**, and he went to the good schools. I guess you would say he was a very ambitious man, and he read all the time, and that was a great

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

influence for me. He had me reading **Dickens** and **Dumas** when I was nine and 10 years old, but –

Q: That's pretty impressive.

A: Well, if you starting at the right end –

Q: Yeah.

A: – you know, for instance – well, I guess it was **Robert Louis Stevenson**, it was – was the start of my foreign education, and – what was it, the – “**Treasure Island**” was the first book. So, he very carefully chose the books to be at a level where I could understand, hopefully, and –

Q: Were you his only child?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Were you his only child, or did you have br –

A: No, no, there was a girl after me.

Q: So you're the oldest.

A: Well, I was – I was the eldest, yeah. And well, at any rate, I – I got a piece of education from reading, and I – the reading habit I got into, and had occasional troubles with my schoolteachers because they didn't think that the family should race ahead of this program, you know.

Q: Curriculum, yeah.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: So, at any rate, he was a wonderful old man, and – but he – he got very, very sick. Heart can – heart condition, and we knew he wasn't going to be around a long time, so we had to prepare for this. And the preparation did not include any possibility of going to college.

Q: I see.

A: Because not only did we not have enough money to cover that, but I knew that with a high school education, at that time when jobs were very scarce, I didn't have much of a chance. So – but I did have an interest, and the interest was in journalism, which actually I developed in the grammar school. And before I got out of grammar school, I had an idea, I – I had a – I wa – a little play friend, the – these correspondences with children from other places.

Q: Oh, pen-pal.

A: Yeah, one of – one of my teachers went to, of all places, western **Australia**, which is just – just about west of anything in the wor – in the world. And so I-I got the – my friend sent me the local paper – matter of fact, all of the local papers. And I noticed that one was a weekly, which looked more like an American paper than any of the others. There was the lingering influence of the British journalism, with the ads on the page one and that sort of thing. This was different, this had headlines on page one **[indecipherable]** news on page one. And I was really intrigued by this. And I had already started my self-education, read every book that had to do with journalism. I

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

don't know whether I understood it or not, but at any rate, I did that. And – and then one day I got the notion that maybe these people out in poor old **Australia**, would like to have a correspondent in the **United States**.

Q: Not a bad notion.

A: And I noticed that they had a regular correspondent in – in **Asia** who traveled around. And then they had another correspondent in **London**, which was home to the Australians. And so these were very special needs. One was, of course, the local aspect, of the – of news, and the other was **London**. And – but I said th – I-I decided to write a letter to the editor. So I went to the British – the – I don't read it any more, but oh, I can't remember the name of it. At any rate, it's – was – it's a – it's a British publication, similar, but rather more serious than the World Almanac for – that we have.

Q: The Economist? Would it be the Economist?

A: No, no, the –

Q: No?

A: – no, no, no, this i – no, no. No, it says –

A2: You mean like the encyclopedia.

A: Sure, it's got the name of a – of a the – research publication, but –

Q: I see, okay.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: But at any rate, it was the one place where they had all of the editors by name, everywhere in the British commonwealth. And so I thought, well, in the British commonwealth, they speak English, and that's the only thing I can speak, so I wrote them a letter and I said, I am a student of journalism. No mention of grade, age, anything like that. So, I had the – and I followed my father's rules. He said, when you write a letter, you keep it on one page, if you possibly can, because you lose the reader on the second page.

Q: Absolutely right. Absolutely right.

A: And so – so I followed all the rules, and I used the simplest language, don't be fooled by the multi-syllable words. So I just said in plain English that I was a – a journalism student [**indecipherable**] without experience as of now, but I noticed their paper, and I noticed that they had correspondents in these other places, and none in the **United States**. So would they be interested in taking me on, course free, as a correspondent. And I thought afterwards, what a stupid thing to do, you know. I consulted no one, and I got – I had the shivers afterwards. Then, in the normal turn of events, which between the **United States** and – and **Australia** is about two months, I got a letter back, and it was from the publisher, who said, you know, we are – we are interested in you. We have to know a lot more about you, but then he said, let's consider it a possibility. And so I did, I – I found the name of the editor of the publication: that was on the masthead of course, And I wrote him and sent him a very

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

long article about the failure of the – o-o-of **Roosevelt's** policies. Because at that time, it were – that was about 1937 was it, something like that.

Q: So you weren't even 20 years old? You were like 18.

A: Oh, oh, I was far from 20 years old. I – I was [**indecipherable**] nothing man, I had – had absolutely nothing, so – so –

Q: But chutzpah. A lot of chutzpah.

A: Oh, a lot – a lot of – a lot of gall.

Q: So, I'd like to turn this now to – as you're speaking, a number of thoughts are going through my mind. When I've interviewed other people who were part of liberating forces, **U.S.** forces, most of them do not have the exposure that it sounds like you did, to news, to world events, to – it – to people who were different from yourselves. So one of the key questions that I often ask somebody is, before they even get to **Europe**, did you meet anybody who was Jewish. Well, if you live in **Manhattan**, chances are you did.

A: You couldn't miss them.

Q: Okay.

A: Oh yes, well, that's a Jewish city, almost.

Q: And then my second question is, is that if you were interested in news and journalism, were you aware, even as a teenager, of the news coming out of **Europe**, of what **Germany** was doing?

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Oh, oh certainly. I was right – I – I was reading about **Hitler**, it seemed, when he first came up.

Q: To power.

A: [**indecipherable**] by – what was his name? A famous, very arrogant guy, who seemed to win wars without thinking about it.

A2: **Hindenburg**.

Q: **Hindenburg**?

A2: Talking about **Hindenburg, von Hindenburg**.

Q: **Von Hindenburg**?

A2: **Paul von Hindenburg. Paul von Hindenburg**.

Q: **Paul von Hindenburg**?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes.

A: That's right

Q: Yes.

A: And –

A2: The chancellor.

Q: The chancellor, yeah.

A: Yeah. And so I a – I was a con – conscious of the growth of **Hitler**. Actually, almost everybody was, but I read so much. I read internationally because I was interested in

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

international affairs, but I was also – I-I was taught at home that you – you’re a man when you gu – when you’re born, and you use your brain from there on. And so it was a very good policy. And I had a mixed literary education, in that I – there was “**Tarzan of the Apes**,” which I also read, and the bi – the – was it the **Hunter** boys?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: A-Another series. And so here I was reading the classical 20th century – or 19th century literature from **Europe**, in English, of course, translated, and then these other books, and enjoying them both. But at any rate, no, I was really up on the news in **Europe**. There were a lot of other things too, the same time, an awful lot of trouble there. **France** was having a terrible time. This was followed up by the other activities that are – were very ominous in **Japan**. They were going after **Manchukuo** – ma – **Manchuria**. And – and in **Africa** the Italians were trying to take over –

Q: **Ethiopia**.

A: **Ethiopia**. So, it was a very disturbing time, interesting time. I can’t say that I was scared by it. I was intrigued by it, and there was some very good books at the time coming out, various commentators; professional journalists wrote books.

Q: Well, **William Shirer**, I think, was based in **Berlin** at the time.

A: Oh yeah, well I – he was a giant in the –

Q: Yeah.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: – in the group. But at any rate, there was a great deal of concentration on the things that counted abroad, and also many of the problems at home. We had no military policy, and we were – we were terribly weak at the time, and that was one of the big issues coming up in the **United States**, how do we protect it?

Q: So I'd like to turn it back to, again, what you talked about earlier in your father, and his role in your education. And – did these – these events, these world events that you are talking about, not only in **Europe** but elsewhere, but of course for us it's particularly what was going on in **Europe**; were you discussing these at home?

A: Oh yes, well, we – we, of course, had dinner every night in the dining room, and it was a conversational sort of sport. So we talked about everything, and sometimes when I wasn't old enough to know, I got instructed from the higher people, my mother and father. And yeah, you know, it was a – it was a very good way to get educated, I think, without feeling the pain.

