

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Lester Libo
August 3, 2012 and October 25, 2012
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PREFACE

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LESTER LIBO
August 3, 2012 and October 25, 2012

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Lester Libo taped on August 3rd, 2012 in Washington, D.C. The interviewer is Noemi Szekely-Popescu. Hi Lester, how you are doing?

Answer: Very good, thank you.

Q: Great. Can you spell your last name for me.

A: L-I-B-O.

Q: All right. Was that your name at birth?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have a middle name?

A: Martin.

Q: Okay. And your first name was Lester at birth?

A: Lester, yes.

Q: And can you tell me your date of birth?

A: 9-18-23.

Q: Uh-huh. And where were you born?

A: Chicago.

Q: Okay. And can you please tell me the names of your parents?

A: My mother's name was Anita.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Pearl was her last, maiden name.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And my father's name was Leopold Libo.

Q: Now, was his last name spelled Libo when he was born, spelled L-I-B-O?

A: I don't -- Yes. But it was in Russia. They both were Russian immigrants.

Q: Uh-huh. You said you mother's name was Anito?

A: Anita.

Q: Okay. What year was she born?

A: 19, wait a minute, 1890 something.

Q: Mid-1890s?

A: Huh?

Q: Would it have been the mid-1890s?

A: I have it -- I have it down somewhere. I don't remember but I have it in my in my iPhone.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yeah, I think I do.

Q: All right.

A: Let me look it -- look it up here.

Q: Lester is taking out his iPhone and he's looking it up.

A: No, I have their date of death.

Q: Actually if you would give that to me?

A: Okay. She died in November of '92 and my father died in 1986.

Q: Okay. So your mother --

A: They were both 96.

Q: They were both 96 when they died?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: So if -- if your mother died in '92, she was born in 1896?

A: Yeah.

Q: Right? Because she was 96; does that sound right?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: Okay.

A: Because she came to the States in 1913.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And so -- so she was 17 then, that's, yeah.

Q: All right. So your mother was born where in Russia?

A: Rovno, R-O-V-N-O which was Russia when she was born and it became Poland later and then it became Russia again. It was back and forth. And my father was born in Ekaterinoslav, which during the Soviet regime it was Dnipropetrovsk.

Q: Rovno is spelled, R-O-V-N-O?

A: Right.

Q: And Ekaterinoslav is: E-K-A-T-E-R-I-N-A-S-L-A-V?

A: Right.

Q: Okay. And your father was born what year?

A: My father?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I think he was -- well, let's see when did --

Q: Would it have been 1890?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And can you tell me what families they were born into? Were they observant families? What traditions did they keep?

A: My father came from a very observant family but his mother died at childbirth --

Q: Uh-huh?

A: -- with him. And so he was really raised by his oldest sister; then his father was an Orthodox. And on my mother's side, they were, I would say, modestly observant, not hardly observant.

Q: Hardly observant?

A: Hardly observant. They observed the holidays.

Q: The Sabbath or the high holidays or both?

A: Just -- just the high -- just the high holidays. More, more festively than religiously.

Q: So --

A: They weren't particularly religious.

Q: So they weren't observing Shabbat?

A: No.

Q: Were they keeping Kosher?

A: No.

Q: Do you know what language they spoke at home?

A: They spoke Yiddish and Russian.

Q: Do you --

A: They spoke Russian when they didn't want me to understand.

Q: Oh no, not your parents, your mother's parents?

A: Oh, they spoke Yiddish.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And my father was probably Russian and Yiddish.

Q: And when you were describing the level of observance, were you talking about your parents or your mother's parents?

A: My mother's parents.

Q: Okay. So your mother's parents would only observe the high holidays? Did they keep kosher; do you know?

A: No.

Q: Do you know what kind of professions they had? Did your grandmother work?

A: My mother's --

Q: Your mother's mother. Did she -- did she work or did she stay home?

A: I think she stayed home. Yeah, I'm pretty sure she stayed home.

Q: And your mother's father, what was his profession?

A: He was -- he was a dairyman.

Q: Like Tevye?

A: Yeah. He was a dairyman. I think he was like -- I know that in the States he worked for a dairy company.

Q: Do you know whether that -- that's what was -- that was what he was doing in Russia too?

A: In Russia, Russia --

Q: He did to? Uh-huh. And on your father's side, you said they were orthodox. Do -- What did they keep at home?

A: In Russia?

Q: Yup.

A: What did they keep at home?

Q: In -- in terms of traditions?

A: Oh, well they -- they must have kept everything as far -- See, he was the only one in his family who immigrated.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: He -- he left in 1917, I think, or 1916.

Q: Why did he leave?

A: To escape the Draft of Bizarre and he was -- he was smuggled on a -- in a cold car -- in a cold car in a train and he crossed Siberia and China and came to Japan and came to the United States from Japan.

Q: Wow.

A: First in Seattle and he was the only one.

Q: Now, did he have any male siblings?

A: Yes, he had a brother.

Q: Now I'm guessing the male siblings would have also been subject to the draft; so, why did your father decide to leave and not the others?

A: I'm not sure. I think the brother may have been exempt for some reason or injured or something.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I'm not sure. I don't remember that about a brother. I know he had a couple of sisters. I'm not sure about a brother.

Q: Uh-huh. So, did he arrive in the States in 1916?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you know why he chose to come to the United States?

A: Well, he -- he chose to escape.

Q: But his destination, do you know why he chose this destination?

A: No, I don't. I don't know whether he knew anybody here. I don't think he did.

Q: Uh-huh. So, his port of entry was Seattle?

A: Yeah.

Q: And that was in 1916? And your mother's port of entry was?

A: She came -- they -- she came with her family.

Q: Okay?

A: She had -- she had two sisters.

Q: What were their names?

A: The oldest was Ester and the middle one was Sophie and the youngest one, she was the youngest, Anita, and they had a brother who died in -- in the service in Russia, in the military.

Q: But they came in 1913; is that correct?

A: Yeah.

Q: So the brother died in service before the first World War?

A: Yeah.

Q: It was in some other battle or military situation?

A: Yeah, something.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Illness, I think it was.

Q: Okay. Do you know why they left Russia in 1913?

A: No, I guess it was a wave of -- of migration.

Q: But your mother never recounted to you why she -- why her family had left?

A: Specific, no. I know that she came with two -- with her father. Her mother had died in Russia and she came with her father and her sister and the other sister, the middle sister, was already engaged or married and she came with -- with her husband or...

Q: Do you know the name of the husband? Is this -- is this Sophie? Or is this Ester?

A: Yes, I do, Sophie.

Q: Sophie was the one who was married?

A: Yeah, her husband's name was Saul.

Q: Saul. And he was also from Rovno?

A: Yeah.

Q: So did you say that they entered the United States?

A: Through Winnipeg. Well, they came through Winnipeg first, they came to Canada.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: And then they entered, as far as I know, they came to Chicago right away.

Q: Okay.

A: And they lived in Chicago.

Q: So there, your maternal father took up his profession and he worked in a dairy?

A: In Chicago.

Q: But what was it exactly that he was doing? It was dairy. Was he a milkman? Was he working in a processing firm?

A: No, it was in processing.

Q: Processing?

A: He invented a process to make sour cream out of skim milk or something like that. I mean, it was some -- some dairy process.

Q: Did he invent this in the States or before he came?

A: No, in the States.

Q: Did he patent it?

A: I don't -- the dairy company did, I think.

Q: So he was working for the dairy company as a -- this is some sort of technician?

A: Yeah, I guess so.

Q: Was it in a Kosher dairy company?

A: No.

Q: Do you remember the name of the dairy?

A: Western Dairy.

Q: Western Dairy. And your mother at 17 had already been in school back in Russia; is that correct? Had she been in a Jewish school?

A: Yes. No.

Q: It was a public school?

A: Yeah.

Q: And when she came in 1917, what -- what were her prospects? Was it understood that she need --

A: 1913.

Q: I'm sorry, 1913, at the age of 17. Was it understood that she needed to marry or was there a different expectation?

A: Well, I know she got -- she got married in 1922.

Q: So what happened between 1913 and 1922?

A: I don't know. I think she went to school but I'm -- I'm not sure.

Q: Did she have higher education?

A: No. She, I know, she finished high school in the States. But I think she went to high school later or when I was -- after I was born, she took as an adult education.

Q: So she's 17 when she gets here and already pretty much eligible, marriageable age. So what does she do until age 26 when she gets married?

A: I don't -- I don't know what she did.

Q: Was she working?

A: She was -- I don't, I don't know.

Q: Okay. How did she meet your father?

A: I think it was through friends.

Q: Your father had entered the country through Seattle. He then subsequently moved to Chicago?

A: Moved to Chicago, right.

Q: When did he move to Chicago?

A: When?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I think he worked in the Seattle area for just one summer or one year.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So it must have been the next year that he was in Chicago.

Q: So they met through friends?

A: Oh, wait a minute, they -- I know. I remember now. They both had rooms in a boardinghouse.

Q: Where?

A: In Chicago.

Q: Why were they in a boarding house? Your mother's family was in Chicago. Why was she in a boardinghouse?

A: Well, it was like an apartment.

Q: So young adults would be in boardinghouses?

A: Yeah.

Q: At the time?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's -- that's where they met.

Q: Do you recall where this boardinghouse was or the name of the --

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Mrs. Goodman's, I think, was one name I heard but I'm not sure whether it was their boardinghouse or my grandfather's.

Q: Do you know if it had a specifically Jewish clientele?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you know whether --

A: My father worked in -- when he -- when he arrived in Seattle, he worked in the wheat fields harvesting.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then he moved to Chicago and I think the first thing he did -- you didn't get there yet, I don't know if that was a question.

Q: No, go ahead. Go ahead. I don't want to cut you off.

A: He worked as a, as a sewing machine operator in a men's clothing store.

Q: In Chicago?

A: In Chicago --

Q: Now, had he --

A: -- Hart Shaffner and Marx. It was a good company and he had a good job there.

Q: Had he had any training in textile before he left Russia?

A: I don't think, no.

Q: So as a machine operator, you're saying?

A: Yeah, sewing machine, you know, it was called the -- it was called, "operator" was the title.

Q: Okay. And this is -- remind me what year this is, approximately?

A: Late teens, early 20's.

Q: Okay. And so they meet. Do they meet the same year they get married or is there a long engagement?

A: I don't think -- I don't know.

Q: Okay?

A: I know they got married in 1922 and I was born the next year.

Q: All right. Were you -- were you an only child?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh. So you grew up in Chicago; is that correct?

A: Right.

Q: So can you tell me where the apartment or house was in Chicago where you grew up?

A: Yeah, well in the early days, in infancy and very early childhood, we lived in the Humboldt Park -- Park District, I think it was on Potomac Avenue and then we lived in

Albany Park which was like Wilson Avenue was one place Wilson and Spaulding and then later it was Lawrence Avenue, always apartments. My-- my parents never had a car and they never had a house.

Q: I'm just -- I'm just going to put your microphone a little higher because I can see that it's, it's in your way. Just, sorry about that. So, you said Potomac Avenue, Albany Park, Wilson Avenue, and Lawrence Avenue. This is throughout your childhood?

A: Yeah. Oh, there was another place, Spaulding and Armitage, that's right; before Albany Park it was Spaulding and Armitage.

Q: Okay. I will pause the recording right now; just a sec. And we're back. So, you had mentioned a few areas: Potomac Avenue, Albany Park, Wilson Avenue?

A: No, before Albany Park there was Spaulding.

Q: Spaulding is before?

A: And Armitage area which is -- was more Humboldt Park.

Q: Now, are any of these areas or all of these areas, were they considered Jewish neighborhoods at the time?

A: Not completely but, but some, somewhat, but not -- not Albany Park was considered a Jewish neighborhood but it was mixed.

Q: It was mixed. So, I understand that your parents chose to live in a mixed neighborhood?

A: Yeah, I would say that in Chicago the division street area was Jewish; the west side, Roosevelt Road area was Jewish, and Albany Park was Jewish. And then later there was

a migration to Rogers Park, which was farther north. And I think nowadays it's in the suburbs, northern suburbs, but at then, those were the three areas.

Q: Uh-huh. Now, so they were in a pretty much integrated neighborhood throughout your childhood. Did -- To what extent did they keep traditions?

A: My parents --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- were Atheists.

Q: They were Atheists. Do you know whether your father's views influenced your mother or did they have these views independently of each other?

A: They weren't active Atheists. They were --

Q: Agnostic?

A: They were simply nonbelievers.

Q: Okay.

A: They didn't -- they didn't -- they didn't follow any, any religious customs.

Q: Was having a Jewish identity, was that a topic in the home or they just spoke of themselves as Americans or perhaps Russians who had left?

A: No, Jewish identity was a -- As a matter of fact, I went to a Jewish school.

Q: Oh, I see. So, how did they define Jewish identity as growing up for you?

A: Ethnic.

Q: Okay. Meaning were they reading Yiddish press or?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Oh --

A: He was reading a Yiddish paper.

Q: Okay. Were they political in any way? Alright.

A: Just normally, you know, they voted.

Q: Okay. Did they perhaps have any Zionist sympathies?

A: No, not particularly. I mean, yeah, some but not, not wholeheartedly, you know, not, not fiercely.

Q: Uh-huh. Did they take, I'm just -- I'm just going to say that your -- your -- when the microphone, so when you're --

A: Oh.

Q: -- you move your hand towards your face then you're touching the microphone and it makes a noise. Did they take part in any kind of demonstrations or did they do any kind of any political actions whatsoever? They did? What was important to them? In -- What were their ideals? When they put you in a Jewish school, were you taught religion?

A: Wait a minute, excuse me, ideals, I would say they were democratic ideals.

Q: Okay.

A: Civil liberties.

Q: Okay.

A: Antidiscrimination.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Sort of socialist.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I would say more left.

Q: Uh-huh. Social democrat?

A: Well, more.

Q: A little bit more to the left. How did they feel about the situation of blacks in America?

A: Black?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Oh, they were -- they were against the discrimination and against, you know.

Q: Would -- Was that apparent in something that they did or something or how they spoke? Did they discuss --

A: They discussed it.

Q: Okay.

A: They read about it. They went to demonstrations about it.

Q: Okay. Did they ever take you to a demonstration?

A: Yes.

Q: How young were you when you went to these demonstrations?

A: I don't remember. I think, probably early like early grades or earlier before school and after.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then I went to a Jewish school after school.

Q: Oh, so you were in a public school and then you had extra hours after, okay --

A: Yeah. I was in a public school to learn Yiddish.

Q: --to learn Yiddish. Was there any religious instruction?

A: No.

Q: Okay. And --

A: I was never Bar Mitzvahed.

Q: Oh, really. Amongst your friends, what kind of friends did you have? Who did you hang out with in your childhood?

A: Well, I always had friends. They -- they tended to be Jewish. Other guys.

Q: Did your Jewish friends tend to be nonreligious as your family?

A: It was a mixture.

Q: Okay.

A: Some were and some weren't.

Q: Uh-huh. And that was never a cause for tension? You didn't have disagreements over that?

A: No.

Q: Uh-huh. And so you were in this Jewish school after public school, this was between grades what and what? Was this throughout school? In high school, too or?

A: Oh, I don't think it was all the way through. I think it was part -- I think part of high school.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And part of elementary and high school. I remember it was a storefront school.

Q: What does that mean?

A: It was -- it was a school in a store.

Q: In a store? So somebody owned a store and they would let it out, too?

A: No, the school would rent, rent it. The organization then.

Q: Uh-huh. So your parents, it seems, based on what you're saying, were fairly well-informed and curious about the world. Were they paying attention to what was happening in Europe in the '30's?

A: Oh, yes. Yes.

Q: So do you remember any conversations about this in the home?

A: They were definitely anti-Nazi. They were very upset about the persecution of the Jews.

Q: Now, how much were you hearing about that? How well were you informed?

A: A lot, all the time.

Q: Through -- through which media?

A: In the '30's.

Q: How did you hear about it?

A: Well, it was in the news. It was in their conversation. It was in the school that I went to.

Q: The Jewish school or the public school?

A: The Jewish school.

Q: And it was a topic of conversation with your friends as -- as a child or as an adolescent? Or was it really the adults talking about it?

A: The adults.

Q: And when you say it was in the news, was it in the Yiddish language news or also in the English language news?

A: Well, it was in the English, too, about Hitler.

Q: Uh-huh. And your parents were reading the English language news?

A: Yes, my father read the paper every day.

Q: Now I'm not sure I asked this, but your parents did not -- obviously, they didn't keep any traditions so there was no Kosher food at home?

A: Right.

Q: Was there -- was there anything else that -- that was an indication that this was a Jewish family?

A: Well, they spoke Yiddish.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: My mother made some Jewish foods.

Q: Like what?

A: Jewish dishes. Chopped liver, chicken noodle soup, mondel, soup and mondel.

Q: Mondel this is a mondel broth. This is a cake or?

A: It's something you put in -- drop in soup.

Q: Oh, really?

A: It's mondel, it's a baked --

Q: Something crispy?

A: -- ball like crispy, yeah.

Q: Crispy.

A: We had --

Q: Careful of the mic. Careful of the mic.

A: Oh, we had -- I had a favorite dish which was called Pachau (ph) which there was a Pechaw but this -- this was not Pechaw. This was Pachau which was our own family thing.

Q: What was it?

A: It was a chip and soup. It was a thick chicken soup with egg and lemon. So it's sort of like Greek Avgolemeno but it was thicker and you eat it with bread.

Q: Were -- were the --

A: You dip it.

Q: When you would go over to your friend's house, did they pretty much have the same cooking you had at home or was it somehow an isolated phenomenon, the food that you had at home? Or was it the same cooking everywhere?

A: No, all we had were some family favorite dishes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And my father was a vegetarian.

Q: Oh, why?

A: A strict vegetarian. Huh?

Q: Why?

A: Ideals, he just didn't want, was against killing any living thing. So he would eat eggs.

Q: Uh-huh. Dairy?

A: Dairy, yeah, and dairy. So, our house always had more vegetables than any other house that I visited.

Q: That's fascinating. Did you know any other vegetarians at the time or was your father the only one?

A: No, well, there was a vegetarian restaurant in Chicago.

Q: Really? This is in the '20's?

A: In the Division Street area, yeah, it was famous. I mean, vegetarianism was -- was more popular.

Q: Really?

A: It was a movement and there were names attached to it. I can't, Doctor Lindlar, I think.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And there was -- there was cookbooks and there was a vegetarian restaurant --

Q: Do you remember the name of the restaurant?

A: -- on Division Street. No, no, I don't. I'd recognize it if I saw it but I don't remember it, no.

Q: Now, let's get back to your friends. Did you -- So you had a mix of friends. Were any of them non-Jewish?

A: I think there was, yeah, a couple but mostly were Jewish. And mostly were of the same with families that were in the same political and connected with the Jewish school.

Q: Uh-huh. Now what were your favorite activities growing up? What were your hobbies?

A: Oh, well, softball. I played with soldiers on the living room floor.

Q: Uh-huh. Careful of the mic.

A: Huh?

Q: Careful of the mic.

A: Oh, I --

Q: Did you practice any sports?

A: Yes, softball.

Q: Softball. Anything else?

A: Yeah. Tennis. Bowling, later. Shot pool, later.

Q: How much later? Is this after the war?

A: Probably, no. No, I think this was like in the late teens. There was a boys club, a neighborhood boys club.

Q: Was it a Jewish boys club?

A: No, Albany Park Boys Club. I learned to play chess. My father played chess, I learned to play chess.

Q: Were there other boys who knew how to play chess?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you play it out of the home?

A: Yeah. And cards. Roller skating as a kid.

Q: Uh-huh. Really?

A: As a younger -- as a young kid, I did roller skating and I had a scooter and I had a tricycle. And later I had a bicycle.

Q: But -- And these were all of your possessions; is that right?

A: Yeah.

Q: You had your own tennis racket.

A: Yeah.

Q: You had your own bat and mitt for the softball?

A: Softball there were no -- there were no mitts.

Q: There were no mitts? Okay. I just don't know my softball.

A: Yeah, well, Chicago style softball was not fast pitch.

Q: Okay.

A: And it was a -- and it was a bigger ball.

Q: Uh-huh. How many -- how many rooms did you have in the apartment?

A: Four.

Q: So that would be two bedrooms, I'm guessing?