Q: Yeah, it is. It is. To have got – to have – to have conversations around the dinner table about important events of the day is something that doesn't happen that often any more.

A: There were a lot of people then, commentators on radio. There was one fellow – what was his name?

A2: **Kaltenborn**.

A: Yeah, **Kaltenborn**.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A2: **H – H.V. Kaltenborn.**

A: Yeah. He was a – and there was also a man who spoke so fast, we couldn't eat. So we turned him off. And **Lowell Thomas**, and you know, a lot of people.

Q: Yeah.

A: The pretty – pretty much accomplished journalists. And the – and who could expound on a-anything. I think they had a little more freedom than they do today, because there are other people who popped up and said, you're wrong. And so that was a very good example of growing up in a democratic state.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: It was a – it was a fine experience, and a lot of fun.

Q: So, did you write – after that first article that you sent to the Australian newspaper, did you become their correspondent? Did you end up submitting pieces?

A: Well, I did, actually I did, but that – long before that, they had that article, which was very long. It took a whole bedsheet of paper, that they used to print on those days, and oh, they had the **[indecipherable]** that they – usually you find in the – in the English press, but in the American. Our correspondent in **New York** –

Q: Yeah. That's right.

A: – tell us what in the world is going on there? So – so I was astonished, because they were sort of ta – presuming. They didn't know how old I was. I know they wanted to find the –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: They didn't ask the basic questions.

A: They weren't – well, they wanted to find out, but events were moving too fast.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I was, of course, absolutely stunned, because I had a plan. As soon as I got that rejection, I would write to an English paper in **South Africa**, and see if I could work on them. And there was no – there was no compensation for this, but every few weeks I'd get a very generous check, a hundred dollars, which to me –

Q: That's a lot of money.

A: – was a lot of money, to cover my expenses. Well, my expenses were because I traveled by subway, and you know, were – were very slim. And – but I – I had a terrible time because I found that between reading about these things and getting an idea of how coverage is done, and then having your pencil in your hand and trying to decide, do I do it, or d-d – or don't I? I had a couple of disastrous – potentially disastrous experiences. One was **Lena Medina**. **Lena Medina** was a five year old girl in **Lima, Peru** who gave birth to a child – at least the story, this is what the story said. And my source was I had read it, it was a **UP** dispatch. And I knew because I'd gotten the – a sort of the copy boy's job at the "**Herald Tribune**" at the – at that time. I knew that the paper always substituted the **UP** for **AP** or anybody else in **Latin America**, because they felt that it was more reliable. So in comes this strange story, and I was too young to have the educational experience of anything involving women. Women were

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

there, and what it takes – what I assume it – you know, it assumes that. But at any rate

–

Q: That it's unusual if they give birth at five.

A: – this was all to – very unusual, I thought it was – I thought instinctively it was impossible, because I had never met anyone five years old who had a child.

A2: Reasonable conclusion.

A: And so I sent in my cable as one of the little stories I had from **America**, this strange place where five year olds have children. And then apparently –

Q: They printed it, I bet.

A: They – they printed it, oh what they did though, they did a very clever thing.

Q: What did they do?

A: They also doubted the veracity of this.

Q: Okay.

A: So they called every [**indecipherable**] person in **Perth**, and asked them what they thought of it, and they said, it's crazy. It can't be, it's impossible. So then they – they ran that story together with my story, in order to take the onus off themselves, in case I – I'd gone crazy. And – but they had, and they didn't know it. And so then there was that dead – dreadfully dead period, nobody wrote me or anything saying you shouldn't take these stories seriously. And I had my explanation all done, because I realized, I talked to some older people, th-they said, oh, that's ridiculous. So then –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: Trial and error.

A: – “**Life**” magazine was bought by somebody on the paper. And this was a – oh, month or two later, and all – everything goes very slowly out there. So – and it showed a picture of **Lina Medina**, her surgeon who had per – performed the operation. It was a – it was a – a Caesarian operation. And – and there was the little infant, believe it or not, there he was. And – and they got very excited about this, so immediately they jumped on it. They – they reported the existence of the photograph, and said they’d – or they – they thought that they should print the fact that this was photographed, maybe everybody would be interested in reading it, or seeing it. And they – they got really very excited. The publisher began going back to the Monday lunches that he had sort of artfully dodged, after that terrible thing. And the –

Q: Does this mean your journalistic career was born with that article?

A: Oh, I don’t know, I had the writing, yo-you know, I’d been submitting stuff, and they’d been printing it, and I got pretty sassy about it. I expected to see the story repeated, whatever I said, with a byline on it. They put a byline every story, even a short one. And no complaint, no instructions, nothing from them. They just let me go. I had – and then in 1941, I still had this job, and I had the – another one of those shocks. I was – I – I had a very weak – weak week. Poor week for journalism. Nothing was developing that I thought I could afford to send. It was 35 cents a na – a – a word, press if I filed. So I was very conscious of this, par-particularly because of my Scottish ba –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

background, and I didn't want to waste the paper's money. So I came to this crisis where that weekly cable looked pretty feeble. Excuse me. And there was a big, big event the Wednesday before. This was about Friday, I was filing. And there was a battle at **Aron** between the French and the British. Maybe you remember it. I don't know how they [**indecipherable**] but this was a pretty exciting story because the British and French were allies, and they – the French had been trying to get Admiral **Darlan**, who was in command of the French forces, to – to surrender, and the – the French were very stubborn; they wouldn't surrender. So finally the British said, all right, if you don't surrender, we're going to fight you. And they started this battle, a really horrible thing because the casualty rate was enormous. Some of the biggest ships then operating in the two navies, had been sunk, there in **Algeria**, of all places.

Q: Is that where the battle was taking place?

A: Mm.

Q: In **Algeria**, okay.

A: Yeah, that was it. And so I knew all about this, of course, and then source reports in the general news that so many ships had been lost, and so many people had been killed. It was a pretty horrible outcome. But I thought [**indecipherable**] and maybe – maybe I could sneak it in, and they'd realize that I was using old news, but I had to. And so, oddly enough, they printed it. But what they did is they ran – they went to the archives and got the **Jane's** book – **Jane's** ships, and copied out the pictures that were

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

mentioned, all of the casualties, and read it down one side of page one. And then they sent all of – the few little words I had to say, I never mentioned anything that I – you know [**indecipherable**] to repeat. But obviously the battle had been fought, and I had to say something about it. So I did that, and that was all printed in eight point type. So must have been a very impressive thing. I never saw it.

Q: You never saw that piece as it ran?

A: No, the paper never came. My – every once in a while I'd miss a copy. So, any rate I – I was agonized when I discovered that they printed it, and no other paper in **Australia** printed it, of course. And so th-ther was no wi – no battle and all of its casualties from **Brooks McClure**. So I wondered how – how we got around this, and what happened. Well, what happened was that I – I always made s-small reports, as small as I could make them, and put each story on a different page. And then I'd sit in the telegrapher's office and peel them off wa – one by one. Well, because this was such a bad reporting day, I worked very hard and very late, to get the best I could out of it, and so I guess the cable came in with this odd story in the middle, and the rest of it much less important stuff. And so the Australian censor then record it. What they done is they blanked it out. And so, on the next Wednesday was an announcement that **Churchill** is going to make a special speech. And so everybody in the world was listening to that, and they heard all about the Battle of **Aron**, many of them for the first time. So, at any rate, I escaped –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: Yeah.

A: – that time, and I didn't even know it. And I thought I was so smart, oh boy.

[**indecipherable**] to get it. They said they didn't know what to do, they held a – and editorial conference, and – and they were all standing around, they – all the editors, and debating this thing. Finally somebody said well, look, he's our man, and we're – we – we trust him, and it's all down on paper. I think we should stick with it, see what happens. And so everybody more or less agreed, that's what they did. And they saved themselves a lot of trouble. Well, all right, I'm sorry. I hope I didn't digress –

Q: No, no, no, no.

A: – too much.

Q: It – it – this is – it is all very relevant, because it brings me to the next point. And that is, you had mentioned earlier that your dad passed away in 1940, and that your life changed at that time.

A: Oh yes.

Q: And I wanted to – I wanted to ask in which way it had changed, and how did you – did you have to leave journalism then? Did you have to – did you make decisions to go into the military, were you drafted? I want to bring – get us to the place where you're ending up in **Europe**, and tell me what the sequence of events was.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Oh well, I was – I was not drafted yet, and I guess I had a slightly preferential rating, because I had al – besides my father, who was very sick, I had three women to take care of in the immediate family.

Q: And they were?

A: So I had – may have had a [indecipherable], but the – but I – they didn't draft me, and I didn't volunteer until much later. But wa – events moved very fast. He was a stubborn old Scot and he – he went to work every day. He didn't know he was dying and his physician was recommending that he quit, and all that. No, he wanted to go on, do the job. So it was a terrible strain on everybody who loved him, of course. And I – what changed – well, one thing that didn't change was the journalism idea. I had now fixed it, because I did this silly thing. And I knew that that's what I wanted to do.

Regardless, I – I went hunting all over **New York**, all over **Westchester County** to try to get a job. And of course, they almost laughed. What school did I go to? And I only [indecipherable] curious creature. I was six-one, 180 pounds, and in other words, always out of line with my peers, and – and always doing silly things. So – so I – I got the desserts I – I really worked for, and couldn't get a job in – on a newspaper. So, we had – we had to manage – course, we had to live on the re – the savings of the family, and it was very hard. I – I was out run – running around, trying to get another job and all this, and it was –

Q: Did you stay – where did you live in **Manhattan**? Was it in –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: **Laurel Hill**.

Q: And where is that?

A: Do you know **Laurel Hill**?

Q: No.

A: Well, **Manhattan** is ver – is long and lean. And when you get up to the top, there's a little – little piece at the very top, it's a mountain, and it's called **Laurel Hill**.

Q: Is it near the **Bronx**?

A: Hm?

Q: Near the **Bronx**? Is it near the **Bronx**?

A: Oh yeah, sure, it's a na –

Q: Okay.

A: – it's the next thing to the bran – **Bronx**. And, in fact, in grammar school, I went to school in – in the **Bronx**, and in – and afterwards, in high school, I went to **George Washington High**, which is down at **Washington Heights**. So –

Q: I know the area now. I get a better sense of that. I wanted to then – you were looking for – you were looking for a job. Did you eventually find one?

A: Well, I got a job, oddly, on the – on the “**Herald Tribune**.” I had been writing a little bit, trying to sell some articles in **America**, too. And I didn't do spectacularly, but I made a few sales. And then there was a man named **Charlie McLenden**(ph), who had just taken over as city editor of the “**Herald Tribune**,” and I got an interview with him.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

And I brought my clippings, to show him that I was doing something. And he said well, I'm sorry, we don't have any jobs for – for people like you, you know, education, all those considerations, on – on the staff. But he said, I – I'll hire you for – on the – for – as a copyboy. That was another irrelevancy, here I was over six feet tall, and running copy from one desk to another. Sort of an embarrassing situation. And so I had that job for a long time, they didn't fire me, they kept me on. And they had a reputation for those that they – that passed the test and stayed, of – of making them reporters after a certain length of time. But all these people had, you know, education. So it didn't look very promising. But I was able to use the paper's facilities, their library, the – they had an internal telegraph office, where I spent a lot of time writing up my stuff. And the work wasn't hard. The – this big goof was running around doing it. And so, at any rate, I used it to good advantage, and almost gave up. I – I was – I was then 23.

Q: Mm-hm, so that's 1942.

A: Yeah, that's right. Well, that's when I joined the army, and I – my mother and I had a ken – consultation. I asked her what she would think if I went in the army. She said she thought it was a very intelligent thing to do. After all, there are all kinds of people, big sons like you that have to go. Sure they have to die, they have to suffer, but they're going. And she said that, you're an American, you have to decide what to do. So I joined the infantry, which was the most idiotic thing to do. I'm sure I could have gotten a job at a – at a better branch of the service, but – but I fel – felt very patriotic at the

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

time, I did the right thing. So – and then, of course, I had to make a lot of changes, I had to quit my job in aus – **Australia**. Which actually was paying off a little bit, you know, they were paying me far more than I was worth, and I had originally asked just to – to work for nothing, but they wouldn't accept that. So, they were very nice. And so then off I went into the infantry.

Q: And where were – were you stateside for a while?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Were you based in the – in the **U.S.** for a while?

A: **United States**? Oh yeah, sure. I'd, of course, did all the basic training and all, which is a – which is another great exercise. It's very, very hard, you know, you – you have to fall on your rifle, and do all sorts of odd things that normal human beings probably wouldn't.

Q: That's right.

A: But – but I got along all right, I got promotions. And then I had a – a specialty, I – I developed a special skill [**indecipherable**] because I worked at night, and sometimes I stayed over, and then the fellow down – we had a wire link between **New York** and **Washington**, and there was another young fellow there, just in my same position. And we would send long messages to each other. And I – I got so that I could type 60 words a minute.

Q: Wow.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: And then – that's the speed of the transmitter distributor that does it automatically, you know. And so, when I got in the army, I did another foolish thing. They said, put down anything you think y-you might be able to do in the service, if you have a special –

Q: Skill, mm-hm.

A: – skill. So I thought about that a little bit. I thought the only thing I knew how to do was to type. So – so I told him that I could – I – I could imitate the speed of a – an electric transmitter on the typewriter. Well that's – really that wasn't such a – an achievement. There are millions of girls with typewriters who could do that.

Q: But they're not in the army.

A: No, that's right. And they didn't get the opportunity to do this. So somebody had run the **IBM** rod you know, through the bo – through the cards, and came out with this remarkable fact that one of their soldiers – actually, I had – I had this experience with computer – with transmitters that, you know – computer transmission.

A2: The teletypes.

Q: The teletypes probably.

A2: The teletypes.

A: Yeah.

A2: The teletypes?

Q: Was it the teletypes?

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Yeah, teletypes, yeah.

Q: That's right, mm-hm.

A: So, well, then I didn't know this, but the – the army decided in the earlier period, when they weren't so overwhelmed, that they would experiment with a – a wireless. Well, wireless was an unknown then, for teletypes, although it's – today it's e-
everywhere. And so they – they transferred me. I think I was a – I was probably just a **PFC** at the time. And –

Q: Private first class?

A: Huh?

Q: Private first class?

A: Private first class. And all of a sudden I found that I was still in the infantry, but I had this special assignment. They had teletype machines, and you could practice on them, and I practiced on them, and somebody else did too. And one of – two of – two other men were taken in for this, but they were both noncoms. One was a master sergeant and the other ta – the next le-level. And so – but they came out of the – out of the signals business, they worked for railroads, you know, all sorts of things. So they had plenty of experience. They knew all about how – how these things worked. I didn't know, I couldn't repair one. I wa – I wasn't going to tell them I wasn't qualified. I was secretly pleased that the – well, I guess I already had a grade. I was probably a corporal or a sergeant by that time. And I'll tell you, when you think and what you do in the

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

infantry, how you will get home to mama is a question. So – so I the – I – I decided I'd do what the wa – army wanted me to do. And so I had this curious job all through – actually variations in my career, I joined the air force, and I – I – I qualified, and I was very keen about that.

Q: Was this post-war?

A: Huh?

Q: Joining the air force was post-war, or during the war?

A: No, this was during the height of the casualties in – in the eighth army, you know, in the – in – in **Europe**. And of course, we weren't doing too well the – **Asia** either, but – but it was a – it was a death wish, actually, if you got into that. And I – I was willing to go, but when I had any kind of alternative, I – I was willing to accept it. Then a –

Q: Because the in – can I just –

A: Yeah.