A: Yeah.

Q: One living room?

A: And then when the Depression hit, my father lost his job.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: And we moved to a smaller place and I slept in the living room --

Q: Uh-huh. On a couch?

A: -- on a couch that would open up. A sleep sofa.

Q: Do you recall where that apartment was, the one that you moved to after the depression?

A: That was on Lawrence Avenue.

Q: Okay. And did your -- your parent's situation become better in the '30's?

A: Well, let's see. He got a job. When he lost his job at Hart Shaffner Marx and the layoffs there, he got another job with another clothing manufacturer but that was much lower level company. It was more of a sweatshop and he made less money and I remember that he didn't value it very much. And then he -- oh, he -- when he was working as a machine operator, he worked Saturdays as a shoe salesman in a department store in downtown Chicago. So, when after a while with the second job that he didn't like much, he went full-time as a shoe salesman.

Q: Uh-huh. And this is what year? Early '30's? Late '30's?

A: I would say mid '30's.

Q: Mid '30's. So it was after the New Deal, already started?

A: Yeah.

Q: Were they sympathetic to the New Deal?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Was your mother working during these years?

A: No. My mother didn't start working 'til I think after I left.

Q: You left in the Army or you left --

A: Yeah. I left to go to the Army.

Q: Now, did she start working because they had a money issue or there was some other reason that she started at that point?

A: Probably money and also for something to do. And she -- she worked at something, she worked for the U.S. government in -- in the treasury bonds processing.

Q: Okay. And this was -- this was after 1943? Or was this still during the war?

A: It was during, yeah.

Q: It was. But after you had -- after you had joined the Army?

A: I don't remember if she started -- she may have started when I -- when I started college in '41.

Q: You started college in '41. So what year did you graduate high school?

A: '41.

Q: Okay. So you went to college the Fall right after?

A: Yeah.

Q: And which college did you attend?

A: Central YMCA College.

Q: And this is in Chicago?

A: I got a scholarship there. I got a half scholarship and then it became a full scholarship after I was there for a year.

Q: The scholarship was based on maybe some --

A: A competitive exam.

Q: A competitive exam. And the Central YMCA is in Chicago?

A: Yeah. Now it's Roosevelt University but it was Central Y.

Q: Going to college was something you wanted for yourself or your parents wanted or both?

A: Both.

Q: Were you still living at home when you were in college?

A: Yes.

Q: And when you were in college by that time had your parent's situation ameliorated and were you in a bigger apartment?

A: No.No, I think it was the same.I think I --

Q: You were still sleeping on the couch?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: I did my homework on the dining room table.

Q: And your father was a full-time shoe salesman by that time?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did that business go well?

A: His -- his work?

Q: Yeah. Uh-huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: So they -- they weren't really squeezed for money by that time or do you recall feeling like money was an issue still at the time?

A: Money was always an issue.

Q: Money was always an issue?

A: They were always, seems to me to be, what's the word?

Q: It was a topic of conversation or?

A: Well, it was -- Well, economy was always important.

Q: Uh-huh. Do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

A: Yes.

Q: So how did you learn about it?

A: Oh, it was in the news.

Q: Was that -- was that --

A: It was.

Q: -- how you learned about it?

A: Everybody talked about it or...

Q: Well, that's what I'm curious about. Did you open a newspaper and that's how you learned about it or did someone tell you, run up to you and say hey, this is what just happened? Do you recall how you heard about it first?

A: No, I don't. I think somebody probably told me but it was on the radio and then in the newspaper. I remember seeing the headlines.

Q: Uh-huh. How did you feel when you saw the headlines?

A: Oh, upset and angry.

Q: How -- At that time, how did you define yourself? Were you American? Jewish American? Jewish American of Russian heritage? How did you think of yourself at the time?

A: I thought of myself as American. I guess American Jewish.

Q: Uh-huh. When you started college did you have a focus? Did you have a concentration of topic that you knew you wanted to pursue?

A: Yes.

Q: And what was that?

A: Well, in high school, I wanted to be a journalist because I was the editor-in-chief of the high school weekly paper.

Q: Wow.

A: And I also won a -- an essay contest. And but when I started college -- oh, before I started college, I had a high school guidance counselor and she gave me some tests, vocational interests and other things and I was so impressed with her job and her, her function that I decided that I wanted to be that. So when I started college, I told them I wanted to be a guidance counselor. I wanted vocational guidance as my major.

Q: Now, what was --

A: And they said --

Q: Yeah --

A: -- they said that means you should major in psychology. So that's what I did. So right from the start I -- I majored in psychology.

Q: And what about vocational guidance that really grabbed you? What was it that excited you about this?

A: I think I think the idea of the -- of the various tests and -- and, I guess, you know, a methodical way to help people with deciding on careers and what to go into.

Q: Uh-huh. By the way, that -- that test that she gave you, what was her guidance to you? What career did she propose?

A: Personnel administration.

Q: She did?

A: Yeah. Or something, you know --

Q: Something to that effect?

A: -- working with people.

Q: So since you were the -- the editor of the high school paper, you must have thought of yourself or other people thought of yourself as a good writer. Was this something that your parents were particularly proud of? Interested in? Did they give you feedback about this or?

A: I don't -- They were always very, very complementary, very praiseful. They -- they were always very supportive.

Q: How -- how good was their English at that point?

A: Their English was pretty good. They were very concerned about proper English. And my mother went to -- went to school to -- to learn more. Their English was pretty good.

Q: Okay.

A: And of course he worked as a salesman, so.

Q: Right. So he must have been good at communicating. I'm a little bit concerned -- a little bit confused about the timeline of your father's jobs. Was he first in dairy and then in textiles?

A: No, he was never in dairy. My grandfather was in dairy.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry, confusing everyone?

A: My father was -- was --

Q: Right. Right.

A: -- in textiles. He was in tailoring, you know, clothing manufacturing.

Q: Right. Right. And then he goes into shoe salesman?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did he work in a store? Was he his own boss? How did he --

A: Oh, no. He -- he worked in a department store.

Q: A department store?

A: In a major department store --

Q: Which one?

A: -- in Chicago. The Boston Store was the name of it. Netcher's, Netcher's Boston Store. And you know later in life, he -- they moved when I moved. When I got out of the Army, my first -- When I got out of the Army, I went to Stanford. That was the school I was always interested in. So I went to Stanford. I went to Berkeley for the first summer. And they moved to Berkeley because her sister, Ester, lived in Berkeley. By the way, the three sisters each had only children -- each had only one.

Q: Really? What a coincidence.

A: And one, Ester's and Bernard's son was a physicist and Sophie and Saul's son -- daughter was a lawyer.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And so, my parents moved to Berkeley and all the time that I went through Stanford. And then I moved to Ann Arbor after that, they stayed in Berkeley. Then I moved to Baltimore and they moved to Baltimore.

Q: Now, was this because your family was a --

A: And he was -- When he lived in Berkeley, he sold shoes in San Francisco at the major shoe store in San Francisco, I can't remember the name of it. And then in Baltimore he worked selling shoes.

Q: Well, it seems to me that your parents are moving from town to town to be along with you. Was this --

A: Right.

Q: -- I'm guessing, this was kind of unusual that the nuclear family would stay together even after the child is an adult? Was this unusual?

A: I don't know.

Q: Oh?

A: Probably.

Q: Was there something about your family that made them more tight knit than usual?

A: Well, they didn't have anybody else. They just only had one child, so.

Q: Did they have a social group of their own? Did they have people that they would go to dinner or have a card game or --

A: No, not much.

Q: -- tea?

A: No.

Q: So there weren't people, guests, in the house when you were growing up?

A: No. Well, my grandfather lived with us for a while. And then when we had a -- when we had the two bedroom apartment, we had a roomer. We had a grocery store owner who -- who lived with us.

Q: Really? So he was renting out the -- the room?

A: The room. So I always slept in the living room.

Q: Uh-huh. I see. Okay so we are back --

A: That's right. I never had a room of my own until after...

Q: How do you think that affected you?

A: I'm very interested in architecture.

Q: Oh, yeah? Okay. So let's get back to your college years. So you start college in '41 and you're studying psychology. Are you studying anything else?

A: Well, I took a lot of math because I was advised to take math for statistics.

Q: Uh-huh. Were you good at math? Bad at math? Didn't really care?

A: I was okay. I got A's and B's in everything. I had all A's and B's, more A's than B's.

Q: And I seem to recall in a conversation before this interview you said that you had a passion for music?

A: Yeah.

Q: So this is something that came from your parents?

A: My father was a music lover. He, you know, he listened to the symphony. He would go to the symphony. He would take me to concerts. He -- I played piano. My parents gave me piano lessons when I was little.

Q: But -- but there was no piano in the home? Or was there?

A: Later. What happened was, my parents got a bigger apartment. In order to rent a room to a distant cousin, a woman and her daughter. So they lived with us and they -- we had a piano. We had an upright piano. I don't know if my parents --

Q: When was this?

A: -- got it or because I know that my cousin Pat, Pearl was her name; Pat, they changed it to Pat. She took piano lessons and then I did too. So, we were both taking piano lessons.

Q: Okay. So this -- this piano in your home, when was this? How old were you?

A: Oh, probably 10; 10, 12; 10, 12 to 14, something like that.

Q: And did you play any other instruments?

A: Yeah, I played e flat alto clarinet in the high school -- in the high school concert band. And I played snare drum in a marching band, a marching drum and bugle corps.

Q: So, you said that you did not have your own room growing up but you were playing all of these instruments. Clearly some of them at school. But was that not an issue that you had to practice an instrument and you didn't have your own area?

A: No.

Q: It wasn't imposing on other people?

A: No.

Q: Your father was listening to symphonies on the radio or did he have his own records?

A: Radio.

Q: So -- so there was no gramophone or record or?

A: No.

Q: Okay. So what -- If I understand correctly, you were not drafted; you volunteered?

A: I volunteered.

Q: Okay. When was that and why was that?

A: I volunteered in '41, I think, or '42, probably.

Q: Well, you were in college how many years before you went into the Army?

A: I was in college two, two years but I had three years of credit because I took extra courses.

Q: So if you started in '41 and you did two full years that would have been --

A: '43.

Q: '43? So would that have been when you volunteered for the Army?

A: No.No, I went in in '43. I went into the Army in '43.

Q: So you volunteered earlier --

A: In '41.

Q: And you actually went in in '43?

A: Right.

Q: So what caused the delay?

A: I -- I enlisted in a program called the ASTP, Army Specialized Training Program; millions of guys did this. And it was -- it was a way to continue college until, I think, the end of the academic year and -- and not go right away. So if you enlisted, you could continue college if you were --

Q: -- already in college?

A: -- in a field. If you were already in and you were in a field that they considered a specialized field.

Q: And this was one such field?

A: Yeah, right. So, I went in and was in college but then I-- I don't remember exactly why I got impatient and instead of staying, I -- at the end of that -- of that -- of that year, that Spring of '43 I think, I asked to -- to go.

Q: Now --

A: And not continue in ASTP.

Q: And the ASTP would have given you the right to defer until when?

A: Well, indefinitely.

Q: Ok.

A: Until graduation.

Q: Until graduation?

A: Right.

Q: Now, what was your motivation to enlist to volunteer?

A: I was so interested in personnel administration and industrial psychology that I thought that I could do it in the Army. And so I asked to -- to go.

Q: Did someone, some kind of advisor, confirm that that was an option that they would be able to do this or this was just your own idea?

A: No, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So I went in the Army and -- and I was -- I went to infantry basic training which --

Q: Where?

A: It was North Camp Hood, Texas; which now is Fort Hood. And it was rough and it was -- there was no running -- there was no plumbing and there were lister bags for water.

Q: What's a lister bag?

A: A lister bag is a water holder. It's a big -- it's a big bag with a faucet at the end of it.

Q: So you're saying there is no plumbing? How -- how did you and other guys clean themselves?

A: No, I think there -- there were showers but there --

Q: There were showers?

A: -- but there was no water pumps or anything else. I know we were always short of water. Basic training started on the 4th of July in Texas.

Q: Of '43?

A: Yeah, it was really rough.

Q: Can you describe what kind of -- what kind of regiment you had? What you had to do in a day?

A: Well, all of the usual military training things.

Q: How physical would it have been?

A: And ending in a 25-mile hike.

Q: 25-mile hike?

A: In a full -- full field pack hike. And there was also crawling under machine gun fire, the obstacle course, and -- and just and listening to lectures.

Q: Lectures on what?

A: Military, you know, arms like --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- the nomenclature of the rifle.

Q: Now, how did your parents feel about you volunteering?

A: That was okay.

Q: They were --

A: They were worried.

Q: -- supportive?

A: Well, they were worried about me in the service but -- but they were supportive, yeah.

Q: How many of your -- your friends or acquaintances were doing the same at the time?

A: Well, some were drafted and I don't know whether anybody else was doing what I did.

Q: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. In basic training, were you the only Jewish person there in your unit?

A: I think there were one or two others. You know, I should say before I forget that, I'm jumping the gun here, though.

Q: Yeah, go ahead.

A: I was hoping that I would be assigned to personnel or classification because that's what -- that's what I wanted. And at the end of basic, they did put me in the camp office in classification which is what I liked.

Q: How much time was there between the beginning and the end of basics?

A: Well, basic training was 13-weeks at that time.

Q: Okay.

A: Well, I did work in the office for a little while and I thought I had it all made and that I was part of the camp and I wasn't shipped out. And then orders came through. I guess what happened was that the Army needed more troops and more combat troops so the order came in closing or -- or changing our office.

Q: How much time did you spend in the office before that order came through?

A: I don't think it was more than a month or two.

Q: Okay. So we're still in '43?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So then -- So, I was shipped out and along with maybe one or two other people that's all.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And so I was shipped out to a the 71st Light Division which was jungle and mountain. And that was at Camp Carson Colorado. And that was in preparation for Asia.

Q: Uh-huh. What kind of training was that?

A: That was also rough and it was -- there was a maneuvers there -- in the -- it was raining and -- and there we had no light -- light infantry means this was a mule pack outfit. There was -- there were three light divisions: The 89th, the 14th, and the 5th. I was in the 5th, regiments, pardon me.

Q: Okay.

A: The 5 regiment and the 14th and the 66th. And --

Q: You said something mule. What was the expression you used?

A: Oh, mule. Mule pack.

Q: What is that?

A: Mules like our outfit was just backpacks and carts I think pulling, pull-carts, backpacks. And another Light Division was all mules.

Q: Uh-huh. So -- so what is all mules? You said you were carts and backpacks?

A: Mules. Yeah, we were backpacks and something else, I forgot. Light, meaning that you could go without cannon.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Without tanks.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Without heavy trucks and stuff like that. So it was all on foot. But I think we had a kind of a cart. But another division was all mule packs.

Q: So what is a mule pack?

A: A mule is -- is a donkey.

Q: Oh, so these are actually mules?

A: Yeah.

Q: I thought it was maybe a code for some kind of --

A: No, no they were --

Q: Mules.

A: -- mules. They had mules that carried --

Q: So they had mules with them?

A: And they would carry things.

Q: I see. I see. But you were not in that division?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Now, given that you had --

A: But I -- I -- I --

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: -- want to say that by volunteering and going into that --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- then I was just in the infantry and I was -- I was in the -- in the mud.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: One day a guy from headquarters that I knew was a friend of mine saw me in a foxhole in the rain and he said Les, is that you? And he said considering your background, let's see what we can do. And so he got them to -- to think of me for -- for Service Company, which would be classification.

Q: Yeah.

A: So then later, when I was in classification, I was in charge of getting the new men coming into the outfit into their units. Well the new men coming into the outfit, by then I was a corporal, the new men coming into the outfit were buck privates and they were -- they were raw like raw recruits.

Q: Recruits.

A: Because they had just come from ASTP. ASTP ended.

Q: I see. So it would have been your cohort?

A: And they were all shipped out of college. So I, you know, had the advantage.

Q: Uh-huh. This, this man who you knew, a friend of yours, do you remember his name?

A: No.

Q: Do you remember where you knew him from?

A: From the Army itself. From just --

Q: But from Colorado or maybe had you been together in Texas or?

A: No, I think it was Colorado.

Q: And so, during this whole process you said that maybe there was one other Jewish person there. Was -- Did the other --

A: There was one Jewish guy who was the newspaper reporter. His name was Irving Werstein. I remember him.

Q: Did the other men in this unit know that you were Jewish?

A: The 5th Regiment was originally in Panama in peacetime and most of the people in it were from Kentucky and Tennessee and they were hillbilly types.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And they didn't -- they didn't know much about that. About Jewish or whatever.

Q: So they would not have been aware?

A: No, I think there was some anti-Semitism from somewhere but it wasn't -- it wasn't so much Jewish as it was city and college.

Q: Uh-huh. And you had both? You had been a college boy and a city boy?

A: Uh-huh, right.

Q: Was this an issue? Did they make it an issue?

A: Yes. Yes, because they were in much better shape. I mean, they were more used to that kind of life than I was.

Q: Uh-huh. Did they taunt you or did they treat you badly?

A: Well, I remember one day I was huffing and puffing climbing a mountain and I said, I'm not used to this. I said, I grew up in Chicago where -- where I'm used to escalators and elevators.

Q: What did they say?

A: So, so he laughed. But later that night around the campfire, he told the other guys what I said and they in a taunting, teasing, hostile way. So I...

Q: But this -- this didn't escalate? They didn't actually hurt you or?

A: No.

Q: There was no -- They didn't isolate you for being different?

A: No, I think I was closer to a couple of guys that were more city.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: That we were different from the -- from everybody else.

Q: And you had your own support group then?

A: Yeah.

Q: Now given that you had had very different ideas about what was going to happen before you got the desk job, before your friend finds you in the foxhole, so during those months, how are you coping with the disappointment? Is it a disappointment?

A: It wasn't. I mean, I just took it as life; something to cope with. I didn't -- I didn't try to do anything about it --

Q: You weren't angry?

A: -- except cope with it. No, it's just the Army, that's all. I mean, I figure that's just normal.

Q: Now --

A: When I got orders to go -- to go to the 71st Light Division, I did look up what a Light Division was in the camp library and it said jungle/mountain, mule pack, amphibious, and paratroop.

Q: And what did you think when you saw that?

A: And then I -- I said God, I don't want any of those. And then it turned out to be a combination of two of them: Jungle and mountain.

Q: Right. Uh-huh.

A: But you know my son was a paratrooper.

Q: Really?

A: So.

Q: When? What year?

A: Oh, 20 years ago or so.

Q: 20 years ago or so.

A: No, more than that. He's in his 50's so.

Q: Was there a war on?

A: No.

Q: It was in peacetime?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Because you were not drafted. You were -- you were a volunteer. Did you enjoy any perks? Was there anything given to you as a reward for that or you were just treated the same?

A: My impression was that there were a lot of enlisted personnel in our outfit because it was an old Panama outfit. It was a regular Army outfit, 5th Infantry.

Q: So those were not draftees?

A: No. But -- but then there were draftees, too. So, there were both.

Q: And there was no distinction between an enlistee and a draftee?

A: Well, I think the newer ones, like the ones who were drafted, along with me, we -- we were different, you know, coming from cities or with more education than these other guys that...

Q: But the system didn't treat you differently?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Okay. So this -- this man recognizes you in the foxhole. This is your -- your big breakthrough moment and he -- he takes you where? Where do you end up?

A: In Service Company, the same regiment.

Q: Okay.

A: But instead of Company F, which is a line company, and I was on mortar. I was a 60-milimeter mortar ammunition bearer. And I thought that I was lucky to get that -- to get that assignment because the mortar squad is a little behind the lines.

Q: Right.

A: Because you have to shoot over --

Q: Right, right.

A: You know -- but I was there were -- there were seven ammunition bearers in a mortar squad, I think, or five or seven, I don't remember. And I was tail end. I was the last one in. So I considered myself really lucky --

Q: Sure.

A: -- that I got that job.

Q: Sure.

A: So.

Q: And then you're taken out of that company and put into Service Company?

A: Right.

Q: And what -- what letter is that? The Service Company?

A: Just Service Company.

Q: Oh, it doesn't have a letter?

A: No.

Q: Okay. And are you given training in the Service Company?

A: I don't remember any training. I think I had to learn the personnel situation.

Q: Okay.