Q: – clarify? Because being in the infantry would have been the worst possible situation. Is that – i-if I understand this properly? It was –

A: Well –

Q: – not the – the least of – le-let me see if I can rephrase that. Is it if you want to get home to mama, being in the infantry is going to be the place where it's least likely to happen?

A: Oh, wi – yes, I would say so.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: Although the – although I discovered after I got in the air force, that the casualty rate was just as great. They shoot you out of the sky, and – instead. So the question – I – I – I wasn't doing too good at artful dodging, really. But at any rate, things were all right. I was just getting around, and then finally wind – wound up back in the infantry when **Eisenhower** declared that they had too many fliers, and – and that they were going to pair – send all the fliers and [indecipherable] specialists, and all the special kinds of people back to the infantry. Some of them had never been in the infantry when they were put in. If you ever heard of the Battle of the Bulge –

Q: Oh yes.

A: – there was a – there was a tremendous of them [indecipherable] to that. And to go in to a – to a war like that, that was murder. And – but I didn't – I was sent down to a regular infantry division that was only training. I-I –

Q: What year was this?

A: Oh, let's see. Oh, this was late '43 or early '44.

Q: Okay.

A: And I – and I joined this infantry unit, one of the last to go to **Europe**, actually, and oddly enough, you know, was a late arrival, I was put into **Patton's Third Army**, which had one of the dreadful infantry scores – casualty scores.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: Mm-hm. So you arrived in **Europe** – I want to establish this fact: you arrived in **Europe** when? In early '44?

A: Let me see. Must have been.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were the last division to arrive, so we were sort of a – a poor gift to the army that got it. But we trained very hard, and I had had a little training before, so I felt, they can train me to death if they want to, because I want to be equal to the job when I get it. So – but in the meantime there was this typewriter business. Now, if you can imagine, they had, while we were in the **States**, they had the typewriter equipment, and they had this special articulated truck, one of those things that swings in all directions, you know, to – to transport it. And I was tra – I was trained in how to park this thing, and you know, to run it, in case they needed me. But – but they had a regular team of transport people who – who normally handled this job. Well, I went into the field in **Mississippi**, and did all these things, and that's the last I saw of the truck or the – or the computers, the –

Q: The wireless teletypers?

A: The tele – wireless teletype. And they didn't – course they don't – didn't consult me in the service on anything, really, but I didn't know what ha – what happened to it, but they had forgotten to cancel it or change it in some way. So there was always this little strange thing, that I went abroad, I was – I was posted in the signal company of the 65th

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

infantry division, and got assignments occasionally, but it was not a – not terribly a busy job for me. A division is about 14,000 men, so you can see they had a lot – lot of people that do their normal work. And – and I never was pressed too much, because I had this secret job. Nobody ever talked about it, it was just – I was just out in the cold, I guess. I got a couple of promotions.

Q: Well, what did you do? This is wa – something I don't understand: when you were in the infantry, what was it that you were doing over there in **Europe**?

A: Well, I was – I was attached to this super-secret mission. So, I don't know, that was enough for me. But I was in – getting in a few – few firefights, but nothing –

Q: So you didn't really see battle?

A: Huh?

Q: You didn't see battle?

A: Well, sure I f-fought. I was shot and – shot at and I shot back, and no, I had enough experience so I could say I was an infantryman, but – but there I was encased in this situation, and they –

Q: Well, what can you tell us – what can you tell us about this su – this secret mission? What was its goal, what was its purpose, what was –

A: Well, the thing was, they wanted to develop a wireless system, which would connect the – the frontline troops with headquarters, and – in-instantly. And you can do it with

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

teletype, but you can't do it if you have to have lines between teletypes being cut by the enemy all the time.

Q: Right. Right.

A: And just laying the lines is too hideous a job. But this was obviously the beginning of a project that we were trying to analyze all the aspects, and see if they can straighten it out. I – I could understand, but I never – never thought it was terribly funny, but I happen to be the beneficiary, so I wasn't going to argue about it. Well, as a result though, I had a distorted military career, in which – during which I had the two experiences that we – we were to talk about.

Q: And that we're – I'm hoping, yeah, that we can now. So di – does this – the fact that you were in this – in this particular – I don't know if the right word is occupation or activity, is that what brought you closer to – when we're going to talk about **Ohrdruf**, that – why you happened to be there at – at that time.

A: Well, you know, it's only because I got into this peculiar subculture –

Q: I see.

A: – in the military. There were other people in the army, some fascinating people. There – you can't imagine how some noncommissioned officers got positions of enormous authority, and it's because of that, in this instance, that I got into one of these things. The one about the – the wor – the work projects of the – to so many of the Holocaust victims. And so from there on I was – I was part of an infantry unit, didn't

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

have to go – di – wasn't callable and ba – and part of the **[indecipherable]** and really just give it – I had a lot of free time. And that was the real trouble. Free time and **McClure** don't go together. So I went out, had some adventures. I was actually **AWOL**, I guess a ti – absent without leave.

Q: Where?

A: And – but nobody missed me, and –

Q: Were you in **Germany**?

A: – I answered all the – you know, you get up in the morning, they blow the bugle, they get you out, they – they check your name to make sure you're there. Then you go to breakfast, and then, of course, **McClure** vanishes.

Q: Where did you vanish?

A: My wer – might work on a keyboard, but he's not doing anything most infantry men would respect. So, at any rate, the way I – I at some time will get to the – to these two things, two very different experiences, quite profound. And –

Q: In all of this, you say you arrived in 1944, early in 1944, and probably it's a year and some months later, maybe a year and three months later when you come onto **Ohdruf**. In that time, did you know, was it spoken of, was it known about, of what was happening basically to the Jews and others in **Europe**? Was it – was – were you aware, were others aware?

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: Well, that's an interesting question because as an individual, I don't remember being terribly well-informed about – well, once – once they opened **Auschwitz**, all right. But before that – well, I was aware of the **Saint Louis** incident.

Q: Okay.

A: And the criticism of **Roosevelt** because he didn't save those people, keep them from going back and dying, like they did.

Q: Yes, absolutely.

A: And so I – I was aware of that, and of course I knew that the German propaganda was all anti-Jewish. But this business of gathering up people just to kill them, I didn't – wasn't aware of being aware of that. And in fact, when I – when – when we discovered that the work quarters of these poor people in south **Germany**, first time we had encountered it – apparently, I don't know how they got away without being caught, becau – of course, **Germany** is a very big country.

Q: Yes.

A: And – and we went after the cities first.

Q: So tell us about – you say the first time you encountered this was in south **Germany**? So was that like **Bavaria**? In **Bavaria** is –

A: No, no, I – it's that province next to **Bavaria** that's a little south and east.

Q: **Baden Württemberg**?

A: Yeah.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: That's a little southwest, closer to **France**.

A: That's where **Ohrdruf** was.

Q: Oh no, no, then we're going the other direction, then it's **Thüringen**. Then – was **Ohrdruf** the first time you came into contact with what this policy had been?

A: Oh yes, yeah. And I wasn't the only one, I was – I was one of many, many – everybody. Nobody –

Q: Can you – now can we go into some detail about this? You were – when you were already almost there, what was your – what was your job? What were you doing when you were called to go to **Ohrdruf**? What was y – what were you involved in?

A: Oh yeah, well, that's the – the – the thing here, I referred to about th-the sub-class in the army.

Q: Right. Right.

A: Some awfully smart people of very low rank got in, and it's amazing. He was in the – i-in g – **G3**, the – the operational side of the division. And he did some magnificent, good work. He made sure everybody got decorations who were supposed to.

Q: Who was this person?

A: A young man from **Chicago**, ju – was just a name to me. I got to know him, but he wa – he worked on the “**Chicago Tribune**,” and had – that was a fascinating – something that I didn't know. Because, I guess he had good talent, he was taught to do all the main jobs on the paper. So that the – if the – if the printers went out on strike, he

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

would go down and work a linotype machine. So, at any rate, he was a – a pretty – pretty savvy young guy, and had been kicked around a little bit, so he – he knew how to – how to handle problems. And – and he had a boss, a – I don't know, a colonel, or a lieutenant colonel who was very enamored of him for a while; this is a smart boy. And so he gradually elevated in authority. He was given [indecipherable] of things to do, th – his boss wanted results, and he was a results getter. And so, at any rate, by the time I ga – I got to know him pretty well, because of my interest in journalism, I found he had been with the “**Chicago Tribune**,” which was not the **New York Tribune** – “**Herald Tribune**.”

Q: Right.

A: But – but we had a similar interest, and we joked about – about journalism, and so on. And so it got so, for little things. I was mostly idle, in another part of the camp. The – the camp is a city, really. And he'd call on me if he ever had something that – a job to do, that he couldn't do or – so – so we got pretty chummy. Then one day a – one day a **Jeep** showed up first thing in the morning. I – I was just finishing breakfast, I guess, and I was being called by my friend. So I got in the **Jeep**, and off we went, over to his headquarters, and he told me we – we've discovered some anomaly here, strange thing, a lot of people dying and I don't know, we just got a radio report on this thing at – I need this – h-he – he described it. Well, he said he – he wanted to send me over there to take a picture of this thing. He said we should have pictures of it. So he gave me a no –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

a German 35 millimeter camera, one of the best that they make. And – but it had film in it, I didn't know the speed of the film, and that was a big handicap because I knew I couldn't take many pictures in the shadow, if – if – if that was standard film. So, off I went, and they had a driver, really quite incredible. He had surveyed the route to this place by – by using a – automobile company maps. And so we went right there, it was no problem, he made no mistakes, he drove right there. And we got into the area, we didn't know where the camp was, but we saw all of the military equipment that had been gathering.

Q: So, by the military equipment, do you mean U.S. military?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And how long, you know, from where your unit was to where this camp was, was it a half hour drive, was it an hour drive, do you remember? Was it –

A: It was – I – I – I – as I – I feel it now, it seemed to be about half an hour, 45 minutes. Though I – I could be wrong about that.

Q: Yeah. But anyway, it wasn't half a day. It wasn't something that was very far away.

A: Oh, no.

Q: Okay.

A: We didn't have to eat or anything.

Q: Okay. Okay.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: So, well, I came upon this rugged terrain. We got off the main drive. He wa – he was absolutely sure of where he would find it, and he came – he came into an area where we saw a lot of – a couple of tanks, and a lot of other motorized equipment, American, and we figured we'd – we'd hit something. And then we were – were led by the locals, wha-whatever **G.I.s** we could find, and led to this place. Well, it was very remote in the woods, and the little building, all of raw wood. And they had a huge gate, with a slogan, let's see if I can remember. It's a very simple slogan in German, and **[indecipherable]** although most people had to deal with it. **Arbeit** – something about **arbeit** that – well, work is a liberator, or –

Q: **Arbeit macht frei.**

A: Yeah, that **macht frei**, that's right.

Q: **Arbeit macht frei.**

A: **Arbeit macht frei.** And there was this – that's the only metal I could remember, everything else was just wood. And I learned also later that they built hundreds of these on the same plans, so that if you encountered one in one place, it looked like the same you saw before. And –

Q: So, was like a wooden building? Did it look like a storehouse, or a warehouse?

A: No, no, it didn't have any distinction or appearance of authority or anything like that. It was just a little – I want to say, a crudely built architecturally nil kind of

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

construction. And it – it was designed for its purpose, which it was just to house the Holocaust victims.

Q: So, did you open the – did you open a door to it?

A: Oh, I didn't do anything. I arrived, I was just another **G.I.** I – well, I was more than that, I was a – I think I was a sergeant by then, but I was just another guy dressed in all the same clothes that everybody else was, and I liked that because nobody asked any questions. I wasn't part of the rescue team though, and I had free access, I could go around, take pictures wherever I wanted. I –

Q: What's the first picture you took?

A: First picture I took was of the – of the grave. There was about, oh, I would say about 800 feet long, very long, and very deep, and about 15 feet wide.

Q: And what did you see in it?

A: Hm?

Q: What did you see?

A: Well, bodies. In fact, I – I had no trouble understanding what it was for, because they were in the process of dumping more bodies in, all of them naked. They take – they took off the rags that they had been wearing, washed them, and then they'd use them again, you see. But th –

Q: So when you came aco – across this first scene that you took a photograph of, there was actual dumping of bodies going on in the –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Yes, oh yeah, sure.

Q: Was this now the U.S. military that was cleaning it out?

A: Oh, there were. There was a lot of work to do, because there were many bodies in this – in the barracks. Barracks were three – three stages high, as I remember, and they were just lay – laid out on the floor of th – each level. And some of them were so weak, they couldn't get up to eat.

Q: So, when you were in the barracks there were people who were alive, as well as people who were dead.

A: Oh yeah, well, they were dying. That's what they were doing, it was –

Q: Was this men or women?

A: All – all – all – both.

Q: Both men – any children?

A: No, I didn't notice any children. I think they disposed of the children very quickly. I know –

Q: When you say – excuse me that I'm interrupting – when you say three stages, do you mean that there were – the bunks were in three bunks –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and that people were on each level?

A: Three tiers.

Q: Yeah, okay.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Yeah. Now, of course, the stronger ones so happened to be on the top, because they could still get down, but – but there were a lot of them even in the – on the lowest level, who were just comatose. Ju-Just a terr – it's a terrible sight. These are people who should be dead, but were alive.

Q: Did you take pictures there too?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Did you take pictures of them?

A: Couldn't, because I wasn't sure of the – of the film.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah. I figured it was not a ver – a super speed, that's what you need for that, in order –

Q: Because it would be inside, and darker, yeah.

A: Your light, there's – there's almost no light in there. So I didn't – I took some pictures, but they didn't come out.

Q: Mm-hm. And do you have an idea of about how many bodies you saw, or how many people you saw in there? Was it stuffed to the gills? Was it a hundred, 200? Was it 50?

I know those are abstra – you know, sort of estimates, but –

A: Yeah, hard to tell.

Q: – to get a sense of a –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Hard to tell how many there were. I went in, I took a look, I saw some of them, and I came out.

Q: Did any move to you? Did anybody want to talk to you?

A: Oh yes, well, not – not – I mean, they didn't campaign, but you could see they'd look at you with those empty eyes, and beg you, really, to help. But th – they were very pleased, they were – by – by the time I got there, the operational troops had called for help, and they got some – some very skilled medical people, by the way. They couldn't do much for the ones that were dying, of course, but they were dying, and they had to be disposed of, because it was a very great danger, biological danger. So, when I got there, I – the one thing I remember, the one, looked like pretty husky guy, a man, maybe in his middle 30s, something like that, carrying a skeleton. Dang – skeleton was just dangling there. And then – then tossed it into the trap, you know, into the –

Q: By trap, do you mean that 800 foot long –

A: Yeah, di –

Q: – ditch that –

A: Yeah.

Q: It was the grave.

A: Yes, it's a – and somebody, they put in lime. And I saw this, and I think that was early enough so that – it isn't the way it necessarily looked at the end. But –

Q: So this is before the lime starts taking effect?

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Hm?

Q: This is before the lime starts doing what it does?

A: Yes, that's right, it wasn't – th-there – there was some lime underneath. Th-This – the depth of this, human depth was maybe three or four feet already, so a lot of bodies underneath that al – already been disposed of, and I don't know how long that gash had been there. I suspect that it was there be – before the guards left. They – they got a warning that the Americans were coming.

Q: Can – do you have a sense of how long the U.S. military was already there before you arrived?

A: Well, not to my – it wasn't too long.

Q: A day?

A: A – no, no, not a day. They – the tank came on it – what was that hour, I don't know. It could – I think it was a man who became General **Abrams**, who was the commander of the tank. He was then a captain, or something. And then he had other trucks, cars with him, with troops. Let's see. I think it was fairly late in the day when he came on, or possibly even later.