A: Personnel procedures and everything.

Q: So you said earlier you were processing the new recruits, the boys who had been ASTP and who had just -- just graduated?

A: That was in this.

Q: In this company?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes?

A: Right.

Q: Are you still in Colorado at that point?

A: No, we moved to -- We changed to a Full Division from a Light Division.

Q: Okay?

A: So I think that's why I got the job in Service Company because it expanded.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Everything expanded and classification specialist, I guess, was created or I don't know whether it was there before.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But when we changed to a Full Division instead of a Light Division, we went to Fort Benning, Georgia and that's where we were. Fort Benning.

Q: How long did you stay in Fort Benning? Approximately when did you get there and when did you leave?

A: I think until we went to overseas. We went overseas from New Jersey. We were there just very briefly in New Jersey. But --

Q: So when did you get to Georgia and when did you leave Georgia?

A: Well, I don't think we went -- we got overseas until '45.

Q: January '45 is when you got overseas?

A: Something like that.

Q: So, when you enlist, this is '43, you do 13 weeks of basic training. So 13 weeks, what is that? That's about three months? So, you're in the Fall of '43 and then you're going into -- your -- then you go to Colorado because basic training is in California; did I get this right?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Texas, Texas is basic training. And then you go to Colorado?

A: And then Colorado.

Q: And you stayed in Colorado a whole year?

A: Part of Colorado was in, I think part of Colorado I must have been in Service Company too at the end of it.

Q: Okay?

A: But -- but I may have been there a full year but I -- I think we were in Fort Benning longer.

Q: How long did you stay in Georgia?

A: I'm not sure.

Q: Okay. Was -- was your job different in Georgia? Did you do different tasks there?

A: No, there it was Classification Specialist 275.

Q: And when you get your orders to ship out, how do you feel? What's your reaction?

A: Just expected, that's all it was.

Q: You weren't worried? Scared? Apprehensive?

A: No, not that I remember.

Q: Okay. All right. So in '45, at the beginning of that year, where -- where are you shipped to?

A: We landed in Normandy but by then there was no beachhead anymore. It was all a port.

Q: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

A: You know, so, with -- with landing docks and stuff like that. So we landed there and we camped in Fort -- now what was it called, Camp Lucky Strike.

Q: This is in France?

A: Yeah, Camp Lucky Strike. Camp Chesterfield. I think we were -- the French called it, "Lukey Streak".

Q: Was it close to Normandy? Was it in Normandy?

A: In Normandy.

Q: In Normandy. And what were you doing in the camp?

A: Uh-huh. Well, the same, same things. I mean, I was working in Service Company and classification.

Q: But -- but what kind of tasks were you assigned? Or were you still processing new draftees in France?

A: No, no.

Q: What were you doing?

A: I don't know, it was just keeping track of personnel.

Q: How long were you in Normandy?

A: Shifts, promotions, I don't know. I don't remember how long but I know that when we started going across, I – I remember there was a town of Bitche, B-I-T-C-H-E.

Q: B-I-T-C-H-E?

A: And Kulmbach in Germany was -- we were in Alsace Lorraine first. I don't remember the town, but I think --

Q: While you were in -- still in France, were you interacting with any of the local population?

A: Yeah.

Q: So what -- what kinds of --

A: I took French in high school.

Q: Oh, really?

A: So, I was the French interpreter. It was rough. I mean, I -- I mean, my French was rough.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But I was the official getter of wine.

Q: So how did that happen? How did you get the wine?

A: Well, at the end of the day, you know, we could go into town.

Q: Okay.

A: So we went into the village and I would ask for -- for wine and there was something else, there was two things. And of course, we were always in good shapes to -- good shape to barter because we had cigarettes and that was what everybody wanted.

Q: Was that the only thing you bartered or was there anything else? Rations or chocolate or?

A: Chocolate. But I remember saying, (? "Aba do divan"?). Oh, I know, it was "vin rouge or vin blanc". That's right. It was only two --

Q: So you didn't get down to the varietals. You didn't talk about what kind of wine it is? You didn't say --

A: Oh, no.

Q: -- I would like a burgundy wine? Or no? No, it was just red or white? Both?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did they have both?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have a preference?

A: But mostly red, I think. I don't know. I wasn't hot on wine drinking any way. I brought it back for the other guys.

Q: Was -- was actually alcohol consumption, was that something your parents did? Did they drink wine at home ever?

A: My parents didn't drink. My father would take a shot of schnapps only at a party or something. And he never was drunk. My mother wouldn't drink.

Q: And so growing up had you had any experience with alcohol in high school? In college, before you entered the Army?

A: No.

Q: There were no parties?

A: With alcohol?

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: So when you were tasked to bring back this wine, you had no interest in it?

A: No. I don't -- I'm not sure about that. Maybe I was interested in tasting it or but not a great deal.

Q: And the other -- the other soldiers, did they drink too much?

A: Well some of them did, yeah.

Q: They did? Did they misbehave when they drank too much?

A: Oh, yeah, there was some times cases of fighting or passing out or...

Q: So the misbehavior would be on base? It would not be in the village? It would not be in with locals?

A: Right, right.

Q: There was no incidents with locals?

A: No, I don't remember any.

Q: When somebody misbehaved, given that you're in classification, did you have to write up a report?

A: No, that was -- that was done -- that was not done by me. That was court-martials.

Q: Okay. Oh, okay. So you were bringing back wine. And what other tasks did you do as an interpreter?

A: Laundry.

Q: So you took -- You were speaking with the locals in order to get the laundry done?
With women?

A: I don't remember anything else.

Q: So, how long -- how long was your stay in France? You get there at the beginning of the year. Is it still cold when you leave?

A: I don't remember. I think it must have been. I -- I do remember Kulmbach and there was beer --

Q: Okay.

A: -- there.

Q: This is Germany?

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, approximately where in Germany? What's a big city there?

A: Kulmbach was -- was a big city.

Q: Okay. Close to or in, in which state?

A: It's -- I don't know the state but it was closer to France.

Q: Okay. Uh-huh. Is it spelled K-U-M-B-A-C-H?

A: K-U-L-M-B-A-C-H.

Q: Okay. All right. So that's your -- in your memories that's your first German experience?

A: Yeah, if I could see a map, there might be a some other -- some other towns that we stopped in before that but I can't remember them.

Q: Uh-huh, all right. So tell me about Kulmbach. What happened there?

A: Nothing except that it was an interesting, it was a German city and there was -- it had the buildings and the narrow streets and so on and beer and that's all I remember.

Q: Okay. Tell me about the beer. You weren't very interested in alcohol so why did you mention the beer?

A: Well, I just remembered that was one of the features there that they talked about.

Q: Oh. What about the locals in Kulmbach? Did you interact with them?

A: It seems to me that I -- I was suspicious of all of the Germans and didn't know who was a Nazi and who wasn't and was kind of not friendly with them like I was with the French.

Q: And how did you feel about the Germans in general? Did you, because the way you're describing it, what I'm understanding, is that you had a sense that some were not Nazi's. Did you have a feeling that some had been part of the system and some had not? Or did you have a stronger sentiment of kind of a blanket feeling regarding towards them that they must of all been a part of the system?

A: Well, everybody said "nicht Nazi, nicht Nazi." But no, I had a sense that some were and some were not but most were.

Q: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So does that mean that you were -- you pretty much did not interact with the population at that point yet because you weren't sure what you were in for?

A: Right. Also, we weren't there. We weren't at any place long enough.

Q: How long did you say?

A: You know, well, we -- we got into combat 54 days before the end of the war; okay?

Q: Okay.

A: So, when was -- when was V-E day?

Q: May 8th?

A: May 8th. So 54 days before May 8th was what?

Q: Roughly two months. So that would put it at early March; right?

A: Uh-huh. So that's when we went into combat.

Q: And where did you go into combat?

A: And I think it was around Kulmbach; but I'm not sure.

Q: Okay. Okay. And what was your first experience of combat?

A: Well, see, I was in Service Company; so it was, I don't-- I don't -- We weren't in combat. I mean, they were, the front lines, the line companies were in actual combat.

Q: Right, uh-huh.

A: And we were behind them, following them.

Q: Sure. Sure.

A: So we knew what was going on but we weren't directly in it. Where we were, we were taking over what had already been --

Q: Liberated?

A: -- victorious for us, so.

Q: And -- and again, what -- what tasks were you doing? Were you still only processing your own people's --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- papers? So you were -- you were not working on local issues while the Army was advancing?

A: No, not that I -- no not that I --

Q: Did you ever see combat before the end of the war? Were you in any kind of danger?

A: Yeah, there was -- there was one time when there was some shooting or some sniper or something. But in general, no, I was not in combat.

Q: Uh-huh. So --

A: There was one day, one -- one time that was dangerous. I don't remember whether it was a truck, something was blown up or shot or something but.

Q: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

A: But I wasn't hurt.

Q: How did you learn that the war was over in Europe?

A: I don't remember exactly. I think it just was announced all over and celebrated.

Q: Where were you when -- when the war was over?

A: We were in Steyr Austria.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Or near Steyr Austria on the Inn River; we had met the Russians.

Q: So when did you meet the Russians?

A: That was -- When was the war over, May?

Q: May 8th.

A: May 8th. So I would say it was in May.

Q: So that -- that one week, it was one week before. It was the week of -- that's when you met the Russians?

A: I think so, around then.

Q: So can you describe what happened when you met the Russians?

A: All I remember was that there was toasting and -- and joyful meeting and celebrating and --

Q: Did the -- did the two groups mix? Was there any kind of interaction between the Soviet Army and the U.S. Army?

A: I don't -- A little bit.

Q: Did you -- Do you recall ever meeting the Soviet soldier?

A: More by the officers, not much by us. Our -- our major-- our major meeting was with former concentration camp people that were strewn, that were wherever we went, you know.

Q: When did that start happening? That wherever you would go you would bump into, run into?

A: Oh, I would say probably from -- from Central Germany on; especially in Bavaria and Austria. It was the worst in Austria.

Q: So, if it started in Germany, do you recall when you first -- when your company first came across a concentration camp survivor?

A: No, I don't remember when --

Q: Do you recall -- do you recall your first thoughts? Did you know who these people were?

A: Yeah, I knew they were -- Well, they wore striped, striped like pajama like uniforms.

Q: Right.

A: And some of them looked like skeletons.

Q: Where were you coming across these people?

A: Several places across Germany and Austria.

Q: Fields? Roads?

A: But I think the most -- the most -- the largest one was this camp that we opened.

Q: Okay. So, tell me about that.

A: Well, that was -- What was the name of it again? During --

Q: Gunskirchen?

A: Yeah. Gunskirchen Lager. Another GI and I walked away from our unit and just strolling and we -- we came across this camp and we opened the door and out poured some prisoners and some of them were so, looked like skeletons and -- and one -- one called to me in Yiddish and said, "I'm one of you." "I'm one of you."

Q: -- So the prisoner said to you, I'm one of you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, did he know that you spoke Yiddish or understood Yiddish?

A: He didn't. I guess I looked Jewish.

Q: And so you hear this. What -- what is passing through --

A: He said, "Haberach Monus (ph)" have pity, have sympathy.

Q: What did you do when you heard that?

A: I didn't, nothing. I just, I mean, you know, we had a rifle and a steel helmet and we were in full gear and they stumbled out and -- and some, he -- he dropped and I think he dropped dead. And there was some who dropped dead and some just started flowing out so we ran back to our unit to try to get medics and to try to get everybody involved.

Q: But this was not the first time you had seen people in these striped uniforms?

A: No, I had seen -- we had seen others before.

Q: How frequently had you seen them? Just a few incidents or?

A: Yeah.

Q: And those incidents were -- I -- I understand you probably don't remember the exact location but what was the -- where was it in a field? Or on a road? Or in an other camp where they concentrated? Was it many people? Few people?

A: I think it was a few.

Q: So you had come across these people in the striped clothing?

A: I think so, yeah.

Q: And you had known what about them exactly at that time?

A: That they were concentration camp prisoners.

Q: And you knew about concentration camps because?

A: Because I read about them.

Q: In where?

A: I don't know. Maybe, maybe the Yank paper, maybe the GI paper or -- or well, I knew about concentration camps from the time I was a civilian.

Q: But would you -- would you know that the striped uniform is what a concentration camp inmate wears?

A: I think so.

Q: Did the Army ever brief you on who these people are or what to expect about these people?

A: I think -- I think they did. I think there was some discussion about it.

Q: Do you have any concrete examples? Any details?

A: No, I don't. No. In military government we learned a lot about it.

Q: But that was after having --

A: That was --

Q: -- liberated?

A: -- that was later.

Q: -- Guns kirchen. Uh-huh. So when you happened upon this camp your idea of what you're seeing is what?

A: You know, I'm a little confused about prisoners of -- German prisoners of war that were huddled together in trucks and they were carried, they were driven away from where they were captured and prisoners of -- and concentration camp prisoners with the striped uniforms in trucks. It seems to me that I saw them in trucks, too but I'm not sure that they were rescued and carried and that I -- we passed some of them on the roads. I don't know, I just felt that I knew about concentration camps and prisoners well before that time and that we saw some.

Q: So as you were describing, you opened the gates. Were the gates locked?

A: No.

Q: So you could just turn a handle and open it?

A: Yes.

Q: Why had they not opened it?

A: And the guards were all gone. The guards had left already and they took all of the food.

Q: Do you know why they had not opened it? The gate?

A: No.

Q: Because it seems to me you're saying that it was easy to open?

A: Yeah. Yeah. The other guy and I lifted it and opened it and I said my God, we opened it.

Q: Do you remember the other guy's name?

A: No. I've been trying to think of it and I -- I can't remember his name. I remember what he looked like.

Q: Careful of the mic.

A: He was also in Service Company. He -- I don't know whether he was a clerk of some sort or --

Q: But so you opened the gate and this is when you hear the man speaking Yiddish?

A: Well, he -- he started coming out?

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: What were your thoughts -- thoughts when you heard that?

A: Well --

Q: -- "have pity. Have" --

A: Well, just felt, I'm touched, you know, moved.

Q: The fact that he was speaking Yiddish?

A: Yeah and that he was so, so thin. And then he, you know.

Q: So did you immediately decide to go back to your company?

A: Yeah.

Q: So you -- At that point you are not interacting with any of the prisoners?

A: No, no.

Q: How long did it take you to get back to the company, do you think?

A: Oh, immediately. We turned around and ran back when we saw all of these people.

Q: And what did you tell your company? What had you just seen?

A: That we opened a concentration camp and --

Q: And what did -- and what did your --

A: Take over.

Q: Okay. And what did they do?

A: They did. As I recall they went there and they evacuated the prisoners.

Q: Did you go back with them?

A: With ambulances, you know, they got ambulances and they got -- Yeah, well, I don't -

- I don't remember too much after that. Where we -- where we were or where we were assigned to something else right away or...

Q: So did you ever go -- go back to Mauthausen during that period?

A: No.

Q: There was -- there was just that one interaction of, I'm sorry, Gunscarium (sic), that -- that one situation where you're opening the gate and then you immediately went back to the company. So you did not enter the camp?

A: No.

Q: And you must have been there just a few minutes?

A: Maybe, yeah.

Q: How many people did you see?

A: Maybe dozens in the background.

Q: What was?

A: It smelled of death.

Q: Tell me -- tell me about the smell?

A: Just -- it just had an awful smell.

Q: What was it reminiscent of?

A: I don't know. Smelled bad and people said that's the smell of death?

Q: Which people? Who said that?

A: Guys in the Army. I just don't remember too much of that.

Q: What was the weather like that day? Was it raining?

A: It was not raining, no.

Q: Was it fairly warm by then? Or was it a cold Spring?

A: I don't remember that. I think it was fairly -- It must-- I don't know. I know it wasn't raining.

Q: I'm going to pause.

End of File One

Beginning File Two

Q: This is a Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Lester Libo.

A: Yes.

Q: Conducted by me, by Johanna Newman (ph), on October 25, 2012 in Washington D.C., and this interview is being conducted over the phone. And now I'm introducing myself to you. I understand that you had some interview already, part of your interview already took place --

A: Yes, there was an interview there in Washington.

Q: Uh-huh, I see, oh, I see, okay. Well, I think -- I hope you're comfortable and sitting down --

A: Yes, I am.

Q: --and relaxing. Okay, very good. Where are you?

A: I'm in Albuquerque.

Q: New Mexico?

A: New Mexico.

Q: That's where you live?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh, okay, very good. Well I was very much interested to hear and I also listened a little bit to the original interview what your function was after World War II. How did you get involved with the denazification and why were you chosen -- chosen to be part of that program?

A: Well, I was -- I was in the infantry --

Q: Yes.

A: -- and we were in occupation in Augsburg.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: And I was just bored, I guess, and I -- and I heard about military government needing people, so I applied for a transfer and I got it, and they transferred me to Regensburg.

Q: Yes.

A: And when I went to -- I was put into Public Safety Special Branch and it turned out that the head of denazification, the enlisted man who was the head, the title is chief clerk, that he was leaving in a few days.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I had a few years of college credit in psychology and I guess they thought that -- that I could do it. So I was only 22 years old, but I wanted it and they thought I could do it, so they trained me to fill his spot.

Q: I -- I suppose it was quite a challenge for you.

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Now, what -- how -- now in retrospect, how successful do you think that this program worked out?

A: Well, in our district, which was -- the state of the niederbayern and obersfeldt (ph) where Regensburg is.

Q: Yes.

A: We had the highest number of -- of -- what you call it, of screenings, we had the highest number of evaluations and removals of people from their jobs, Nazis, than anyone else in the U.S. Zone. We had -- we were very successful.

Q: When you say successful, do you think that it had an impact on --

A: That what?

Q: -- on the Nazis to -- well, let's say nevermind repent, but they realized finally how wrong they had gone or how criminal their government had been or do you think that they -- they did this mostly so that they would be spared from trials or prison or worse?

A: Well, they didn't do it, we did it, we removed them. We-- we evaluated them.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: This was the U.S. government, it wasn't the Germans.

Q: No, no, I understand, I know that, but I was just wondering --

A: We removed them from office --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- in important jobs, like in the government and in important jobs, --

Q: Yes.

A: -- administrative jobs and we removed thousands and that-- that was our mission, to cleanse the new government of -- of Nazis as much as possible at the higher levels. I mean at the lower levels there were -- there were many Nazi party members, but we kept -- if they were -- if -- if they had joined the party after summer of '37 they were considered okay.

Q: Because then they were forced?

A: Yeah. If they hadn't held any position -- any official positions.

Q: The reason that you felt that way is because at that point they were forced, whether --

A: Yes.

Q: -- they liked it or not?

A: It was mandatory that they join.

Q: Right, right. My question merely -- my next question actually was: Who were the individuals you were dealing with and had they been officials during the Nazi regime? So in a way you have answered that already.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. You said that they were --

A: Yes.

Q: -- they had been in the government?

A: Right.

Q: And -- well, and you think that those who went into the party after '37 by -- in their hearts they were not Nazis? Do you think 00?

A: Oh, I don't -- no, it was mixed, I'm sure.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

A: That some believed in it and some were -- didn't and were forced into it, but.

Q: Now, how do you think -- what was the reaction on the parts of these Germans? They were removed from their office by the United States military.

A: Yes.

Q: And what was their reaction to being chosen to be denazified? I assume that some were beyond that. In other words, that they, you know, either ended up in prison or could not be used --

A: Oh, yeah, the ones who -- who were suspected of being war criminals, --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- we didn't -- we didn't process them. We turned them over to--

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- counter-intelligence, you know, to intelligence --

Q: I see, yeah.

A: -- but we didn't deal with those.

Q: So you had good reason to think that the people you were dealing with, it was worthwhile trying to change them --

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh, I see.

A: Yeah, it didn't last long, though. We understand -- I understand that it changed about, you know -- in 1946, I think it was, late 1946. I was there only until May '46.

Q: Uh-huh, yes.

A: I was there from September to May '46. And we were very-- we were very aggressive in pursuing Nazis and getting them out of office.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: And some people -- I mean I understand the Germans themselves felt that it wasn't worth doing or something, I don't know. One -- I remember one Nazi party official that we removed from office said to me that he had -- he had his days of glory and now -- and now it's turned over, so, you know, it's --

Q: Yeah.

A: It's sort of worth it.