Q: In the evening, maybe.

A: Yeah, right. And he immediately re – radioed back to headquarters, and – and they of course notified the division command. And that's the way I got the word myself,

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

very first thing in the morning. We – so they must have been there, couldn't have been doing very much, because of the darkness.

Q: Right.

A: And I suppose they were – they must have been suspicious too. A lot of serious trouble going on one place, you know, and th – and after dark, you don't dare endanger yourself. But at any rate they – they notified us. They used their own medics in the – the little group that arrived.

Q: Do you remember the date?

A: Hm?

Q: Do you remember the date this was? **[technical interruption]**

End of File One

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Beginning File Two

Q: I'm just going to say something here, okay? This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Brooks McClure**. We're on a separate track, that's why we're go – so, I was asking you about the date. Do you have an idea about when this was?

A: Oh, I didn't keep track of dates. I – I could be a week off –

Q: It's okay.

A: – at any time.

Q: But it was April.

A: Hm?

Q: It was April, you think.

A: I th – I seem to remember that it was April. I was looking – incidentally, I didn't mention this, but I had a few notes, and I had some of the pictures that I took, in my files. And my wife died, and I got sick, and so I didn't follow up very much on this. Had to sell the house and – and move into an old people's home. So, I – I – I wasn't aware of this very much, but unfortunately a lot of the files that I preev – prized, were lost. And so I would have had the date, and a – a lot – lot of other things in there. I – I can't imagine my not noting that down, because this was such an unusual experience.

Q: Yes.

A: But –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: Was it cold still?

A: Huh?

Q: Was it cold still if you –

A: Oh, it was always dank.

Q: Okay.

A: Sort of chilly, you know. I do – there was certainly in the air, and it was in – I suppose even in – it might have been in spring, you know, the weather.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But I was wearing a re-regular uniform, no coat or anything. So I – I don't know. It couldn't have been very cold. But those poor people, oh my heavens.

Q: Did anybody try to speak with you from those – from –

A: Yes. Usually in a language I didn't understand. A lot of them were Poles, ge – Germans, Russians.

Q: Mm-hm. So you think you sa – maybe there were Soviet soldiers who were in the group, too?

A: Oh, it's quite possible. The Germans were not very respectful of the – of the Russians –

Q: No.

A: – soldiers. So, anyway, that's really the extent of my experience.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: How long do you – did you stay there? How long did you stay wi – in this one place?

A: Not – not very long.

Q: No?

A: We were – we were on the move. The – the – the army as itself, was moving very fast. And that's why I think they – they overtook some people that were trying to get away. And **Patton** moved at times, 50 miles in a day. Now, if you can imagine a military force of maybe clo-close to a half a million men –

Q: That's a lot.

A: – moving this fast, and actually, if you read up on it, it's quite interesting in retrospect, to see how well the Americans did. They fought like fiends. The Germans de-defending their own country, didn't do nearly as well.

Q: Do you want to take a break a little bit?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Do you want to take a break?

A: No, thank you –

Q: No, okay.

A: – I don't care.

Q: Okay, I think maybe he wants to sit up?

A: I'm full –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A2: Want to sit up a little bit, **Brooks**?

A: Yeah, I know, I – I'm –

Q: Want some help here?

A: – I'm not in perfect condition, and I hope you will excuse. Sometimes I – I can't remember, you know.

Q: I think you're doing great. I think you're doing just great. Before **[interruption]** okay, continue, yes, all right. It's going to be another track, or no?

A: Miss?

Q2: All right, now it's going, so –

Q: Okay.

A: She'll have to talk a little louder than normal.

Q: Okay.

A: Cause I – I'm losing my hearing.

Q2: Okay, you're fine, you're fine.

Q: Everything's fine with the recorder. Okay.

A2: **Brooks**, I think you once mentioned something about the guards from the camp.

Q: Yes, I wanted to ask about this –

A: Oh, oh, yeah, sure, sure.

Q: – the guards from the camp. Could you tell us something –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: It would be a shame not to talk about that. The – the camp had th – been warned by wireless, and immediately started to disband. And ul – a lot of the – the guards seemed to have rooms or something down in the town of **Ohrdruf, o-h-r-d-r-u-f**, as I remember the spelling. And some of them dashed down and changed their clothes, and just mingled with the local people. And s – but very soon the Americans realized what had happened, and they sent a tank down and they put them on the tank, brought them back – the ones they could find. They fu – found quite a number apparently. This all happened before I arrived.

Q: So very quickly.

A: Yeah, oh, yeah, so was –

Q: Very quickly.

A: – no delay. I thought the military did a wonderful job. They didn't pause for a minute. And they brought them back dressed in their **[indecipherable]** uniforms, and – and civilian clothes. And this town, by the way, is a lovely little paradise, beautifully kept. They all had flower – window flower arrangements. And – and it was really a wonderful place to go to. They had the **[indecipherable]** and then the – all the arrangements. And so – and they had a full population town, I guess, mostly middle aged people, women and men. But –

Q: About how far was the campsite from the town?

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: I'd say about two miles now, my guess – my guess is. I don't know how you – one measures distance when you're walking –

Q: Did you walk it?

A: – especially when you're a young man.

Q: Did you walk it?

A: Oh, I walked it, sure.

Q: About how long did it take you to get from the town to the camp?

A: I don't know. And I don't know why I walked it, because we had a car. But – but I don't – I don't know, I went down – maybe I'm a – had company. I can't remember now.

Q: It's okay.

A: But, at any rate, I got down there, and I remember entering the town from one end, and seeing how beautiful it was, and how fiendish the whole idea seemed to be. At a – any rate –

Q: The guards – excuse me that I'm interrupting, but we go back to the guards. They were brought back in civilian clothes to the camp. Did anybody recognize them and identify them, from the – from those dying people?

A: Oh yes, well, that's what I was about to say. There were some of the Holocaust victims who were at least strong enough to stand up and move around. And when the – when the Americans brought these people in, I heard, and I – and thi-this is not my

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

personal experience, but they attacked them. And at first the Americans had to intervene, and stop it and so forth. And – but that didn't appease the – the victims at all, of course. The – but all of this is hearsay. I wa – I – I heard this when I – when a – when we arrived.

Q: Another question. Maybe my final one that has to do with **Ohrdruf**, unless **Joe** has some more, is when peop – when the Americans came, the **G.I.s** – no, I have two more. When the Americans came, and they saw this, did they have any idea of what it was that they were seeing?

A: No. No. Of course, the first thing you see is the dead and dying.

Q: Yeah.

A: And these were obviously not people armed, so they weren't soldiers in the normal sense. And they were all dressed in these curious uniforms, with the stripes going down, you know. And so they – they were – must have been aware that these were prisoners who had revolted, or something. I-It was hard to piece together a story, even when I was there. And the next day, a passel of – of generals came to see it.

Q: Well, that's my second question.

A: Yeah.

Q: Does the name **Franks** say anything to you? **Franks**, as a last name.

A: French?

Q: **Franks. Frank**, with an **S** at the end.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Like – like the country?

Q: No, no, not like the country, like the hamber – no, like the hot dog. A frank.

A: Oh, the franks.

Q: Yeah, does the name **Franks** say anything to you?

A: No, no, I di – I never met a **Frank** knowingly.

Q: Okay. Because I had heard that there was – this was a person who was responsible for getting some of the higher-ups to come to **Ohrdruf** and **Buchenwald**.

A: Oh, well, I may have. I ma – oh, no, **Buchenwald** is something else again. This is an entirely separate and belated development.

Q: Okay.

A: So no, the next day they got **Patton**, **Bradley**, I think – what's that? Field Marshall **Montgomery**, and then a couple of others, because they found that it was something very unusual. Actually, how it escaped their notice so long, I don't know, because our patrols extended far in. But I suppose er – if it had been er – discovered ear-earlier, it would have been a little bit – bit of a situation. For one thing, maybe the response, because of the time of day, would have been quicker. They – they rea – they – they recognized – the medics that they had were just regular combat medics, and they knew they couldn't do a great deal. All they did was recognize the principle that after a certain point of not eating, you are doomed.

Q: Right. Yeah.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: And – and there were a lot of doomed people around there. Oh, it was really awful. And, you know – well, you’ve all seen pictures of these people; they’re so thin, it’s unbelievable. Their veins stood out on their arms and everything.

Q: Yeah.

A: [indecipherable] didn’t seem human. And I wonder how they got along. There was a good mixture of languages, but you’d have to organize it among the survivors, a few could speak English or French. Otherwise, they were out of communication, really, I think. Maybe some of the Germans mixed in would have been re-reasonable

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: Pardon me?

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: Oh, I didn’t stay very long at all. Took my pictures. I knew they wanted them back at headquarters, and so I – I just about jumped in the car, and off we went.

Q: So were you there a couple hours, perhaps, or half a day?

A: Yeah, yeah. Not very much at all. I realized early on that I couldn’t spend much time in – inside these buildings.

Q: Mm-hm. So it was more than one building?

A: Oh well, I think so. I think there was. I only went into one, but it was a – it was a pretty sizable thing. I don’t know how many workers they had to have, or they were using for whatever project they were doing. They were – they were probably cleaning

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

out the – the ... the woods, you know, because the Germans do that. They make it a policy, clean out the underbrush wherever they are, and they use it, of course, profitably, to burn. But – and I wouldn't have been – I don't know where the – how – I don't know how – how the civilians managed. They – the tradition in **Germany** is to go into the woods and clean it out. Well, you know, if – if the – if the camp was two miles away, I don't know how they would escape being discovered, but I don't think that's an issue. These – the – the townspeople all knew about this. I understand that afterwards, the Americans took the **Bürgermeister** and a number of senior civilian officers up to watch this process that I watched; they were still burying these people.

Q: Did you ever write about this after the war?

A: Huh?

Q: Did you ever write about this?

A: No, I never did. I never did. But I – but I – I think that after the war it was well known, and wasn't quite as dramatic as hanging them with piano wire in **Auschwitz**. But the – the whole thing is unbelievable, more-so – you know, one says that it's unbelievable that a group of people would be killed this way, for nothing other than being what they are. And that binary nature of these people, who could be very polite and – and com – polite society, in their polite society, and yet they – th-there was – the Germans did an analysis of one of their big meetings and it survived the war, and I saw it in **Germany**, in fact. This was after the war. And it was appalling to see these people

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

who were responsible for th-th-the disposal of human beings, joking about it and going about it in such a detached way. No – no – no emotion involved. Well, but at any rate, that's not pertinent to what we're talking about, but –

Q: It is, but it is not – it's not direct witness, it is the impressions that you get after the fact.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: So it ties in, it ties in.

A: That's right. It didn't have to be a visual presentation at all.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: You just think of the idea, planning and executing these people in such a way.

Q: Yeah.

A: And this was the other way. These were the dregs. These were – these were not the people who were employed in [indecipherable] plants all through **Germany**, or – there – there were a lot of commercial properties that were managed and run by these people. Some fantastic stories about that, but seeing it is an emotional experience.

Q: Did you talk about it to your folks when you came home, to your home?

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: Yeah?

A: My mother was the only one left, so –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: When – when **Patton** moved on at that clip, that pretty fast clip of moving, you know, such a wall of humanity forward, 50 mi – did you go forward as well, as part of that?

A: No, well, the country is vast.

Q: Okay.

A: We had the – the – the third army had the southern quarter of **Germany** to take care of. We – we were – were – we were at one point closest to **Berlin**, then moved down, on orders, of course.

Q: Yes.

A: And **Patton** was assigned this last southeastern quarter of **Germany**, and what went with it, a little bit of **Czechoslovakia**.

Q: Right.

A: And – and **Austria**, of course.

Q: Right.

A: The Austrian experience is also – that's where they have separate comment.

Q: I'd like to get there.

A: We were all a little anxious, I suppose. We were doing very well, but when you're in a battle, if you're moving forward, you feel pretty good about that, but your – you're further exposing yourself to doom. And the – I was – I was not aware of – of this sweep, but I knew it happened. And in fact, after – after the Battle of the Bulge, our –

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

our – our army – I – I – I – I’m afraid I – I shouldn’t say our army, I wasn’t in the army, but I – in that army, but because I – of my personal experience. But oh, the casualties were fearsome. And the men who really fought have a different, instinctive feeling about it. But our infan – infantry really ch – went through them so fast, that we had some surprises. We overtook the – the retreat of the Germans. They’d retreat a while, then they’d surrender. And so – but as I say, in – in **Austria** they got another picture of it.

Q: What happened in **Austria**?

A: Because they were – these were civilians and – and the Austrians that were in the army were, of course, in the German army. And so they didn’t have much to do in **Austria**. I know wa – in our experience, the Austrian takeover was a cinch, after the fighting that we had done before.

Q: Was this already – if you were in **Ohrdruf** in a – in April, where did you – when the war ended in early May, do you remember that, where you were at the time?

A: Yes, I was in **Linz, Austria**.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: Sure. Sure, I – the – the end of war is really the end of war for – for the Austrians, there was nothing. And all the pretty girls, some very eager to cooperate ger – Austrians, but not – not resisting. We had to face the possibility that we’d have to fight

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

through it, but they didn't have – they did – they didn't have a home guard or anything, to give us any trouble, so **[inaudible]**

Q: Let's talk then about that second – second episode –

A: Oh yeah, well, that's a different thing entirely, and – and in retrospect, it's a funny experience. I enjoyed it so much afterwards, because it was so dangerous when it was done.

Q: So tell us about that.

A: I – we were – we were stationed in **Linz**, in western **Austria**, and I was – I – I had attached myself to the – to the intelligence section of the army. And get – got to know a very affable, probably 25 year old major who was working there too. He was an infantry officer, a big man. I – apparently he certainly never showed any fear or anxiety under extreme pressure. But at any rate, I reported in one day. It was across town, I was with ya – with my infantry friends, and – eating there and so forth. So I came in one morning, about eight o'clock I suppose, and there was this major whose name I can't remember – and that's a shame, you know, that just – should never forget the name of somebody who made such an impression. But at any rate, he was a good – good old boy, an Irish American, and he looked in his flushed face **[indecipherable]** and he looked very affable, friendly, took care of his non-coms and was very much appreciated. So, he had come into the office just before me, and he got a call from the director of the museum. And the director said oh, he was very sorry, had to bother him

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

this way, but he heard about the – the exchange of troops. We had gone on the – on the u-upper Austrian side of the **Donau** river, and had – the Russians had moved in too far when we – when we met. There was a clerical error. So that was passed. The Russians were in that territory, we didn't try to throw them out, of course. But they were advanced maybe – maybe a couple of miles on – on what was supposed to be a straight line of division. And so they now – now decided that they would settle all this at the very highest level. Probably **Patton** himself participated, and they decided they'd better change this. So they got together with the Russians and with perfect agreement on it, the Russians would pull back, and we would move – we'd move forward into that area. And when – although we didn't know anything, or I didn't know anything, of course, let me say that when I say we don't know, that means I don't know. But at any rate, I didn't know there were planning to do this, they didn't consult me. And so, both the major and I were very upset. What happened was, when we first came in, the major went over to this museum, and talked to the director, who seemed to be a perfectly reasonable sort of person, to see were there kind of any pictures that were reputed to have been put there by **Hitler**. And – excuse –

Q: Sure.

A: The director at that time said that no, there were no pictures, but that we could see that there were spaces where pictures had been. And we didn't know what – what happened to them. So – but nevertheless, any amount of questioning as the director,

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

produced no answers. And then of course, suddenly, the – there came this change, and he discovered what he knew, or something, that the pictures were in a certain farm wa – in a – in a barn, couple of miles in – in that area. And so he said –

Q: Where the Russians were – where the Soviets were.