Q: In what language did you interrogate these people? How did you deal with the --

A: Well, I had -- I had a German American -- I had an American originally from Germany as an interpreter. He was in the Army.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: So he was an interpreter.

Q: By the way, have you ever come across the name of a American lawyer by the name of Kemp -- not American, German lawyer by the name of Kempner (ph)?

A: Kempner?

Q: Kempner, yeah.

A: Sounds familiar.

Q: Because apparently he is -- was a -- a -- a lawyer who interrogated also this -- these kind of people, people who had been in office, who had --

A: Oh, uh-huh.

Q: -- held government jobs and trying to find out how much did they know what was going on --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and were they in favor of it or not, and so apparently he -- you know, he became quite well known. That's maybe why the name is familiar to you. Yeah, Kempner was the name. He was a German interrogating his own people.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Yeah. Okay. So how -- let's see, did they honestly cooperate or did they just want to escape punishment and, therefore, participated in the program? What would you think?

A: No, I -- well, they were being investigated, they wanted to get away -- I don't think they cooperated. They were --

Q: They did not cooperate with the American --

A: Well, who -- who were you thinking of? The people who were --

Q: The people who were supposed to be denazified.

A: The people who were screened?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, they filled out the fragebogen and handed it in.

Q: That was my question, too: How honest were the answers or could you assess that?

A: Well, that's an interesting question because a lot of -- many Germans came from the east zone.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: And there were no records to check on their responses, but in our zone, in our area, Regensburg itself --

Q: Yes.

A: -- had an intact record center that had all the Nazi records. So people from the local area we could check on, so we had --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- so we had a routine check in the records center --

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: -- in Regensburg on everybody, but people who came from Poland or East Germany, --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- whatever, we had no way of checking on them, so of course they were more sus -- they were more suspicious.

Q: Uh-huh. So you think that some of them really -- well, let me ask you this then: How did you determine who -- whom to get into the program?

A: Who --

Q: How did you choose the individual that you thought would qualify to be in the program and be denazified?

A: I -- I don't know. We didn't -- we didn't choose.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Somebody chose.

Q: I see, uh-huh.

A: Military government, I don't know. We -- we were -- we were the evaluators, --

Q: I see, I see.

A: -- but we didn't do the initial choice.

Q: So you were handed a list of people --

A: Yes.

Q: I see, I understand. And then you did your best to try and get the Nazi ideology out of them, huh?

A: Not to get the Nazi ideology out of them, but to keep the ones that were more serious Nazis out of -- out of important jobs.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: I mean we didn't expect to change their ideology.

Q: And -- {coughing} excuse me. And how did you -- you were a young person, as you mentioned earlier.

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you feel to carry out such a difficult burden? I mean in a way from a human point of view this is quite a -- a hard burden to carry because you decide on somebody's future in a way.

A: Not at all, it was a joy.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: I was glad to do it. It was revenge.

Q: Well, that I can understand, right. Now, how was the --

A: I was -- you know, I'm Jewish.

Q: I know, I know.

A: So I -- you know, I saw that as a -- as a good kind of revenge.

Q: I see, uh-huh. And -- well, okay.

A: My interpreter was also Jewish, he was -- he was a German Jewish refugee who was in the Army.

Q: Yeah. Well, many of them came --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- at an age here to America and then enlisted in the Army, that's right.

A: Right.

Q: You know I come from that part of the world, too.

A: You came from --

Q: I'm originally from -- from Hamburg.

A: Oh, yeah?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, that's in the north.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Now, what was the procedure, was this program conducted on a one -- one-on-one basis or did you have groups at the same time, and how exactly did you proceed in this project, in this program of denazification?

A: Well, we had the fragebogens.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they would come in, and they would have to be evaluated.

Q: Right.

A: And we had a staff of evaluators that were about 30 people.

Q: Oh, I see, uh-huh, yeah.

A: And there were -- they went over them and -- and they would come to me and say this one looks suspicious or this one, you know, and so on, but they would -- there were -- there were procedures to follow.

Q: I see, okay.

A: And --

Q: So you followed a protocol, in other words?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh, I see, okay. But then -- and then let's say now you have chosen 10 or 20 or 30 of these individuals. Was it conducted like in a classroom or was it conducted on a one-to-one basis?

A: No, one-to-one.

Q: It was one-to-one?

A: Well, each -- each questionnaire was --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- was a -- it was a separate investigation, a separate procedure for each individual.

Q: I see.

A: Yes.

Q: What was the procedure?

A: The procedure was to evaluate their questionnaire and to come up with a rating in -- there were five categories.

Q: Uh-huh, I see.

A: You know, you know those five categories: Number one is mandatory removal, number two is -- is discretionary adverse recommendation, number three is discretionary no recommendation, number four is no evidence of anti -- no evidence of Nazi activity, and number five was evidence of anti-Nazi activity.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: And so each individual would get a rating.

Q: Yeah.

A: That would be the conclusion. And then if they were in the four or five, they would be removed from office or not hired and their bank account would be frozen and their property could be seized and used by the Allies, by the Americans for, you know, like homes could be used for troops.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah. And how long did such a process take?

A: The evaluation process?

Q: Yes, uh-huh.

A: Just -- just -- it was -- I don't know, I would say anywhere from an hour to a couple of days.

Q: Uh-huh, I see.

A: It depended on if there were any complications, because we also had a special investigations unit that would look into difficult case -- cases that were, you know, harder to figure out.

Q: Right, right, uh-huh.

A: They -- you know, they might -- they might go to -- to interrogate some other people or try to get other records or whatever.

Q: Uh-huh. Or did you interview members of their family or --

A: No.

Q: -- I don't know what -- uh-huh.

A: No.

Q: Or friends or --

A: either. Most -- the action in most cases was taken on the basis of the questionnaire alone.

Q: Uh-huh, I see.

A: We would bring them in for interviews if we had questions.

Q: I see, I see. Oh, you mean you got the fragebogen, that you evaluated, but you didn't necessarily have the individual in front of you?

A: That's right.

Q: Uh-huh, I see. I didn't realize that. Now I suppose I had a -- I had a different concept somewhat. I thought that after you went through the fragebogen and you decided who was suspicious or wasn't suspicious, that they somehow got some kind of a -- I don't want to call it brainwashing, but some kind of a, you know, democratic viewpoint or -- or --

A: Oh, no, no. No, it was strictly --

Q: Based on their fragebogen.

A: It was, yeah, strictly screening, no attempt to change them or argue with them.

Q: And were they cooperative, were they hostile, antagonistic or --

A: Well, I would say the main attitude was to try to get out of it, you know, to say that they were innocent.

Q: Oh --

A: "Nicht Nazi, Nicht Nazi" was -- was their motto. There was one case -- -

Q: Well, that was easy to say afterwards.

A: There was one case I remember where this man said that-- that he understands that the tables were turned and he had his days of glory and now his side has lost and he's

prepared to take the consequences, and he -- you know, he said well, we had our day and now you have your day. Well, that was very unusual.

Q: Uh-huh, to admit that?

A: For anybody to do that. Most of them were—made excuses. You know, they said they were forced or that they were not really a Nazi and so on. And of course the people from -- who came from East Germany, there was no way to check.

Q: That's the other big problem, exactly, right. So I was-- one of the questions I had in my mind was: Was any material used during this process, but I guess it wasn't 'cause I had a different concept of it at all.

A: Right.

Q: I thought there were lectures being given on democracy or lectures --

A: Oh, no. There was no attempt to change anybody. It was completely screening.

Q: Uh-huh. And get the least suspicious back into the workforce?

A: The what?

Q: I said and then to get the least suspicious individuals back into the working force?

A: Yeah, to -- well, to allow them to continue in their -- on their jobs.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Or to be hired.

Q: Yeah, I understand, yeah. Okay. Let's see now, what qualifications did you have or required in order to be part of this process? Well, you said that --

A: Well, I was -- I was a college student, I was a psychology major, and I also had experience working in personnel administration.

Q: I see, oh, I see.

A: So I had administrative experience.

Q: I see. And were you in charge of the -- of this particular program?

A: Yes, I was -- well, I was an enlisted man, I was a sergeant.

Q: Yeah.

A: The person in charge of the whole thing was an officer, a captain.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And he -- and there was also a lieutenant, so I remember there were two American officers that were in charge, but the day-to-day work was done by -- the day-to-day work of -- of being in charge, I mean, --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- was done by an enlisted man.

Q: I see.

A: And my predecessor was the one who was being discharged. He was also a Jewish guy --

Q: Yeah

A: -- from the States. And I was put in to learn -- learn the ropes.

Q: I see, yeah.

A: And learn the job --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- that he did heading up the staff, supervising the staff.

Q: I see. So you were in a supervisory position?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: The title was chief clerk.

Q: I see, good, very good. Were there Germans that participated under oath?

A: Germans --

Q: Well, let's say those who filled out the fragebogen -- fragebogen, and was there anywhere where they had to, I don't know, sign that -- like we say here in the United States --

A: I think -- I think --

Q: You know, to whatever I wrote that --

A: I think they signed it -- I think they -- when they signed it it said -- it probably said in there that something about --

Q: But they were not under any verbal oath or anything like that?

A: No.

Q: Well, they -- I think they got away with too much, quite honestly, but never mind.

Well, that was another question I had: How could you be sure that what they put down in their fragebogen was an honest answer? But I think you answered that already and you could --

A: The record center.

Q: Yeah. You could check it unless they came from the east?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Well, that's, of course, a big problem, but -- and that I guess wasn't really eliminated until the '90s, right, when they got records.

A: Yeah.

Q: What did you hope to achieve with this denazification program?

A: Cleansing. Well, to keep the new Germany, the new German government more democratic, and not -- not back in the hands of the Nazis.

Q: And do you think you succeeded?

A: We succeeded in -- in our job, but we understand that the new German government kind of weakened and we had heard that Nazis were being kept or hired again.

Q: And that was under Adenauer or --

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, I guess you were dealing here with what, 52 million people or however many --

A: Yeah.

Q: So you told me already where you were located, right? In -- in Regensburg --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- or where was --

A: Regensburg on the...

Q: Okay. And that's where -- where your work was concentrated, in that part of Bavaria?

A: Yes.

Q: How long did you work in this capacity?

A: I was there from September of '45 through May of '46.

Q: At the time that I was in a DP camp in Italy.

A: Oh.

Q: Beyond that even, until August, I guess, of '46. Okay. What were some of the most memorable incidents that you remember from that period? You already told me about the guy who said you had your day --

A: Yeah.

Q: I mean we had our day, now you have your day. I'm sure you came across a number of other memorable incidents with these people.

A: Well, I think one was when the statistics came out to show that we had the highest number of removals in the whole US zone.

Q: Uh-huh. The highest removal?

A: Yeah.

Q: That's interesting.

A: Yeah, the highest number.

Q: Well, Bavaria is sort of Hitler country --

A: Oh.

Q: -- perhaps that's why.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Munich, that's part of it.

A: Also, we had heard --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- that the British were sitting and having tea with the Nazis, and that the French, I don't know -- the French were either very vengeful or just didn't care, but that the United States forces were the most serious about denazification, so we were proud that we were doing a good job.

Q: Uh-huh, okay. But specifically on a one-to-one from an individual, do you have any memorable incidents that occurred with, you know, you speaking to any of these people or in conversation or --

A: I don't -- I don't remember any specific.

Q: I see. Now, you think that the program was effective?

A: Well, it was effective while we were doing it, but it was -- but it was overturned; you know, it was watered down and then it was done away with.

Q: How soon would you think was it watered down? I think that really is also an important point because was there already a new younger generation coming in or --

A: No, not while we were there. It was after -- we heard that it was done afterward, probably in late '46.

Q: What, that they over turned this program?

A: That's what I heard.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Were any other highlights that you remember during this period? I mean some really heavy duty Nazis that were discovered in this way? I assume that perhaps through the fragebogen you did discover some --

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Anybody specific?

A: No, I can't remember any -- any big -- big name.

Q: Yeah, I mean really big shots.

A: No, I don't think so.

Q: Okay. What about -- or how was it justified that some of the Nazis scientists, etcetera, ended up here?

A: Oh, I don't know. I don't know anything about that. I guess the United States needed them.

Q: Or they would have fallen into the hands of the -- of the -- of the other side.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think -- well, let me ask you this: What are some of the strengths or weaknesses of this program?

A: Well, I think -- the weakness was not having record centers -- not having records on people who came from other areas.

Q: Oh, yeah, yeah, right, right.

A: Other than that, I think it was done very well.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You know, and they were serious and people were removed and gradually jobs were -- were given to people who were not Nazis. There weren't many -- there weren't many around, you know. There was -- practically everybody was in the Nazi party because of the mandatory membership --

Q: Right --

A: -- from '37 on.

Q: {Coughing} excuse me. No, that I realize and that, of course, very difficult to make this distinction and then to be sure that --

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, very difficult. Did you -- were you able to -- to obtain lists of Nazi party members?

A: As I recall, there was one time when -- when somebody uncovered a record or a list of -- of -- of members that we could check against -- against our applicants. It was kind of a surprise treasure that was uncovered.

Q: I can imagine, yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: And probably to the great disappointment of some of the people --

A: Yeah, right.

Q: There you had it black and white, huh?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. I had a question of how were the candidates for denazification chosen?

A: It was a routine thing on their job. It was because of what -- what position -- I guess -- I guess it was, you know, everybody in certain jobs in the government or in important positions in society.

Q: That you really needed in order to --

A: We didn't -- we didn't select them, they were -- we received -- we received them, somebody else selected them.

Q: Made the selection. When you say somebody else, you mean from among the allies, not from within the Germans themselves?

A: I guess so. I don't -- I don't really know. It might be that an order went in from military government that everybody in a certain industry had to submit a fragebogen.

Q: I see, okay, uh-huh. So really everything, all the -- all the selection, and I hate to use that word for obvious reasons, but let's -- let's just use it for lack of a better word, so all the selections were really based entirely on the fragebogen?

A: On -- all the selection?

Q: Yeah, who was going to be denazified or not.

A: Oh. Well, it started with the fragebogen.

Q: Yeah.

A: Then if there were questions or suspicions, then -- then there would be interviews and further investigations.

Q: Did you do some of the interviews yourself as well?

A: Did what?

Q: Did you do personally some of the interviews yourself or --

A: No. We had an American GI originally from Germany who was a special investigator and he would -- he would do them.

Q: He would do the --

A: Interviews. And he -- and he would do the -- he would do further investigation.

Q: I see. So really was a whole team work?

A: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Now, the -- the workload must have been overwhelming, as we said before, dealing with a whole nation?

A: Well, we only had one state.

Q: Now, did this -- that's a good answer because that brings me to another question. Did you -- did the United States have such programs all over Germany?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yes. It was in the -- the whole US zone --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- was divided into areas and all of them had the same kind of thing we did.

Q: I see, I see.

A: We were just -- we were just in one state.

Q: You're just the -- the --

A: Niederbayern and obersfeldt.

Q: Niederbayern, yeah. Oh, I see. This really was a very well organized undertaking.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: I mean -- so what would you say, roughly how many people in your sector, on your section were involved in this? Germans, I mean.

A: Oh, I -- the population?

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't -- I don't know. A million.

Q: Oh, really?

A: I don't know. I don't remember.

Q: Well, it was a vast undertaking. And you -- you -- you talk about the Americans having done that, and I was not aware of that either that -- that this was not an allied undertaking. I always was under the impression that this was a cooperative undertaking.

A: No, this was American.

Q: I see. And the other --

A: And the others had their own systems.

Q: Uh-huh. Did they also call it denazification?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I don't know what they had. I mean we -- we had heard that -- that -- that the British were having tea with the Nazis and the French were just wrecking their stores and homes.

Q: So not -- not --

A: Oh, and the Russians were terrible, you know.

Q: Yeah, I know that.

A: Everybody ran away from the Russians --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and said that they were monsters.

Q: Right. Now that I heard --

A: Because they were so -- they were so vengeful --

Q: Right, even from --

A: -- at the destruction that the Germans did of Russia.

Q: And also a lot of Russians died because of that.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. So let me ask you this: What would you say, how-- how did this experience affect you as a young person in such a responsible position, you know, which involved really impacting the course of people's lives? Were you aware of your power, were you troubled by the fact that you did not have experience in that area?

A: No, actually, I think it matured me. I enjoyed it. We lived well. I mean we had -- we had a hotel room, we had a -- we had -- we -- you know, we lived in a hotel, we had dances, we had an orchestra, we had a bar, we -- I had a girlfriend. We had a chauffeur to go wherever we wanted to, like to a play or an opera or concert. It was -- it was a very educational experience.

Q: I see.

A: I mean I was -- I was so young. I had -- I had three years of college credit, which I had done in two years.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: And so, you know, --

Q: Did you pursue that psychology at the end?

A: Yes, I went on and got a PhD in psychology.

Q: Very nice, lovely. Well, so you're telling me that so close after the war ended, this horrible war, they had already concert, theater, opera, dances --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and everything else?

A: Yep.

Q: I guess people are very resilient.

A: Yes.

Q: Well --

A: Well, Regensburg wasn't -- wasn't wrecked as much as some other cities.

Q: I know, I know. Hamburg was destroyed, 75 percent.

A: Oh, yeah, bombing.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And were you -- well, you said you enjoyed it, so I assume you enjoyed the feeling of having power over these people?

A: Well, it wasn't that, it was just having an important job.

Q: Important job, too.

A: And having a lot of the luxuries of -- of, you know, living well.

Q: Right, right, right.

A: I mean there were also the problems of being away from home and living in -- still living in a hostile environment. I mean we weren't -- you know, it was dangerous to walk down the streets alone at night.

Q: You just asked -- you just answered my next question, which really was How dangerous or how hostile were these people against the -- well, the allies in general but the United States Army soldiers that were in --

A: Well, they were -- there were always stories about an attack. You know, there were -- there were German Army veterans, was Hitler Youth former members, there were true believers. There were stories that there were attacks on GIs and -- but I don't remember

that anybody in our unit was attacked, but -- but we were always careful. I mean I remember walk -- walking down the street myself at night, like if I took my girlfriend home, and then I would walk back to my hotel, I would carry a knife.

Q: I see. So one really did need a little bit of protection after all.

A: Yeah.

Q: You were not welcomed with open arms?

A: Oh, no. Although many of them acted that way.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Well --

A: Oh, yeah, they acted that way.

Q: Well, it probably netted them some chocolate and nylon stockings and other things.

A: That's right, and they were glad the war was over.

Q: Yeah. Well, that's for sure.

A: And cigarettes were very important, cigarettes and chocolate and stockings, yeah.

Q: What days these were, oh, my God. I remember them quite well still. Well, I had a question whether, you know, you had to follow a protocol in this process or whether it was, you know, partially your own instinct to realize who was honest, who was not honest, etcetera? What guided your -- your work more, the protocol that you had to follow or the instinct that you felt when confronting some of these fragebogen?

A: Probably both. You know, for instance if there was a contradiction in dates or functions or -- see I -- I didn't -- I wasn't an evaluator myself, I was the head of the unit, so the evaluator would come to me with a question. They would say here's -- here's a

fragebogen where this guy answers this and this place and that on that place and it looks like a contradiction and so on, so they would come to me with questions.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

A: But they would -- they would do the evaluations, I wouldn't, but I would train them.

Q: I see, uh-huh. Now, another question just came to my mind. Most of Germany was mobilized into the Army.

A: Yeah.

Q: And these people that you dealt with were people who were holding office jobs or -- or were working for the government in a -- in a different capacity.

A: Yeah.

Q: Not in the Army.

A: Right.

Q: How did they -- how did they manage to stay out of the Army?

A: I -- I have no idea.

Q: But these guys, in other words, had -- that you were dealing with had not been in -- in the military in the Wehrmacht?

A: I'm -- I don't know. I think some were -- some were in both.

Q: I see.

A: Civilian and had been in the Army too.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I don't know. I think they were in the Army and then they were -- this was peace time.

Q: Well, just a few months, yeah, they may have been --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- demobilized by that time?

A: Right. So maybe the records show that they were in the Nazi party and then they were in the Army and now they were out in a job and they were being screened in the job.

Q: Now, how often did you come across or did they honestly --

A: How what?

Q: How often did you come across somebody who honestly said that he was a member of the SS?

A: Oh, nobody.

Q: Nobody, I see.

A: No. We didn't come -- we didn't come across many SS. I think they were picked up by other intelligence. Maybe they were picked up before -- before they got to us.

Q: I see.

A: I don't remember many -- I don't remember many SS members.

Q: I see.

A: I remember some SR members --

Q: Yeah. Well, that was the forerunner.

A: Sturmabteilung.

Q: Well, they were the forerunners to the SS actually, I guess.

A: Yeah, they were the brown shirts.

Q: Yeah, the beginning of the whole business.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. How did it affect you as a Jew to be put into this position, to work with Nazis and trying to sort of get them back on a normal footing on the -- on the non-Nazi lifestyle or non-Nazi outlook.

A: Well, I was -- I was certainly motivated.

Q: As a Jew.

A: Yes. I was glad to pay them back.

Q: Right.

A: And I was glad to see justice being done.

Q: What happened, by the way, to those people that were fired from their jobs and did not -- could not be re-employed in -- into the government?

A: Yeah, that's a good question, I don't know. We -- we always wondered about that, what happened to them.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Maybe they -- they just did some -- some kind of business by themselves.

Q: Well, this was -- Germany has always been a big bureaucratic --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- structure, but --

A: Maybe this went into some kind of business or got jobs in a business where --

Q: But you don't -- you don't know what --

A: No.

Q: I mean unless they ended up in prison. I suppose some of these people had a record or -- a record came to light --

A: Well --

Q: -- where they actually --

A: They weren't imprisoned. They -- I mean some of them lost their homes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And --

Q: Well, you said they -- their finances were --

A: Yeah, their bank account was frozen. They were allowed to take out just like \$200 a month, something like that.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: They were punished.

Q: Not enough.

A: No.

Q: Not enough, but what can you do. You could have taken a whole nation and cut them off from the member of the world like Mr. Morgenthau you wanted to do?

A: By the way, I wanted to ask you --

Q: Yes.

A: -- kind of a far out question.

Q: That's okay.

A: I have written a novel based on my experience there.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It's called The Finishing Touch.

Q: Yeah.

A: And it's about the nazification, and it has a love story woven in and out of it, but, you know, it's about an American who falls in love with a German woman and the German woman has two brothers, one of whom was in the -- notorious Nazi and the -- and one -- one died, and the one who was the Nazi takes on the identity of the one who died and tries to pass as the one who died and so there is this intrigue about who -- which -- which brother is this --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- and trying to trace and find out so on. It's a suspense novel. And I would like to find a publisher or an agent for it.

Q: Uh-huh. Oh, my goodness. That is very very intriguing. You did that in recent years?

A: I just wrote it. I just finished it.

Q: How lovely. That's really quite an undertaking.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, that's always very, very difficult to find a publisher, but I suppose you could approach a number of, you know, known publishers and send them the manuscript. I guess that's how you go about it --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- or you can go through some of the universities publish books.

A: Yeah, right.

Q: But I don't know whether -- you know, as a novel, but it's really a historic novel, I assume?

A: Yeah, it's a historical novel. It's all about the kinds of things that we talked about.

Q: Right. Okay. So possibly some of the universities might be interested. I mean you have to start somewhere and usually, you know, one person gives you an idea and another person and eventually you may --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- find somebody who does -- sounds fascinating to me.

A: Well, it's related Holocaust museum, that's why I asked you.

Q: We don't do any publishing.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: We don't do any publishing.

A: Oh, I see.

Q: We have a book steward that sells novels and mostly authentic stories about the Holocaust --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but these are all published books, but we do not -- we in the museum do not publish books, but you --

A: Oh, by the way, when I was in the infantry, we had opened -- we had opened a concentration camp as -- I was in Patton's Army as we swept across France, Germany and Austria and it was almost like a different town every-- every day the advance was so fast --

Q: Right.

A: -- but we-- we came upon a Mauthausen.

Q: Oh, yeah, yeah.

A: And our unit opened one of the camps of Mauthausen.

Q: Oh. You mean one of the subcamps?

A: Subcamps, right.

Q: Yeah, uh-huh.

A: And that was interesting.

Q: I bet. And you found survivors there?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah. Lots of people were -- were there and we opened the gates and they streamed out --

Q: Mauthausen, was that --

A: Some dropped dead.

Q: -- in Austria or was that in Germany?

A: Pardon?

Q: Mauthausen, was on the German side or Austrian?

A: I think it was -- I thought it was German.

Q: Could be, I'm not sure.

A: I mean our unit went farther west -- I mean farther east --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- than any other.

Q: So how long were you in the Army?

A: We met the Russians near Styer, Austria. I was in the Army for three years.

Q: You enlisted or you --

A: Yeah, I enlisted. I enlisted in '41 --

Q: After Pearl Harbor.

A: -- and then they had a program where you could stay in college.

Q: Oh, oh, I see, uh-huh.

A: And so I didn't -- actually didn't go in until '43.

Q: I see, I see. Well, those were the worst years, I guess.

A: '43 and '46. And then I was -- I was put in the infantry.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So -- but I was -- I was put in classification, so I was the head of the classification part of the infantry regiment, which is a personnel, so --

Q: So you saw a lot of battle though?

A: A lot of what?

Q: Battle. I mean active warfare.

A: I saw a lot of what?

Q: Of active warfare, of battles.

A: Warfare?

Q: Yeah. I mean you were in the trenches, so to say?

A: Oh, yeah, yeah, right. No, I saw a lot, but I was not in -- I was not actually in the front line. I was in service -- service company, which is -- which is in -- it's an infantry regiment, but it's -- but it's -- it's -- it's the clerks and the drivers and the supply people --

Q: I see, okay.

A: -- and so on, so we were -- we were a little behind. We were not in -- in the foxholes.

Q: I see. Did you -- you had a staff that worked with you, yeah?

A: In -- in denazification?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: How large a staff would you say did you have?

A: Oh, there were 35 people altogether.

Q: I see, uh-huh. And you were the -- you were the supervisor --

A: Yes.

Q: -- of these 35 people?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. And they had to report back to you of their findings, --

A: Yes.

Q: -- etcetera?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And who were they mostly, they --

A: They were mostly Germans and DPs.

Q: Oh, I see. Not the American soldiers?

A: There were -- there were a few American soldiers, but they were not the evaluators.

The evaluators were all German speaking.

Q: I see.

A: And --

Q: So they were Germans out of the population of Germany?

A: Some -- some were Germans and some were DPs from -- from other countries.

Q: But spoke German?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. And DPs, also Jewish DPs?

A: There were a few, but most of the DPs were not Jewish.

Q: I see, uh-huh. Well, that's interesting.

A: There were a few -- I remember there was a Polish -- couple of Polish Jews, there were a couple that were in concentration camps, and then there were others that were hidden or escaped, but the majority were not Jewish, but there were some Jews.

Q: How long do you -- would you say that this whole program last?

A: Well, as I understand -- as I understand, it didn't last much longer after I left. That somehow with the new government they changed the thing, maybe the whole program lasted a year or a year and a half.

Q: I see. So that's not very -- no, I -- excuse me. I remember as a teenager hearing about this -- papers were full of this denazification, denazification, but I don't think that we ever had really a concept of what that really involved. I think perhaps, maybe only in my own mind, I thought that really was kind of a -- how shall I say, yeah, a curriculum, that's probably the right way of --

A: Oh, uh-huh.

Q: I thought it was like a curriculum of changing these people's outlook.

A: Oh, no.

Q: But you're telling me now that this was not it at all.

A: No, it was never -- it was never like that.

Q: I see.

A: It was political screening.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Cleansing of job holding. But I think they -- I think they let Nazis back in because they needed them.

Q: They did.

A: They needed their job skills. And also the whole scientific and technical --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- development.

Q: And then you had the scientists that they needed.

A: Yeah.

Q: What were the dynamics between your team members?

A: And?

Q: No, I said the dynamics between your team members, among themselves, the 35 or whatever, yeah, especially in view of what you just told me that there were DP people and there were Germans and then there was the Army, so how did all that work?

A: It was -- it was fine. I mean everybody worked together, everybody seemed to -- everybody got along --

Q: Even --

A: Everybody had stories to tell about their own hardships.

Q: Well, that I would believe, yeah. Do you remember some of those stories or some of those hardships that people were talking about?

A: Well, as I said, a couple were in concentration camps.

Q: Yeah.

A: Some, you know, had to leave their homes and travel --escaped, were in hiding for many years.

Q: Right.

A: No, I -- as I recall, everybody got along fine. There were no frictions.

Q: Even among the people who were in the concentration camp and the Germans that they were --

A: Well, the Germans on our staff were anti-Nazis.

Q: Yeah, that I can understand, sure.

A: So that was okay.

Q: Uh-huh. But among themselves they got along, you say?

A: Yeah. Seems to me they got along fine. I don't know.

Q: I mean you did not notice any frictions?

A: No.

Q: Uh-huh. Well, I guess maybe they were all out to do the same thing.

A: Yeah, exactly. No, we were all doing an important job, we -- we realized that, and it was -- it was Nazi hunting, and, you know, somebody would find a fragebogen that would have a contradiction in it or show something or -- or some -- something would come up from the record center showing that somebody that we had screened turned out

to be an important Nazi office holder, they would come into my office and hold it up like victory. Yeah, look what we found.

Q: I can imagine, yeah.

A: That was -- those were the high spots was discovering somebody who had been cheating or finding a --

Q: Do you -- well, I can imagine that that was regarded as a major victory.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, I don't know whatever we -- we try to do, I hope we accomplished this in some way or other.

A: Yeah.

Q: Was this an emotional situation for you?

A: Yeah, somewhat, I guess.

Q: As an American or as a Jew?

A: Well, my family did not -- my -- my parents and grandparents did not come from Germany, they had -- they had -- they were American immigrants, they came from Russia.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they came a lot earlier, so they were not affected by what was going on in Germany with Hitler. But everybody, of course, was very involved and very interested and cared a lot about what was happening in Germany, so my -- my work there in military government was -- was highly respected.

Q: I can imagine, yeah. That I can imagine. Well, I --

A: But the strange thing was that it didn't last very long and that -- you know, within a year after I was out --

Q: There was --

A: -- it went back into German hands.

Q: Yeah. That's really too bad. I didn't -- must confess that I did not realize it, but then at that point I had come to the United States --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- and I guess, you know, your -- you start a new life and a new language and a new everything, and somehow you leave these horrible events of the past behind.

A: Is your name Johanna?

Q: Yes.

A: So how old are you?

Q: Right now I'm 81.

A: Oh, okay. I'm 89.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Oh, so you -- yeah, so you came to the States then, huh?

Q: 1946 --

A: Oh, uh-huh.

Q: -- after the war.

A: Same as me.

Q: But you grew up here, I didn't.

A: Yeah, right.

Q: My parents had the good fortune of finding --

A: No, we knew -- you know, in the States during the '30s we knew German Jewish refugees.

Q: Some of them came early, they were smart.

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, my parents found out that Albania allowed Jews to come in and that's where we went and that's where we survived the war?

A: Albania?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh.

Q: Yeah. But, you know, the Germans occupied that country as well in 1943.

A: Yeah, right.

Q: Yeah, yeah, but the Albania people were exemplary among the nations of saving --

A: They were what?

Q: They were exemplary among the nations of saving Jews and not handing them over and not --

A: Oh, that's interesting.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: That's good.

Q: Yeah. Yes, it is, and it's not much known, not well known at all. And in fact, you know, I speak in many places, in schools, etcetera, to talk about that part of history.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And it's really important that people have to know.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's why I want my novel to be published.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, I wanted to ask you, this interview is going to be on -- is going to be on a CD -- on a CD or something?

Q: I believe so, but I --

A: Because --

Q: This is actually the first time that they have asked me to do an interview, you are my guinea pig, and -- so I really don't know the exact correct answer to your question. I believe it's going to be on a DVD, yes.

A: Because we -- yeah, because we wanted, the family wanted a -- wanted a DVD.

Q: Yeah, I'm going to ask the young lady who talked to you earlier and who interviewed you the first time --

A: Right.

Q: -- whether, you know -- whether this will be on a DVD and whether they can send it to you.

A: Okay, wonderful.

Q: But I think it's certainly going to be here in the museum in the All History Department.

A: Oh, good.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course.

A: Well, that's an honor.

Q: That's a big aim right now, to get as many survivors and etcetera, you know, interviewed before it's too late. But I can ask that question right now because the young lady just walked in, so hold on one minute, please.

A: Okay.

(Inaudible conversation.)

Q: You will be sent a copy.

A: Oh, good, wonderful.

Q: How many copies would you want?

A: Oh, a few.

Q: Okay. I'll tell them. How many children do you have?

A: I have four -- I have three living children, I had four. I have five grandchildren.

Q: Lovely. These are the little dividends --

A: Yes.

Q: -- as they say, right? Very good.

A: My son was -- my son was in the Army.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I was a paratrooper.

Q: I see.

A: And he was not in any war, though.

Q: Uh-huh. Well, that's the best way of being in the Army.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's right. Well, that's very good. Okay. Do you have any other little anecdotes or stories that you would like to relate at this point?

A: I can't think of any. I can't think of anything else. I remember the hotel was the Carmeletan Hotel (ph).

Q: In Regensburg?

A: In Regensburg, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I remember the narrow streets and --

Q: Well, these are all very romantic little cities, aren't they?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Yeah, I know.

A: With a famous church. And I remember we had a dance every week, I think every Friday in the evening or something.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And it was -- it was an interesting time for a young kid.

Q: I'm sure. And what happened -- not trying to be indiscreet, what happened to the girlfriend?

A: She was a lot older than I was and she was from -- she was from Estonia.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: And I wanted to get discharged and come back to the States and I wanted to go back to college and such things, so we just separated.

Q: Parted ways?

A: And we went on. We corresponded for a little while and each found our own partners eventually.

Q: Very good. At any rate, it was a great pleasure talking to you.

A: Thank you very much, I enjoyed it.

Q: And I thank you very much for your time. On behalf of the --

A: I was glad --

Q: -- Holocaust Memorial Museum we all thank you very much for your time.

A: Thank you, I enjoyed visiting there.

Q: Good.

A: And I was -- I was very pleased to hear them tell me that they didn't have much information about denazification.

Q: Right. I am sure that there's so much material out there on many different issues and many different topics that we do not have information on.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: So, you know, we're trying to get as much as possible.

A: Well, good.

Q: Because this is really the only source that people can come to and our, how shall I say, big aim in a way is to educate the youth, the next generation and the next generation.

A: Yes.

Q: And unless we have all of this material on the website or available for students or teachers, etcetera, we're really missing a lot.

A: Right. Well, that's wonderful.

Q: Well, --

A: I'm glad to do my part.

Q: I'm very glad that you did. Okay. So keep well.

A: It was a pleasure -- it was a pleasure talking to you, thank you very much.

Q: And likewise, it was a pleasure talking to you.

A: Oh, will I be getting a letter or something about --

Q: About?

A: About doing this so we could have it as -- in a family file.

Q: Of course I will tell them. I will ask them --

A: Okay.

Q: -- or tell them.

A: Thank you.

Q: Probably together with the DVD --

A: Yes.

Q: -- or maybe even earlier.

A: That would be great.

Q: Okay, thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: Very good.

A: Have a good one.

Q: And you keep well.

A: Same to you.

Q: Thank you. Bye.

A: Bye bye.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview

The following is an additional transcript of this interview.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lester Martin Libo August 3, 2012 & October 25, 2012 RG-50.030*0662

PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

LESTER MARTIN LIBO

August 3, 2012

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial interview with Lester Libo, taped on August 3rd 2012 in Washington, DC. The interviewer is Noemi Szekely-Popescu. Hi, Lester, how you doing.

A: Very good, thank you.

Q: Great. Can you spell your last name.

A: L-I-B-O

Q: All right. Was that your name at birth

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have a middle name?

A: Martin.

Q: OK. And your first name was Lester at birth

A: Lester, yes.

Q: And can you tell me your date of birth.

A: 9, 18, 23.

Q: And where were you born?

A: Chicago.

Q: Ok and can you please tell me the names of your parents.

A: My mother's name was Anita Pearl was her last, maiden name. And my father's name was Leopold Libo.

Q: Now was his last name spelled Libo when he was born? Spelled L-I-B-O.

A: I don't, yes. It, it but it was in Russia. They both were Russian immigrants.

Q: You said your mother's name was Anita.

A: Anita.

Q: Ok, what year was she born.

A: 19, wait a minute. 1890 something.

Q: Mid 1890s. What, would it have been the mid-1890s.

A: I have it, I have it down somewhere. I don't remember, but I have it in my, in my, iPhone.

Q: Oh really.

A: Yeah, I think I do.

Q: All right.

A: Let me look at it, and look it up here.

Q: Lester is taking out his iPhone and he's looking it up.

A: No, I have the date of death.

Q: Actually if you would give that to me.

A: Ok, she died in November of 92. And my father died in 1986.

Q: OK. So your mother

A: They were both 96.

Q: They were both 96 when they died. So if, if your mother died in 92, she was born in 1896, right cause she was 96. Does that sound right.

A: Yeah, right. Because she came to the States in 1913. And so, so she was 17 then, you know.

Q: All right. So your mother was born where in Russia.

A: Rovno. R-O-V-N-O. Which you know was Russia when she was born but it became Poland later and then became Russia again and it was back, and my father was born in Ekaterinaslav which during the Soviet regime it was Dnieper Petrovsk.

Q: Rovno is spelled R-O-V-N-O.

A: Right.

Q: And Ekaterinaslav is E-K-A-T-E-R-I-N-A-S-L-A-V.

A: Right.

Q: Ok and your father was born what year.

A: My father.

Q: Mm hm.

A: I think he was well let's when did

Q: Would it be 1890.

A: Yeah.

Q: Ok. And can you tell me what families they were born into. Were they observant families. What traditions did they keep?

A: My father came from a very observant family but his mother died at childbirth with him. So he was really raised by his older sister but his father was an orthodox and on my mother's side, they were I would say modestly observant, not hardly observant.

Q: Hardly observant.

A: Hardly observant. They observed the holidays.

Q: The Sabbath or the high holidays or both.

A: Just the high, just, just the high holidays more, more festively than religiously. They weren't particularly religious.

Q: So they weren't observing Shabbat.

A: No.

Q: Were they keeping kosher?

A: No.

Q: Do you know what language they spoke at home?

A: They spoke Yiddish and Russian. They spoke Russian when they didn't want me to understand.

Q: Oh no, not your parents.

A: Oh theirs.

Q: Your mother's parents.

A: Oh they. They spoke Yiddish and my father was probably Russian and Yiddish.

Q: And when you were describing the, the level of observance, were you talking about your parents or your mother's parents.

A: My mother's parents.

Q: Ok so your mother's parents would only observe the high holidays. Did they keep kosher do you know.

A: No.

Q: Do you know what kind of professions they had. Did your grandmother work?

A: My mother.

Q: Your mother's mother. Did she, did she work or did she stay home?

A: I think she stayed home, yeah I'm pretty sure she stayed home.

Q: And your mother's father. What was his

A: He was, he was a dairy man.

Q: Like Tevye.

A: Yeah. He was a dairy man. I think he was like I know that in the states he worked for a dairy company.

Q: Do you know whether that, that's what that was what he was doing in Russia too

A: In Russia he did, yeah.

Q: And on your father's side, that family you said they were orthodox. Do what did they keep at home.

A: In Russia

Q: Yeah.

A: What did they keep at home?

Q: In, in terms of traditions.

A: Oh they know what, all they must have kept everything because see he was the only one in his family who emigrated. He, he left in 1917 I think in 1916.

Q: Why did he leave?

A: To escape the draft of the tsar and he was, he was smuggled on a, on a coal car, in a coal car on a train and he crossed Siberia and China and came to Japan. And came to the United States from Japan. First in Seattle, and he was the only one.

Q: Now did he have any male siblings?

A: Yes. He had a brother.

Q: Now I'm guessing the male siblings would have also been subject to the draft so why did your father decide to leave and not the others.

A: I'm not sure what, brother may have been exempt for some reason _____ or something. I'm not sure. I don't remember that about him, but I know he had a couple of sisters. I'm not sure about a brother.

Q: So did he arrive in the United States in 1916.

A: yeah.

Q: Do you know why he chose to come to the United States.

A: Well. He chose to escape.

Q: But his destination, do you know why he chose this destination.

A: No I don't. I, I don't know whether he knew anybody here. I don't think he did.

Q: So his port of entry was Seattle.

A: Yeah.

Q: And that was in 1916 and your mother's port of entry was

A: She came w, she came with her family. She had she had 2 sisters.

Q: What were their names?

A: The oldest was Esther. And the middle one was Sophie and the youngest one, well she was the youngest, Anita. And they had a brother who died in, in the service in Russia. In the military.

Q: But they came in 1913. Is that correct.

A: Yeah.

Q: So the brother died in service before the first world war. It was in some other battle or military situation.

A: Yeah. Something. Illness I think it was.

Q: Do you know why they left Russia? In 1913?

A: No I guess it was a wave of, of migration.

Q: But, but your mother never recounted to you why she, why her family had left.

A: No, I know that she came with, with her father. Her mother had died in Russia. And she came with her father and her sister. And the other sister, the middle sister, was already engaged or married and she came with, with her husband.

Q: Do you know the name of the husband? Is this, is this Sophie or is this Esther.

A: Sophie

Q: Sophie was the one who was married.

A: Yeah. her husband's name was Sol.

Q: Sol. And he was also from Rovno.

A: Yeah.

Q: So did you say that they entered the United States in

A: Through Winn, well they, they came to Winnipeg first, they came to Canada and then they entered as far as I know they came to Chicago right away. And they lived in Chicago.

Q: So there your maternal father took up his profession and he worked in a dairy.

A: In Chicago.

Q: but what was it exactly that he was doing. It was dairy, was he a milkman. Was he working in a processing firm.

A: No, it was in processing. He invented a process to make sour cream out of skimmed milk or something like that. I mean it was some, some dairy process.

Q: Did he invent this in the states? Or before he came?

A: No, in the States.

Q: Did he patent it?

A: I don't, the dairy company did.

Q: So he was working for the dairy company as a some sort of technician.

A: Yeah I guess so.

Q: Was it a kosher dairy company?

A: No.

Q: Do you remember the name of the dairy

A: Western dairy.

Q: Western dairy. And your mother at 17 had already been in school back in Russia. Is that correct? Had she been in a, a Jewish school

A: No.

Q: It was a public school.

A: Yeah.

Q: And when she came in 1917 what, what were her prospects. Was it understood that she

A: 1913.

Q: I'm sorry, 1913. At the age of 17. Was it understood that she needed to marry or was there a different expectation?

A: Well I know she, she got married in 1922.

Q: So what happened between 1913 and 1922.

A: I don't know. I think she went to school but I'm not sure.

Q: Did she have higher education?

A: No. she I know she finished high school in the States. I think she went to high school later when I was after I was born. She took adult education.

Q: So she's 17 when she gets here and already pretty much eligible marriageable age. So what does she do until age 26 when she gets married.

A: I don't, I don't know what she did.

Q: Was she working?

A: she was, I don't, I don't know.

Q: Ok. How did she meet your father?

A: I think it was through friends.

Q: Your father had entered the country through Seattle, he then subsequently

A: He moved to Chicago.

Q: He moved to Chicago. When did he move to Chicago?

A: When?

Q: Mm hm.

A: I think he worked in the Seattle area for just one summer or one year so it must have been the next year that he was in Chicago.

Q: So they met through friends.

A: Oh wait a minute. They were, I know I remember now. They both had rooms in a boarding house.

Q: Where?

A: In Chicago.

Q: Why were they in a boarding house? Her f, your mother's family was in Chicago. Why was she in a boarding house?

A: Well it was like an apartment.

Q: So young adults would be in boarding houses at the time.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Ok

A: And that, that's where they met.

Q: Do you recall where this boarding house was or the name of

A: No.

Q: No. do you know

A: Mrs. Goodman's I think was one name I heard. But I'm not sure whether it was their boarding house or my grandfather's.

Q: Do you know if it had a specifically Jewish clientele?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you know whether

A: My father worked in, when he arrived in Seattle, he worked in the wheat fields. Harvesting. And then he moved to Chicago and I think the first thing that he did. You didn't get there yet. I don't know if that was the question.

Q: No go ahead, go ahead. Yeah I don't want to cut you off

A: He worked as a, as a sewing machine operator in a men's clothing store

Q: In Chicago

A: In Chicago.

Q: Now had he

A: Hart, Schaffner and Marx. It was a good company and he had a good job there.

Q: Had he had any training in textile before he left Russia.

A: I don't know.

Q: So as a machine operator, you're saying.

A: Yeah, sewing machine. You know it was called operator was the title.

Q: Ok and this is remind me what year this is approximately.

A: Late teens early 20s.

Q: Ok and so they meet. Do they meet the same year they get married or is there a long engagement.

A: I don't think, I don't know. I know they got married in 1922 and I was born the next year.

Q: Were you an only child

A: Yes.

Q: So you grew up in Chicago, is that correct?

A: Right.

Q: Can you tell me where the apartment or house was in Chicago where you grew up.

A: Yeah, well in the early days in infancy and very early childhood we lived in the Humboldt park district. I think it was on Potomac Avenue. And then we lived in Albany Park which was like Wilson avenue was one place, Wilson and Spaulding and then later it was Lawrence Avenue. Always apartments. My parents never had a car and they never had a house.

Q: I'm going to put your microphone a little higher cause I can see that it's in your way. So you said Potomac Avenue, Albany Park, Wilson Avenue and Lawrence Avenue. This is throughout your childhood.

A: Yeah. Oh there was another place. Spaulding and Armitage that's right. Before Albany Park it was Spaulding and Armitage.

Q: I will pause the recording now, just a second and we're back. so you had mentioned a few areas, Potomac Avenue, Albany Park, Wilson avenue.

A: Before Albany Park there was Spaulding. And Armitage area which was more Humboldt park.

Q: Are any of these areas, or all of these areas, where they considered Jewish neighborhoods at the time.

A: Not completely but, but some. Some were. Some weren't. Albany Park was considered a Jewish neighborhood but it was mixed.

Q: It was mixed. So I understand that your parents chose to live in a mixed neighborhood.

A: Yeah I would say that in Chicago, the Division Street area was Jewish. The west side, Roosevelt Road area was Jewish and Albany Park was Jewish. Then later there was a migration to Rogers Park which was farther north and I think nowadays it's in the suburbs, northern suburbs. But then those were the three areas.

Q: So they were in an integrated neighborhood throughout your childhood. To what extent did they keep traditions?

A: My parents were atheists.

Q: They were atheists. Do you know whether your father's views influenced your mother or did they have these views independently of each other.

A: They weren't active atheists. They were, they were simply non-believers. They didn't, they didn't follow any, any religious customs.

Q: Was, having a Jewish identity was that a topic in the home or they just spoke of themselves as Americans or perhaps Russians who had left

A: No a Jewish identity was a, as a matter of fact I went to a Jewish school.

Q: I see. So how did they define Jewish identity growing up for you

A: Ethnic.

Q: Ok, meaning were they reading Yiddish press

A: Yes. He was reading a Yiddish paper.

Q: Were they political in any way? All right.

A: Just normally you know they voted.

Q: Did they perhaps have any Zionist sympathies.

A: No, not particularly. I mean yeah some but not, not whole heartedly. You know not, not fiercely.

Q: Did they take I'm just going to say, the microphone so when you move your hand toward your face then you're touching the microphone and it makes a noise. Did they take part in any kind of demonstrations or did they do any kind of political actions whatsoever. They didn't. what was important to them in what were their ideals. When they put you in a Jewish school, were you taught religion.

A: Wait a minute excuse me. Ideals I would say they were democratic ideals. Civil liberties. Anti-discrimination. So socialist, I would say left.

Q: Social democrat

A: Well.

Q: A little bit more to the left. How did they feel about the situation of blacks in America.

A: Black. Oh they were, they were against discrimination I guess. They.

Q: Was that apparent in something that they did or something or how they spoke. Did they discuss

A: They discussed it. they read about it. they went to demonstrations about it.

Q: Did they ever take you to a demonstration.

A: Yes.

Q: How young were you when you went to these things

A: I don't remember anything. Probably early like early grades or earlier. Before school they were there. and then I went to a Jewish school after school.

Q: Oh so you were in a public school.

A: I was in a public school.

Q: And then you had extra hours after

A: Yeah to learn Yiddish.

Q: To learn Yiddish. Was there any religious instruction.

A: No.

Q: Ok. And

A: I was never bar mitzvah'd.

Q: Oh really. Most of your friends, what kind of friends did you have. who did you hang out with in your childhood.

A: Well I always had friends. They tended to be Jewish. Other guys.

Q: Did your Jewish friends tend to be non-religious as your family.

A: It was a mixture. Some were and some weren't.

Q: And that was never a cause for tension, you didn't have disagreements over that.

A: No.

Q: So you were in this Jewish school after public school. This was between grades what and what. Was this throughout school in high school too or

A: Oh. I don't think it went all the way through. I think it was, they part, I think part of high school and part of elementary and high school. I remember it was a storefront school.

Q: What does that mean?

A: it was, it was a school in a store.

Q: In a store. So somebody owned a store and they would let it out to

A: No they were, they the school would rent, rent the organization.

Q: Your parents it seemed based on what you're saying were fairly well informed and curious about the world. Were they paying attention to what was happening in Europe in the 30s.

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Do you remember any conversations about

A: They were definitely anti-Nazi. They were very upset about the persecution of the Jews.

Q: Now how much were you hearing about that.

A: A lot all the time.

Q: Through which media

A: In the 30s and

Q: how did you hear about it.

A: Well it was in the news, it was in the conversation. It was in the school that I went to.

Q: The Jewish school or the public school.

A: The Jewish school.

Q: and it was a topic of conversation with your friends, as, as a child or as an adolescent or was it really the adults talking

A: Adults

Q: And when you say it was in the news, was it in the Yiddish language news or also in the English language.

A: Well it was in the English language too about Hitler.

Q: And your parents were reading the English language news.

A: Yes. You know my father read the paper every day.

Q: I'm not sure I asked this. Your parents did not obviously so they didn't keep any traditions so there was no kosher food at home.

A: Right.

Q: Was there anything else that was an indication that this was a Jewish family.

A: They spoke Yiddish. My mother made some Jewish foods.

Q: Like what

A: Jewish dishes. Chopped liver, chicken and noodle soup. Mandel, soup and mandel

Q: Mandel, this is a mandel brot, this is a cake or

A: It's, it's something you put in, drop in soup. It's mandel is a it's a baked ball like. Crispy yeah.

Q: Crispy. Careful of the mic.

A: We had a, I had a favorite dish which was called **Pechaf** which is a, there was a **Pecha** but this was not **Pecha**, this is **Pechaf** which was our own family thing.

Q: What was it?

A: It was a chicken soup that was a thick chicken soup with egg and lemon so it's sort of like Greek **Avgoleminol** but it was thicker and you eat it with bread. You dip it.

Q: when you would go over to your friends' house, did they pretty much have the same cooking that you had at home or was it somehow an isolated phenomenon the food that you had at home. or was it the same cooking everywhere.

A: No all we had some family favorite dishes. And my father was a vegetarian, strict vegetarian.

Q: Why?

A: Ideals. He just didn't want, was against killing any living thing so he would eat eggs.

Q: Dairy

A: Dairy yeah. Dairy. So our house always had more vegetables than any other house that I visited.

Q: that's fascinating. Did you know any other vegetarians? At the time or was your father the only one.

A: No well there was a vegetarian restaurant in Chicago.

Q: Really and this is in the 20s

A: In the Division street area, yeah it was famous. I mean vegetarianism was, was more popular .it was a movement. There was names attached to it, I can't. Dr. Lindwa, I think and there were cookbooks and there was a vegetarian restaurant on Division street.

Q: do you remember the name of it

A: No I don't .I'd recognize it if I saw it but I don't' remember it now.

Q: Now let's get back to your friends. So you had a mix of friends. Were any of them non-Jewish.

A: I think there were yeah, a couple of them but mostly they were Jewish and mostly were the same in with families that were in the same political and connected with the Jewish school.

Q: what were your favorite activities growing up. what were

A: Oh well softball. I played with soldiers on the living room floor.

Q: Careful of the mic

A: I

Q: Did you practice any sports

A: Yes, soft

Q: Softball. Anything else

A: tennis. Bowling. Later. Shot pool later.

Q: How much later. Is this after the war.

A: no. no I think this was like in the late teens. There was a boy's club, the neighborhood boy's club.

Q: Was it a Jewish boys club

A: No. Albany Park boys club. I learned to play chess. My father played chess. I learned to play chess.

Q: Were there other boys who knew how to play chess. When you played out of the home.

A: yeah and cards. Roller skating as a kid, as a younger as a young kid, yeah I did roller

skating and I had a scooter and I had a bicycle. And later I had a bicycle.

Q: But these were and these were all your possessions, is that right. you had your own tennis racket. You had your own bat and mitt for the softball.

A: Softball there was no, there were no mitts.

Q: There were no mitts ok. I just don't know my softball.

A: Yeah it was well Chicago style softball was not fast pitch and it was a bigger ball.

Q: How many rooms did you have in the apartment.

A: four.

Q: So that would be two bedrooms I'm guessing.

A: Yeah

Q: one living room

A: And then when the depression hit my father lost his job. And we moved to a smaller place and I slept in the living room.

Q: On a couch.

A: On a couch that would open up. a sleep sofa.

Q: Do you recall where that apartment was, the one that you moved to after the depression.

A: that was Lawrence avenue.

Q: Did your parents' situation become better in the 30s.

A: Well let's see. He got a job. When he lost his job at Hart, at Hart Schaffner and Marx and the layoffs there he got another job with another clothing manufacturing but that was much lower level company. It was more of a sweat shop and he made less money. And I remember that he didn't value it very much. And then he oh he, he when he was working as a machine operator, he worked Saturdays as a shoe salesman in a department store in downtown Chicago. So when, after a while he got a second job that he didn't like much. He went full time as a shoe salesman.

Q: and this is what year. Early 30s, late 30s

A: I would say mid-30s.

Q: Mid 30s, so it was after the New Deal already started.

A: Yeah

Q: Were they sympathetic to the new Deal?

A: Yes.

Q: Was your mother working during these years.

A: No, my mother didn't start working til I think after I left.

Q: You left in the army or you left.

A: Yeah. I left to go to the army

Q: Now did she start working because they had a money issue or it was some other reason that she started at that point.

A: Probably money and also for something to do. she, she worked with something, she worked for the US government in, in treasury bonds processing.

Q: This was after 1943 or, was this still during the war.

A: It was during the yeah

Q: It was but after you had been after you had joined the army.

A: I don't remember if she start, she may have started when I started college in 41.

Q: What year did you graduate high school.

A: 41.

Q: So you went to college the fall right after.

A: Yeah

Q: Which college did you attend?

A: Central YMCA college. I got a scholarship there. I got a half scholarship and then it became a full scholarship after I was there for a year.

Q: The scholarship was based on maybe some

A: I had to do an exam.

Q: Had to do an exam. And the Central YMCA is in Chicago.

A: Yeah and now it's Roosevelt University but it was Central Y.

Q: Going to college was something you wanted for yourself or your parents wanted or both.

A: Both.

Q: Were you still living at home when you were in college.

A: Yes.

Q: And when you were in college, by that time had your parents' situation ameliorated and where you in a bigger apartment.

A: No. No I think we were the same. I think I

Q: You were still sleeping on the couch.

A: I yeah I did my homework on the dining room table.

Q: And your father was a full time shoe salesman by then

A: Yeah.

Q: Did that business go well?

A: Yes, it's work yeah.

Q: So they weren't really squeezed for money by that time or do you recall feeling like money was an issue still and the

A: Oh money was always an issue. They were always seemed to me to be what's the word.

Q: It was a topic of conversation or

A: Well it was always, the economy was always important.

Q: Do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

A: Yes

Q: So how did you learn about it.

A: Oh it was in the news.

Q: Was that how you learned about it?

A: Everybody talked about it.

Q: Well that's what I'm curious about. Did you open a newspaper and that's how you learned about it or did someone tell you, run up to you and say hey this is what just happened. Do you recall how you heard about it first.

A: No I don't. I think somebody probably told me. But it was on the radio and the newspaper. I remember seeing the headlines.

Q: How did you feel when you saw the headlines?

A: Oh upset and angry.

Q: At that time how did you define yourself? Were you American, Jewish American, Jewish American of Russian heritage. How did you think of yourself at the time?

A: I thought of myself as American. I guess American Jewish.

Q: When you started college, did you have a focus. Did you have a concentration, a topic that you already knew you wanted to pursue

A: Yes

Q: And what was that?

A: Well in high school I wanted to be a journalist because I was the editor in chief of the high school weekly paper. And I also won a, an essay contest and but when I started college, oh before I started college, I had a high school guidance counselor and she gave me some tests of vocational interests and other things. and I was so impressed with her job that her, her function that I decided that I wanted to be that. so when I started college I told them I wanted to be a guidance counselor. I wanted vocational guidance as my major. And they said that, they said that that means you should major in psychology. So that's what I did and so right from the start I majored in psychology.

Q: What about vocational guidance really grabbed you? what was it that excited you about this.

A: I think, I think the idea of the, of the various tests and, and I guess you know a methodical way to help people with deciding on careers and what to go into.

Q: By the way that test that she gave you, what was her guidance to you. what career did she propose.

A: Personnel administration. It was something you know working with people.

Q: Since you were the editor of the high school paper, you must have thought of yourself or other people thought of yourself as a good writer. Was this something your parents were particularly proud of, interested in. did they give you feedback about this or

A: I don't, they were always very, very complimentary, very praise-ful. They were always very supportive.

Q: How good was their English at that point?

A: Their English was pretty good. They were very concerned about proper English and my mother went to school to learn more. Their English was pretty good and of course he worked as a salesman so

Q: He must have been good at communicating. I'm a little bit confused about the timeline of your father's jobs. Was he first in dairy and then in textiles.

A: No he was never in dairy. My grandfather.

Q: Oh I'm sorry, confusing everyone

A: My father was a, was a in textiles. He was in tailoring you know clothing manufacturing.

Q: And then he goes into shoe salesman

A: Yeah.

Q: Did he work in a store. Was he his own boss? How did he

A: Oh no, he worked in a department store. Major department store in Chicago.

Q: Which one

A: The Boston store. Was the name of it. Nether's Boston store. And you know later in life he they moved when I moved. When I got out of the army, my first when I got out of the army, I went to Stanford. That was a school I was always interested in. So I went to, I went to Berkeley for the first summer. And they moved to Berkeley because her sister Esther lived in Berkeley. By the way the three sisters each had only one, only children. Each had only one.

Q: What a coincidence.

A: and one of Esther's Bernard's son who was a physicist and Sophie and Sol's son, daughter, was a lawyer and so my parents moved to Berkeley and all the time that I went to Stanford. And then I moved to Ann Arbor after that. they stayed in Berkeley. Then I moved to Baltimore and they moved to Baltimore.

Q: Now was this because your

A: And he was a, he was a, he when they lived in Berkeley he sold shoes in San Francisco at the major shoe store in San Francisco. I can't remember the name of it. And then in Baltimore, he worked selling shoes.

Q: It seems to me that your parents are moving from town to town to be along with you. is this, I'm guessing this was kind of unusual that the nuclear family would stay together even after the child was an adult. Was this unusual.

A: I don't know. I probably.

Q: Was there something about your family that made them

A: Well we didn't have anybody else. They just had one child.

Q: Did they have a social group of their own? Did they have people that they would go to dinner or have a card game or

A: No, not much. No.

Q: so there weren't people, guests in the house when you were growing up.

A: No, well my grandfather lived with us for a while. And then when we had a, when we had the 2 bedroom apartment we had a roomer. We had a grocery store owner who lived with us.

Q: So he was renting out the room.

A: The room. So I always slept on that in the living room.

Q: We're back in

A: That's right. I never had a room of my own until after

Q: How do you think that affected you?

A: I'm very interested in architecture.

Q: Ok so let's get back to your college years. And you start college in 41 and you're studying psychology. Are you studying anything else.

A: Well I took a lot of math because I was advised to take math and statistics.

Q: Were you good at math, bad at math. Didn't really care.

A: I was ok. I got As and Bs in everything. I had all As in Bs and more As than Bs.

Q: It seems I recall in a conversation before this interview, you said that you had a passion for music.

A: Yeah

Q: So this is something that came from your parents.

A: My father was a music lover. He yeah he listened to the symphony. He would go to the symphony. We'd take the **big** to concerts. He, I played piano. My parents gave me piano lessons when I was little.

Q: But there was no piano in the home. or was there

A: Later what happened was my parents got a bigger apartment in order to rent a room to a distant cousin, a woman and her daughter. So they lived with us and, and they we had a piano. We had an upright piano. I don't know

Q: When was this?

A: Got it, because I know that my cousin Aunt Pearl was her name, Pat for short. Changed it to Pat, she took piano lessons and then I did too so we were both taking piano lessons.

Q: So this piano in your home. when was this? how old were you?

A: Oh probably ten, ten, 12 to 14 something like that.

Q: And did you play any other instruments.

A: Yeah I played an E flat alto clarinet in high school, in the high school concert band. And I played the snare drum in a marching band, marching drum and bugle corps.

Q: You said that you did not have your own room growing up but you were playing all of these instruments, clearly some of them in school. But was that not an issue that you had to practice an instrument and you didn't have your own area.

A: No

Q: Was it imposing on other people.

A: No.

Q: Your father was listening to symphonies on the radio or did he have his own

A: Radio

Q: So there was no gramophone or record

A: No.

Q: What, if I understand correctly you were not drafted. You volunteered.

A: I volunteered.

Q: When was that and why was that?

A: I volunteered in 41 I think or 42 probably.

Q: You were in college how many years before you went to the army.

A: I was in college two, two years but I had 3 years of credit because I took extra courses.

Q: So if you started in 41 and you did 2 full years, that would have been

A: 43.

Q: 43, so would that have been when you volunteered for the army.

A: No, no I went in, in 42. I went into the army

Q: So you volunteered earlier and then you got, you actually went in, in 43.

A: Right.

Q: So what caused the delay.

A: I enlisted in a program called ASTP, army specialized training program. Millions of guys did this. and it was a it was a way to continue college until I think the end of the academic year and not go right away. And so if you enlisted you could continue college if you were in a field, if you were already in and you were in a field that they considered a specialized field.

Q: And this was one such field.

A: Yeah right so, I, I went in and was in college but then I don't remember exactly why I got impatient and instead of staying at the end of the, of that, of that year in the spring of 43 I think, I asked to go and not continue in ASTP.

Q: And the ASTP would have given you the right to defer until when.

A: Well indefinitely. Until graduation right.

Q: what was your motivation to enlist, to volunteer

A: I was so interested in personnel administration, industrial psychology that I thought that I could do it in the army. And so I asked to, to go.

Q: Did someone, advisor confirm that that was an option, that they would be able to do this or this was just your own idea.

A: Yeah. So I went in the army and, and I was, went to the infantry basic training which

Q: Where

A: It was north Camp Hood Texas which now is Fort Hood and it was rough and there was no running, there was no plumbing and there were lister bags for water.

Q: What's a lister bag?

A: A lister bag is a water holder. It's a big, It's a big bag with a faucet at the end of it.

Q: So you're saying there's no plumbing. How did you and other guys clean themselves.

A: No I think there were, there were showers, but there was no water pumps or anything else. I know we were always short of water. Basic training started on the 4th of July in Texas.

Q: Of 43

A: Yeah it was really rough.

Q: Can you describe what sort of regimen you had, what you had to do in a day.

A: Well all the usual military training drills, ending in a 25 mile hike and a full filed pack and there was also crawling under machine gun fire. The obstacle course. And, and just listening to lectures.

Q: Lectures on what

A: Military you know arms, the nomenclature of the rifle.

Q: How did your parents feel about you volunteering.

A: That was ok. They were worried, well they were worried about me in the service but, but they were supportive you know.

Q: How many of your friends or acquaintances were doing the same at the time.

A: Well some were drafted. And I don't know whether anybody else was doing exactly what I did.

Q: In basic training were you the only Jewish person there? In your unit?

A: I think there were, there was 1 or 2 more but others. You know I should say before I forget that I am jumping the gun here.

Q: Go ahead.

A: I was hoping that I would be assigned to personnel or classification because that was what I wanted and at the end of basic they did put me in the camp office in classification which is what I liked.

Q: How much time was there at, between the beginning

A: Well basic training was 13 weeks at that time, so I did work at the office for a little while and I thought I had it all made, that I was part of the camp and I was shipped out. And then orders came through. I guess what happened was that the army needed more troops, more combat troops so the order came in closing or changing our office.

Q: How much time did you spend in the office before that order came

A: I don't think it was more than a month. Or two.

Q: So we're still in 43.

A: Yeah. so then I so I was shipped out and along with maybe one or two other people, that's all. And so I was shipped out to the 71st light division which was jungle and mountain and that was at Camp Carson Colorado. And that was in preparation for Asia.

Q: What kind of training was that?

A: that was also rough and there was a, there was a maneuvers there and in the, in, it was raining and there we had no light, light infantry means that this was a mule pack outfit. That there, there was, there were 3 light divisions. The 89th, the 15th and the Fifth. I was in the fifth. Regiments pardon me. The fifth regiment, the 14th and the 66th and

Q: You said something, mule, what was the expression you used

A: Oh mule, mule pack.

Q: what is that

A: Oh mules oh like our outfit was just back packs and carts, I'd say pull, pull carts back then. And another light division was all mules.

Q: SO what is all mules. You said you were carts and back packs.

A: Yeah we were back packs and something else, I've forgotten. Light meaning that you could go without cannon, without tanks, without heavy trucks and stuff like that. so it was all on foot. But I think we had a kind of a cart, but another division was all mule packs.

Q: So what is a mule pack

A: A mule, it's a donkey.

Q: Oh these are actual mules. I thought maybe it's a code for some kind of

A: No, mules carried and they would carry things.

Q: But you were not in that division

A: No.

Q: Given that you had had

A: I want to say that by volunteering and going into that then I was just in the infantry and I was in the mud. One day a guy from headquarters that I knew, he was a friend of mine, saw me in a foxhole in the rain and he said Les, is that you. and he said considering your background let's see what we can do and so he got them to, to think of me for, for service company which would be classification. So then later when I was in classification I was in charge of getting the new men coming into the outfit into their units. Well the new men coming into the outfit by then I was a corporal. The new men coming into the outfit were buck privates and they, they were raw, like raw recruits because they had just come from ASTP. ASTP ended.

Q: I see, so it would have been your cohort

A: And they were all shipped out of college so I you know had the advantage.

Q: This man who you knew, a friend of yours, do you remember his name

A: No.

Q: Do you remember where you knew him from?

A: From the army, from

Q: But from Colorado or maybe had you been together in Texas.

A: No, I think it was Colorado.

Q: During this whole process you said maybe there was one other Jewish person there. Was did the other

A: There was one Jewish guy who was the newspaper reporter. His name was Irving Worststein, I remember him.

Q: Did the other men in this unit know that you were Jewish?

A: The fifth regiment was originally in Panama. In peace time and most of the people in it were from Kentucky and Tennessee and they were hillbilly types and they didn't they didn't know much about that. They, about Jewish.

Q: So they would not have been aware.

A: NO I think there was some anti-Semitism from somewhere but it wasn't, it wasn't so much Jewish as it was city and college and

Q: You had both. You had been a college boy and a city boy. Was this an issue, did they make it an issue

A: Yes, yes because they were in much better shape. I mean they were more used to that kind of life.

Q: Did they taunt you, did they

A: Well I remember one day I was huffing and puffing climbing a mountain and I said I'm not used to this. I said I grew up in Chicago where, where I'm used to escalators and elevators so, so he laughed but later that night around the camp fire, he told the other guys what I said and they, they in a taunting teasing hostile way. so I

Q: This didn't escalate, they didn't actually hurt you or

A: No

Q: there was no, they didn't isolate you for being different.

A: No. I think I was closer to a couple of guys that were more city that we were different from everybody else.

Q: And you had your own support group then.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now given that you had very different ideas about what was going to happen before you got the desk job, before your friend finds you in the fox hole. So during those months how are you coping with the disappointment. Is it a disappointment?

A: It wasn't, I mean I just took it as life, something to cope with. I mean I didn't try to do anything about it. Except cope with it.

Q: You weren't angry

A: Just the army, that's all. I mean you know what, I figured that's just normal and when I got orders to go to the 71st light division, I did look up what a light division was in the camp library. And it said jungle, mountain, mule pack, amphibious and paratroop.

Q: And what did you think when you saw that.

A: and then I, then I said god I don't want any of those and then it turned out to be a

combination of two of them, jungle and mountain. But you know my son was a paratrooper so

Q: What year

A: Oh 20 years ago or something. Or no more than that. he's in his 50s

Q: Was there a war on

A: No.

Q: It wasn't his time.

A: Yeah.

Q: Because you were not drafted, you were a volunteer, did you enjoy any perks, was there anything given to you as a reward for that or you were just treated the same.

A: My impression was that there were a lot of enlisted personnel in our outfit because it was an old Panama outfit. It was a regular army outfit fixed infantry.

Q: So those were not draftees.

A: No but, but then there were draftees too so there were both.

Q: There was no distinction between an enlistee and a draftee

A: Well I think the newer ones, like the ones who were drafted along with me, would, we were different you know coming from cities or with more education than these other guys that

Q: But the system didn't treat you differently

A: No.

Q: This man recognizes you in the fox hole, this is your big breakthrough moment. He takes you where, where do you end up?

A: In the service company, the same regiment but instead of company F which is a line company and I was a mortar, I was a 16 millimeter mortar ammunition bearer and I thought that I was lucky to get that, to get that assignment because a mortar squad is a little behind the lines cause you have to shoot over you know and but I was, there were 7 ammunition bearers in a mortar squad. 5, 5 or 7 I don't remember and I was tail end. I was the last one in so I considered myself really lucky that I got that job.

Q: And then you're taken out of that company and put into service company

A: Right

Q: And what letter is that, the service company.

A: Just service company

Q: Oh it doesn't have a letter.

A: No.

Q: Are you given training in the service company.

A: I don't remember any training. I think I'd have to learn the personnel situation, personnel procedures.

Q: You said earlier you were processing the new recruits, the boys who had been ASTP and who had just, just graduated.

A: That was in this.

Q: In this company

A: No, yeah. right.

Q: Are you still in Colorado at that point?

A: No we moved to we changed to a full division from a light division so I think that's why I got the job in service company because it expanded everything expanded. And classification specialist I guess was created or I don't know whether it was there before. But when we changed to a full division instead of a light division we went to Fort Benning Georgia, and that's where we were Fort Benning.

Q: How long did you stay in Fort Benning? Approximately when did you get there and when did you leave

A: Until we went to overseas, We went overseas from New Jersey. We were there just very briefly in New Jersey.

Q: When did you get to Georgia and when did you leave Georgia.

A: Well I don't think we went, we got overseas until 45.

Q: January of 45 is when you got overseas

A: Something like that.

Q: So when you enlist this is 43, you do 13 weeks of basic training, so 13 weeks what is that, that's about 3 months. So you're in the fall of 43 and then you're going into then you go to Colorado, cause basic training is California, did I get this right, I did. Texas, Texas is basic

training. Then you go to Colorado

A: Then Colorado

Q: And you stayed in Colorado a whole year.

A: Part of Colorado was part of Colorado I must have been in service company too you know but I may have been there a full year. I was, I think we were in Fort Benning longer.

Q: How long did you stay in Georgia.

A: I'm not sure.

Q: Was your job different in Georgia. Did you do different tasks there

A: No, there I was classification specialist 275.

Q: And when you get your orders to ship out. How do you feel, what's your reaction?

A: Just expected that's all.

Q: You weren't worried, scared, apprehensive

A: No, not that I remember.

Q: All right so in 45, the beginning of that year where are you shipped to

A: Oh we landed in Normandy but by then there was no beach head any more. it was all a port you know so with, with landing docks and stuff like that. So we landed there and we camped in Fort now what was it called. Camp Lucky Strike

Q: This is in France

A: Yeah, camp Lucky Strike. Camp Chesterfield. I think we were, the French called it Looky streak.

Q: Was it close to Normandy? Was it in Normandy?

A: In Normandy.

Q: What were you doing in the camp

A: Well the same, same things. I mean I was working in service company in classification.

Q: But what kind of tasks were you assigned. Or where you still processing new draftees in France, what were you doing.

A: I don't know. it's just keeping track of personnel.

Q: How long were you in Normandy.

A: Shifts, promotions, I don't know. I don't remember how long. but I know that when we started going across, I remember there was a town of Vitche, V-I-T-C-H-E. and Kulmbach in Germany was, we were in Alsace Lorraine first. I don't remember the town but I think

Q: While you were in still in France were you interacting with any of the local population.

A: yeah. I took French in high school. So I was a French interpreter. It was rough. I mean I wasn't, I mean my French was rough. But I was the official getter of wine.

Q: SO how did that happen. How did you get the wine.

A: Well at the end of the day you know I we could go into town so we went into the village and I would ask for, for wine. And there was something else. There were 2 things. And of course we were always in good shape as far, in good shape to barter because we had cigarettes and that was what everybody wanted.

Q: Was that the only thing you bartered or was there anything else, rations or chocolate.

A: Chocolate. But I remember saying avez-vous du vin. Oh I know it was vin rouge or vin blanc that's right.

Q: So you didn't get down to the varietals? You didn't talk about what kind of wine it is, you didn't say

A: Oh no

Q: I would like a burgundy wine or

A: Oh no.

Q: It was just red or white.

A: Yeah

Q: Did they have both

A: Yeah, but mostly red I think. I don't know. I wasn't hot on wine drinking anyway. I bought it back to the other guys.

Q: Was actually alcohol consumption was that something your parents did. Did they drink wine at home every.

A: My parents didn't drink. My father would take a shot of schnapps only at a party or

something. And he never was drunk. My mother wouldn't drink.

Q: And so growing up had you had any experience with alcohol in high school, in college, before you entered the army.

A: No.

Q: There were no parties

A: With alcohol. No.

Q: So when you were tasked to bring back this wine you had no interest in it.

A: No. I don't, I don't I'm not sure. Maybe I was interested in tasting it. But not a great deal

Q: And the other soldiers. Did they drink too much.

A: Well some of them did.

Q: They did. Did they misbehave when they drank too much.

A: Oh yeah. there were sometimes cases of fighting or passing out or

Q: So the misbehavior would be on base. It would not be in the village, it would not be

A: Right

Q: With locals. There were no incidents with locals.

A: No I don't remember any.

Q: When somebody misbehaved, given that you're in classification, did you have to write a report.

A: No that was, that was done that was not done by me. That was court martials.

Q: So you were bringing back wine and what other tasks did you do as an interpreter.

A: Laundry.

Q: So you took, you were speaking with the locals in order to get the laundry done with women.

A: I don't remember anything else.

Q: How long was your stay in France? You get there at the beginning of the year. Is it still

cold when you leave

A: I don't remember. I think it must have been. I do remember Kulmbach and there was beer there.

Q: This is Germany.

A: Yeah

Q: Approximately where in Germany. What's a big city there.

A: Kulmbach was a big city

Q: Close to or in which state

A: It's I don't know the state but it was closer to France.

Q: Is it spelled K-u-M-B-A-C-H

A: K-U-L-M-B-A-C-H

Q: So that's your in your memories that's your first German experience.

A: Yeah if I could see a map there might be some other, some other towns that we stopped in before that. but I can't remember them

Q: Tell me about Kulmbach. What happened there.

A: Nothing, except that it was an interesting, it was a German city. It had the buildings and the narrow streets and so on. And beer. And that's all I remember.

Q: Tell me about the beer. You weren't very interested in alcohol so why do you mention the beer.

A: Well I just remember that that was one of the features there, talked about.

Q: What about the locals in Kulmbach. Did you interact with them?

A: It seems to me that I, I was suspicious of all the Germans and didn't know who was a Nazi and who wasn't. it was kind of not friendly with everyone. I was with the French.

Q: How did you feel about the Germans in general. Did you, cause the way you're describing it, what I'm understanding is that you had a sense that some were not Nazis. Did you have a feeling that some had been part of the system and some had not. Or did you have a stronger sentiment of kind of a blanket feeling towards them that they must have all

A: Well everyone said nicht Nazi, icht Nazi but no I had a sense that some were and some

were not. But that most were.

Q: Does that mean that you pretty much did not interact with the population at that point yet? Cause you weren't sure what you were in for

A: Also we weren't there, we weren't in any place long enough.

Q: How long did you stay

A: You know we, we, we got into combat 54 days before the end of the war. Ok. So what when was, when was VE day

Q: May 8th

A: May 8th so 54 days before May 8th was what

Q: Roughly 2 months so that would put it at early March

A: So that's when we went into combat.

Q: And where did you go into combat?

A: And I think it was around Kulmbach but I'm not sure.

Q: Ok and what was your first experience of combat

A: Well see I was in service company so it was I don't, I don't we weren't in combat. I mean they were the front lines, the line companies were in actual combat. And we were behind them following so we knew what was going on but we weren't directly in it. where we were, we were taking over what had already been victorious for us so

Q: Again what tasks were you doing. Were you still only processing your won people's papers

A: Yeah, yeah

Q: So you were not working on local issues while the army was advancing.

A: No, not that I know, not that I

Q: Did you ever see combat before the end of the war. Were you in any kind of danger?

A: Yeah there was, there was one time when there was some shooting or some sniper or something but in general no. I was not in combat.

Q: So

A: There was one day, one time that was dangerous. I don't remember whether it was a truck, something was blown up or shot or something. But I wasn't hurt.

Q: How did you learn that the war was over? In your

A: I don't remember exactly but I think it just was announced all over and celebrated.

Q: Where were you when the war was over

A: We were in **Shtirofsky** or near **Shtirofsky** on the Enz River. We had met the Russians.

Q: When did you meet the Russians

A: That was when was the war over, May

Q: May 8th

A: May 8th so I would say it was in May.

Q: So that one week it was one week before, it was the week of, that's when you met the Russians

A: I think so around then.

Q: Can you describe what happened when you met the Russians.

A: All I remember was that there was toasting and, and joyful meeting and celebrating.

Q: Did the two groups mix? Was there any kind of interaction between the soviet army and the US Army

A: A little bit

Q: Do you recall ever meeting

A: More by the officers not much by us. Our, our major, our major meeting was with former concentration camp people that were strewn that were wherever we went you know.

Q: When did that start happening that wherever you go you would bump into

A: Oh I would say probably from, from central Germany on, especially in Bavaria and Austria. It was the worst in Austria.

Q: So if it started in Germany do you recall when you first when your company first came across concentration camp survivors

A: No I don't' remember.

Q: Do you recall your first thoughts. Did you know who these people were?

A: Yeah I knew. They were well they wore striped, striped like pajama like uniforms and some of them looked like skeletons.

Q: Where were you coming across these people?

A: Several places across Germany and Austria.

Q: Fields, roads

A: I think the most of the largest one was this camp that we opened.

Q: Ok so tell me about that.

A: Well that was what was the name of it again.

Q: Gunskirchen

A: Yeah, Gunskirchen. Another GI and I walked away from our unit. We were just strolling and we came across this camp. and we opened the door and out poured prisoners and some of them were so looked like skeletons and one, one called to me in Yiddish and said I'm one of you and I'm one of you.

Q: So the prisoner said I'm one of you. how did he know that you spoke Yiddish. Or

A: He didn't. I guess I looked Jewish.

Q: And so hear this

A: He said **hober rach mones**? Have pity, have sympathy.

Q: And what did you do when you heard that.

A: I didn't, I nothing. I just I mean you know we had a rifle and a steel helmet and we were in full gear and, and they stumbled out and he, he dropped. And I think he dropped dead. And there were some who dropped dead and some just started flowing out so we ran back to our unit to try to get medics and to try to get everybody involved.

Q: but this was not the first time you had seen people in the striped uniforms

A: No we had seen others. Before.

Q: How frequently had you seen them. Just a few incidents

A; Yeah.

Q: and those incidents were, I understand you probably don't remember the exact location but what was, was it in a field or on a road or in a other camp were they concentrated. Was it many people, few people?

A: I think it was few.

Q: So you had come across these people in the striped clothing

A: I think so yeah.

Q: And you had known what about them exactly at that time.

A: that they were concentration camp prisoners

Q: and you knew about concentration camps because

A: Because I had read about them.

Q: In where?

A: I don't know maybe, maybe the Yanks paper, maybe the GI paper or I knew about concentration camps from the time I was a civilian.

Q: But would you, would you know of that the striped uniform is what a concentration camp inmate wears.

A: I think so.

Q: Did the army ever brief you on who these people are or what to expect about these people.

A: I think they did. I think there was some discussion about it.

Q: Do you have any concrete examples, any details.

A: No. I don't. no. the military government we learned a lot about it.

Q: But that was after having liberated

A: That was later.

Q: So when you happened upon this camp your idea of what you're seeing is what

A: You know I'm a little confused about prisoners of, German prisoners of war that were huddled together in trucks and they were carrying, they were driven away from where they were captured and prisoners of war and concentration camp prisoners in the striped uniforms in trucks.

Seems to me that I saw them in trucks too but I'm not sure what they were rescued or carried and when we asked some of them on the roads. And I don't know. I just felt that I knew about concentration camps and prisoners well before that time and that we saw some.

Q: So as you were describing you opened the gates. Were the gates locked

A: No

Q: So you could just turn a handle and open it.

A: yeah

Q: Why had they not opened

A: And the guards were all gone. The guards had left already and they took all the food.

Q: Do you know why they had not opened it? the gate

A: No

Q: Cause it seems to me you're saying

A: Yeah the other guy and I lifted it and opened it and I said my god we opened it.

Q: Do you remember the other guy's name?

A: No, I have been trying to think of it and I can't remember. I remember what he looked like. He was also in service company. He, I don't know whether he was a clerk of some sort or but

Q: So you opened the gate and this is when you hear the man speaking Yiddish.

A: He, he started coming out.

Q: What were your thoughts when you heard that. have pity

A: I just felt touched. Moved.

Q: the fact that he was speaking Yiddish

A: Yeah and that he was so, so thin.

Q: So did you immediately decide to go back to your company

A: Yeah.

Q: So you at that point you were not interacting with any other prisoners

A: No, no.

Q: How long did it take you to go back to the company

A: Oh immediately. WE, we turned around and ran back when we saw all the, all these people.

Q: and what did you tell your company, what had you just seen.

A: That we opened a concentration camp and take over.

Q: Ok and what did they do

A: They did. As I recall they went there and they evacuated the prisoners.

Q: Did you go back with them.

A: It was amb, you know they got ambulances and they got yeah I well, I don't remember too much after that. Where we, where we, we were assigned to something else right away or

Q: So did you ever go back to Mauthausen during that period.

A: No.

Q: There was just that one interaction of, I'm sorry Gunskirchen. That one situation where you're opening the gate and then you immediately went back to the company so you did not enter the camp.

A: No.

Q: And you must have been there just a few minutes.

A: May, yeah.

Q: How many people did you see

A: Maybe dozens in the background. They smelled of death.

Q: Tell me about the smell

A: It just had that awful smell.

Q: What was it reminiscent of

A: I don't know. it smelled bad and people said that's the smell of death.

Q: Which people

A: the guys in the army. I just don't remember too much of that.

Q: What was the weather like that day. Was it raining

A: It was not raining, no.

Q: Was it fairly warm b then? Or was it a cold spring?

A; I don't remember that. I think it was fairly, it must I don't know. I know it wasn't raining.

(end first interview; second interview follows on October 25, 2012 with Dr. Johanna Neumann)

LESTER MARTIN LIBO
October 25, 2012
Interviewer: Dr. Johanna Neumann

(file: RG-50.030.0662.02.02)

Q: This is Holocaust Memorial Museum. Interviewing with Lester Libo, contacted by me, by Johanna Neumann, October 25, 2012 in Washington, DC. And this interview is being conducted over the phone. And now I am introducing myself to you. I understand that you had some interview already, part of your interview already took place.

A: Yes, it was an interview there, in Washington.

Q: I I see ok. Well I think I hope you are comfortable and sitting down and relaxing.

A: Yes, I am.

Q: Ok, very good. Where are you?

A: I am in Albuquerque.

Q: Ah, New Mexico.

A: New Mexico.

Q: That's where you live

A: Yes

Q: Ok, very good. Well I was very much interested to hear and I also listened a little bit to the original interview. What your function was after World War II. How did you get involved with the de-Nazification and why were you chosen to be part of that program.

A: Well I was, I was in the infantry and we were in occupation in Augsburg and I was just bored I guess. And I heard about military government needing people so I applied for a transfer and I got it and they transferred me to Regensburg and when I went to, was put into public safety special branch. And it turned out that the head of de-Nazification, the enlisted man who was the head of, the title was Chief Clerk, that he was leaving in a few days. And I had a few years of college credit in psychology and I guess they thought that, that I could do it. So I was only 22 years old but I wanted it and they thought I could do it. So they trained me to fill his spot.

Q: I suppose it was quite a challenge for you.

A: Yes it was.

Q: Now in this respect, how successful do you think that this program worked out.

A: Well in our district which was the state was **Niederbeir** and **Oberfaus** where Regensburg is. We had the highest number of what you call it screenings. We had the highest number of evaluations and removals of people from their jobs, Nazis, than anyone else in the US Zone. We had, we were very successful.

Q: When you say successful do you think that it had an impact on the Nazis. To well let's say never mind repent but that they realized finally how wrong they had gone or how criminal their government had been or do you think that they did this mostly so that they would be spared from trials or prison or worse.

A: Well they didn't do it. We did it. We removed them. We evaluated them. And this is the US government. It wasn't the Germans.

Q: No, no I understand. I know that. but I was just wondering

A: We removed them from office in important jobs like in the government and in important jobs, administrative jobs and we removed thousands. And that was our mission. To cleanse the new government of Nazis as much as possible, at the higher levels. I mean at the lower levels, there were many Nazi party members but we kept, if they were, if they had joined the party after summer of 37, they were considered ok.

Q: Because then they were forced.

A: If they hadn't held any po, any official position.

Q: The reason that you felt that way is because at that point they were forced, whether they liked it or not.

A: It was mandatory that they joined.

Q: Right, well my question really my next question actually was who were the individuals you were dealing with and had they been officials during the Nazi regime. So in a way you have answered that already.

A: Yes.

Q: You said that they were, they had been in the government

A: Right.

Q: And you think that those who went into the party after 37, but in their hearts they were not Nazis. Do you think

A: Oh, I don't know. No I think it was mixed I'm sure. That some believed in it and some were didn't and were forced into it.

Q: How do you think what was the reaction on the part of these Germans. They were removed from their office, by the United States military and what was their reaction to being chosen to be de-Nazified. I assume that some were beyond that. In other words, that they you know either ended up in prison or could not be used in

A: Oh yeah well the ones who were suspected of being war criminals, we didn't, we didn't process them. We turned them over to counter intelligence, you know to intelligence. And but we didn't deal with those.

Q: So you had good reason to think that the people you were dealing with it was worthwhile trying to change them.

A: Yes.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah, it didn't last long though. We understood, I understand that it changed about you know in 1946 I think it was, late 1946. I was there only until May 46. I was there from September to May 46. And we were very, we were very aggressive in pursuing Nazis and getting them out of office. And some people I mean I understand the Germans themselves felt that it wasn't worth doing or something. I don't know. One I remember one Nazi party official that we removed from office. Said to me that he had his days of glory and now it's turned over so you know it's wasn't worth it.

Q: In what language did you interrogate these people. How did you

A: Well I had a German American. I had an American originally from Germany as an interpreter. He was in the army and so he was an interpreter.

Q: By the way have you ever come across the name of an American lawyer by the name of Kent, no not American, German lawyer by the name of Kempner.

A: Kempner

Q: Kempner. Yeah.

A: Sounds familiar.

Q: Oh because apparently he is was a lawyer who interrogated also these kind of people, people who had been in office, who had held government jobs and trying to find out how much did they know. What was going on. Were they in favor of it or not and so on. And apparently he you know he became quite well known. That's maybe he was, why the name is familiar to you. Yeah, Kempner is his name. He was German interrogating his own people.

A: Unh hunh.

Q: Ok so did they honestly cooperate or did they just want to escape punishment and

therefore participated in the program. What would you think.

A: No. I well they were being investigated. They wanted to get away with, they, I don't think they cooperated. They were.

Q: They did not cooperate with the American military.

A: Well who were you thinking of. The people who were

Q: The people who were supposed to be de-Nazified.

A: the people who were screened.

Q: Yeah.

A: well yeah, filled out the **fragebogen** and handed it in.

Q: That was my question too. How honest were the answers. How could you assess that.

A: Well that's an interesting question because a lots, many Germans came from the east zone. And there were no records to check on their responses. But in our zone, in our area, Regensburg itself had an intact record center that had all the Nazi records. So people from the local area we could check on. So we had so we had a routine check in the record center, in Regensburg on everybody. People who came from Poland or east Germany, whatever, we had no way of checking on them so of course they were more susp, they were more suspicious.

Q: So you think that some of them really well let me ask you this then. How did you determine who was to get into the program.

A: Who?

Q: Yeah how did you choose the individuals that you thought would qualify to be in the program and be de-Nazified.

A: I, I don't know. We didn't choose. Somebody chose. Military government, I don't know. We were the evaluators, but we didn't do the initial choice.

Q: So you were handed a list of people.

A: yes.

Q: I see. I understand and then you did your best to try and get the Nazi ideology out of them.

A: Well not to get the Nazi ideology out of them but to, to keep the ones that were more serious Nazis out of important jobs. I mean we didn't expect to change their ideology.

Q: And how did you, you were a young person as you mentioned earlier. How did you feel to carry out such a difficult burden. I mean in a way from a human point of view, this is quite a hard burden to carry because you decide on somebody's future in a way.

A: Not at all. It was a joy.

Q: Oh ok.

A: I was glad to do it. it was a revenge.

Q: Well that I can understand, right. Now how was the

A: You know I'm Jewish.

Q: I know, I know.

A: So I you know I saw that as a good kind of revenge.

Q: I see. And well ok.

A: My interpreter was also Jewish. He was a German Jewish refugee who was in the army.

Q: Yeah well many of them came at an age here to America and then enlisted in the army. That's right. you know I come from that part of the world too. I am originally from Hamburg.

A: Oh yeah, well that's in the north.

Q: Ok now what was the procedure. Was this program conducted on one, on a one on one basis or did you have groups at the same time and how exactly did you proceed in this project, in this program of de-Nazification.

A: Well we had the **fragebogens**. And they would come in and they would have to be evaluated. And we had a staff of evaluators that were about 30 people. And there were they went over them and they would come to me with say this one looks suspicious and this one. You know and so on but there were, there were procedures to follow.

Q: I see ok, so you followed a protocol in other words.

A: Yeah

Q: Ok but then and then let's say now you have chosen 10 or 20 or 30 these individuals. It was conducted like in a classroom or was it conducted on a one to one basis.

A: No, one to one

Q: It was one to one

A: Well each, each questionnaire was, it was a separate investigation. A separate, a separate procedure for each individual.

Q: I see, and what was the procedure.

A: The procedure was to evaluate their questionnaire and to come up with a rating and there were five categories. You know. you know those five categories. Number one is mandatory removal. Number 2 is discretionary adverse recommendation. Number 3 is discretionary no recommendation. Number 4 is no evidence of anti, no evidence of Nazi activity. And number 5 was evidence of anti-Nazi activity.

Q: I see.

A: And so each individual would get a rating that would be the conclusion and then if they were in the 4 or 5 they would be removed from office or un, not hired and their bank account would be frozen and their property could be seized and used by the allies, by the Americans for you know like homes could be used for troops.

Q: Yeah and how long did such a process take.

A: The evaluation process.

Q: Yeah.

A: Just, just. It was I don't know. I would say anywhere from an hour to a couple of days. It depended on if there were any complications because we also had a special investigations unit that would look into difficult cases that were you know harder to figure out.

Q: right, right.

A: You know they might go to interrogate some other people or try to get other records or whatever.

Q: Did you interview members of their family or I don't know

A: No.

Q: Or friends or

A: We didn't necessarily interview them either. Most were, the action in most cases was taken on the basis of the questionnaire alone. We would bring them in for interviews if we had questions.

Q: I see. Oh you mean you got the **fragebogen** that you evaluated, but you didn't necessarily have the individual in front of you.

A: that's right.

Q: I see. I didn't realize that. Now I suppose I had a different concept somewhat. I thought that after you went through the **fragebogen** and you decided who was suspicious or wasn't suspicious, that they somehow got some kind of a I don't want to call it brain washing, but some kind of a you know democratic viewpoint or, or

A: Oh no, no it was strictly

Q: Based on their **fragebogen**.

A: Yeah it was strictly screening. No attempt to change them. or, or argue with them.

Q: And were they cooperative. Were they hostile, antagonistic or

A: Well I would say the main attitude was to try to get out of it. you know to say that they were innocent. You know nicht Nazi, Nicht Nazi was, was their motto. There was

Q: That was easy to say.

A: There was one case I remember where this man said that he understands that the tables are turned and he had his days of glory and now his side had lost and he's prepared to take the consequences. And he you know he said well we had our day and now you have your day. Well that was very unusual.

Q: To admit that.

A: To do that. Most of them were made excuses. You know and they said they were forced and that they were not really a Nazi and so on. And of course the people from, who came from east Germany there was no way to check.

Q: That's the other big problem in Nazi mind. So I was, one of the questions I had in my mind was, was there any material use during this process. But I guess it wasn't cause I had a different concept of it at all. You know I thought there were lectures being given on democracy or lectures

A: Oh no. there was not attempt to change anybody. It was completely screening.

Q: And at the least suspicious back into the work force.

A: To what

Q: I said and then to get the least suspicious individuals back into the working force.

A: Yeah well to allow them to continue in their jobs. Or to be hired.

Q: I understand, yeah. Ok let's see now. What qualifications did you have or were required in order to be part of this process.

A: Well I was a college student. I was a psychology major and I also had experience working in personnel administration. So I had administrative experience.

Q: I see. And were you in charge of this particular program.

A: yes I was well, I was an enlisted man. I was a ser, a sergeant. The person in charge of the whole thing was an officer. A captain. And he and there was also a lieutenant. So I remember there were 2 American officers that were in charge, but the day to day work was done by the day to day work of being in charge, I mean, was done by an enlisted man. And my predecessor was the one who was being discharged. He was also a Jewish guy from the states. And I was put in to learn, learn the ropes. And learn the job. That he did. Heading up the staff. Supervising the staff.

Q: I see, so you were in a supervisory position.

A: Yes. The title was chief clerk

Q: Good, very good. Were the Germans that participated under oath. When I say those who sent out the **fragebogen** and was there anywhere where they had to I don't know sign that like we say here in the United States.

A: I think, I think they signed it, they had, when they signed it, it said it, I think it probably said in there that something about

Q: But they were not on any verbal oath or anything like that.

A: No.

Q: I think they got away with too much. Well that was another question I had. How could you be sure that what they put down in their **fragebogen** was an honest answer, but I think you answered that already. And you could check it unless they came from the east.

A: Yeah

Q: Yeah well. That's of course a big problem but and that I guess wasn't really eliminated until the 90s right when they got records. What did you hope to achieve with this de-Nazification program.

A: Cleansing. Well to keep the new Germany, the new German government more democratic. And, and not, not back in the hands of the Nazis.

Q: And do you think you succeeded.

A: We succeeded in, in our job. We understand that the new German government kind of weakened and we had heard that Nazis were being kept or hired again.

Q: And that was under Adenauer or

A: Yeah.

Q: Well I guess you were dealing here with what 52 million people or however many

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. so you told me already where you were located right. And in Regensburg or where was it.

A: Regensburg.

Q: And that's where your work was located, in that part of Bavaria.

A: Yes.

Q: How long did you work in this capacity.

A: I was there from September of 45 to May of 46.

Q: At the time that was in a DP camp in Italy.

A: Oh

Q: Well beyond that even and so August I guess of 46. Ok. What are some of the most memorable incidents that you remember from that period. You already told me about the guy who said you had your day. I mean we had our day, now you have your day. I'm sure you came across a number of other memorable incidents with these people.

A: Well I think one was when the statistics came out to show that we had the highest number of removals in the whole US zone.

Q: The highest removal. Yeah

A: The highest number.

Q: Well Bavaria is sort of Hitler country, perhaps that's why. Munich that's part of it.

A: Also we had heard that the British were sitting and having tea with the Nazis and that the French I don't know, the French were either a very vengeful or just didn't care but that the United States forces were the most serious about de Nazification so we were proud that we were doing a good job.

Q: Ok but specifically on a one to one from an individual did you have any memorable incidents. That occurred with you know you speaking to any of these people or in conversation or

A: I don't remember any specific.

Q: I see. Now you think that the program was effective.

A: Well it was effective while we were doing it but it was overturned. You know it was watered down and then it was done away with.

Q: How soon would you think was it watered down. I think that really is also important point because was there already a new younger generation coming in or

A: No it was not while we were there. it was after. We heard that it was done afterward. Probably in late 46.

Q: What that they overturned this program.

A: That's what I heard.

Q: Unh hunh. Well any other highlights that you remember during this period. I mean some really heavy duty Nazis that were discovered in this way. I assume that perhaps through the **fragebogen** you did discover some

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Anybody specific

A: No I can't remember it. any big, big name.

Q: Yeah I mean really big shots.

A: No I don't think so.

Q: What about how was it justified that some of the Nazis signed this et cetera, ended up here.

A: Oh I don't know. I don't know anything about that. I guess United States needed them.

Q: Or they would have fallen into the hands of the, of the other side.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think, now let me ask you this. what are some of the strengths or weaknesses of this program.

A: Well I think the weakness was not, not having record centers, not having records on people who came from other areas.

Q: You're right, right.

A: Other than that I think it was done very well. You know and was serious. People were removed and gradually jobs were, were given to people who were not Nazis. There weren't many there weren't many around you know. there was practically everybody was in the Nazi party because of the mandatory membership. From 37 on.

Q: Not that I realize and that's of course very difficult to make this distinction. And then to be sure that yeah, really difficult. Did you were you able to obtain lists of Nazi party members.

A: If I recall there was one time when somebody uncovered a record or a list of, of members that we could check against, against our applicants. It was kind of a surprise treasure that was uncovered.

Q: I can imagine yeah. and probably to the great disappointment of some of the people.

A: Yeah right.

Q: there you have it black on white.

A: Yeah.

Q: I had a question of how were the candidates for de Nazification chosen.

A: It was a routine thing on their job. It was because of what, what poss, I guess to. I guess it was you know everybody in certain jobs in the government or in important positions in the society.

Q: that you really needed in order to

A: We didn't, we didn't select them. they were we received, we received them. Somebody else selected them.

Q: Made the selection. Now when you say somebody else, you mean from among the allies, not from within the Germans themselves.

A: I guess so. I don't, I don't really know. it might be that an order went in from military government that everybody in a certain industry had to submit a **fragebogen**.

Q: I see. So really everything all the, all the selection and I hate to use that word for obvious reasons, but let's just use it for lack of a better word. So all the selections were really based entirely on the **fragebogen**.

A: On the all the selections.

Q: Yeah who was going to be de Nazified or not

A: Oh. Well it started with the **fragebogen** and then if there were questions or suspicions then, then there would be interviews, and further investigations.

Q: Did you do all the interviews yourself as well.

A: Did what

Q: Did you do personally some of the interviews yourself or

A: No we had an American GI originally from Germany who was a special investigator and he would, he would do them.

Q: He would do the

A: The interviews. And he would look into and he would do further investigation.

Q: I see so it really was a whole teamwork.

A: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Q: Now the work load must have been overwhelming. As you said before, you're dealing with a whole nation.

A: Well we only had one state.

Q: now this, that's a good answer because that brings me to another question. Did you, did the United States have such programs all over Germany.

A: Yes. Yes it was the whole US zone was divided into areas and all of them had the same kind of thing we did.

Q: I see, I see

A: And we were just one, we were just in one state.

Q: The Niederbier yeah. I see so this really was a well-organized undertaking.

A: Oh yes.

Q: I mean so what would you say roughly. How many people in your sector or in your section were involved in this. Germans I mean

A: Oh the population.

Q: Yeah.