A: Yeah, right. And he had – he had the – in fact, address. He knew exactly how to get there. He'd obviously checked somebody. What they were, were cases, beautifully made, of wood, for each picture, whether it's small or large, and were beveled off so that they wouldn't hurt anything. And he said, he se – he was sort of apologetic because he knew he should have revealed this before. Although I do – I think if that had happened, what would happen is the Russians would have stiffened, and taken him away. So we're probably lucky that this happened. And – and so, they – I'm – I'm surprised they didn't have Russian guards on – on these things. But, at any rate –

Q: Did he ask – was his request to your Irish American major that – that the Americans go and get his pictures back? Was that what the request was?

A: No, it was a sort of a – a spontaneous reaction of idiocy by everybody there, you know, they – they really – we all agreed.

Q: That you had to get the pictures back?

A: Yeah, had to get the pictures back. And I don't know what happened to me. I – I'm not prone to make profound decisions like this, but – but he went around, and asked each soldier, do you want to go? It's a little dangerous, but let's go.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: And this is your major? Yeah.

A: Yeah, this fella, he didn't know any more than I did really, but at any rate, he's a very low rank in that big army, and he was making an awful decision. But he – we could have all been wiped out. Was the craziest thing, going over the **Linz** bridge, to the other side of the **Donau**, and feeling that you might be going to your death.

Anyway, there we were, all armed, everybody had a rifle or a machine gun or something, whatever had been assigned to them. And it was a – I thought it was a comical thing afterwards, but I didn't think that – very much that way at the time. So we all went in a little convoy, with the major out ahead in a **Jeep**, and most of us back in the trucks. We had two big trucks, and we didn't know how much we were going to face. Well, we got out there, and in very short order I remember thinking, if I were driving, I wouldn't have been that – that – that good. But we arrived in there, in the top of an enormous barn. You know the way those barns were constructed? They used the upper levels for hay that they dropped down in the spring. And so there were the pictures, among a lot of **fressen** for the cow – for the – the bulls, or what have you. And the – we became a little worried, because the biggest thing of the lot – not – not – not the – the heaviest thing was an unusual shape. It was about two feet wide, two feet high, and about six feet long, and weighed like lead, oh. We c – we – we could move the pictures pretty easily, but this thing, we didn't know what it was, we couldn't take the time to open it, and so we thought we had [**indecipherable**] take – take it. So for

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

our two and a half ton truck, we – we put it on the – the – down early. But it took all the muscular strength we could master. And so when we got back, w-we drove back, and that was a terrorizing experience, because there was nothing but death. Nothing moved in that whole distance that we had –

Q: You did – did you –

A: – that – that they had evacuated.

Q: So no people were there, at the –

A: Huh?

Q: No people were at the farmhouse, or –

A: No, no, well, I'm sure there's some took the alternative of going into the cellar, to be discovered later. But an awful lot of them went visiting the relatives and friends in the safe part of town.

Q: No Soviet soldiers?

A: Hm?

Q: Did you see any Soviet soldiers?

A: No, I saw – I didn't even see an – an ordinary dog. You know, they – the little street dogs everywhere.

Q: Yeah.

A: But we saw nothing breeding in that area.

Q: The dogs went visiting too?

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Oh yeah, I mean, they went visiting or – or hid in the cellar, too. But at any rate, it was just a naked run really, from the safe sa – place, to this – and it wasn't too long, and so I figure a couple miles, maybe. Then we loaded it all up, and came back. And of course, that was the loneliest automobile trip I ever made. And so we went across the bridge and got back, and we – we decided to put it in the museum, we could put a guard on it there. And we didn't have anybody el – of the ability to examine them, and we – we didn't want to – there, there was a – was a big station in – in south **Germany**, near **Munich. Munich** th – yielded an awful lot of those paintings. And they had – there we had some American – those specialists, who knew these paintings, you know. You needed somebody like that to make a judgment.

Q: Did you open up the cases, though?

A: No, but we did open up one. The major said, that damn thing that [indecipherable] and so forth. He wanted to see what was in it, so we opened it. Was a beautifully encased box. And what was it? It was a rowing machine with a [indecipherable] iron base, that apparently the officers wanted to take with them, or get rid of, or something. Didn't want to yield to the Russians, maybe. So in all that happened, we had a good laugh after.

Q: Yeah.

A: Bu-But [indecipherable], it tied us up for a while.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: So was this – did this whole thing es – did this whole adventure take half a day? A day?

A: Oh, well you can be sure we did it as fast as we could.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that – see, that was early in the morning when we first got the word, and the major took no – no time making arrangements with the motor office. And, we were up and gone in – in a matter, I'm afraid, of minutes. Every able-bodied soldier in the area were – well, at least there was a mass of early risers, you know. And the major went around, asked each one of them, you know, why they – why they do this.

Q: Any flak about it –

A: And he guessed right. Huh – huh?

Q: Any flak about it from the higher ups later?

A: None – none that I heard of. I didn't stay on very much longer. I got reassigned to **France**. I was going to go home, and they put me in a safer place, I guess. But oh, I was – that was quite an experience.

Q: Quite an adventure.

A: Oh yeah. And I – I – I thought it was, thinking about it afterwards, I thought it was pretty darn clever of these fellows to say yes, you know, that's – then it's a very freaky thing. I'm sure that if you ask the same people, a lot of them would have said no. But that's th – I know how those things happen.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

Q: Well, when you're young, and the war is over, it sort of – it can go with the territory.

A: Yeah.

Q: It can go – so tell me, when did you return back to the States? Did you stay in **Europe** much longer after the war ended?

A: Well, I was assigned to a place in **Mourmelon** in **France**. I then was shipped to **Paris**, and got a job as an editor on the “**Stars and Stripes**,” which I thought was a delightful way to finish up with the army. And then in due course I had enough credits to come home. Was a lovely assignment there. I don't know what happened to the teletypes. They just never showed up.

Q: I guess not. Well, is there anything else you'd like to add to – to this story that we've talked about this morning?

A: No, I don't think so. There – there's an after play, you might say. I stayed on in – in **Austria** for quite a time, and these people got out of their cages, and they'd just walk around, stupefied. I don't know how they ate. I – I was a nonsmoker, and it – but I took my smoking rations. And cigarettes were worth an awful lot of money. You could get a dinner, a whole dinner, for a cigarette in some places. And I had no use for them, so – so I – I – I gave mine away, rather than destroy them. And they di – they'd know, as soon as they saw the cigarettes, I was being a friendly – I-I don't know how they were treated by other soldiers, you know? And it's a terribly disturbing thing if somebody

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

comes up and says in a perfectly modulated civilian voice, something obviously understandable, if you could understand the language. It's a terrible feeling.

Q: Yeah.

A: Sometimes they just want a sa – a cigarette, or some – or a – or – they'd never ask for a cigarette. They'd get it if somebody gave it to them. It was much too valuable a piece of property.

Q: You're talking now about people who had been prisoners?

A: Yes, right, and –

Q: Former prisoners.

A: – didn't speak a language that I understood.

Q: Yeah.

A: By then I could get along all right for primitive things in da – German.

Q: Yeah.

A: I had studied it, and so I ha – had an advantage. But I don't know, it – it seems unreal. I don't even think I – sometimes I don't think I ha – I went there.

Q: It's not – you know, there are people I've talked to who have been survivors of some of these camps, and they say the same thing. Sometimes they say, I wonder if this really happened to me.

A: Yeah. Right.

Q: You know.

Interview with Brooks McClure
July 7, 2011

A: Funny experience.

Q: Yeah. Well, thank you. Thank you so much –

A: Well – well, thank you.

Q: – today, Mr. **McClure**, for –

A: Thank you for –

Q: – sharing in all this with us. I appreciate it. The museum appreciates it.

A: Thank you.

Q: Yeah. And this concludes our interview with Mr. **Brooks McClure**, on June 7th –
July 7th, 2011, at the **US Holocaust Memorial Museum**. Thank you.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview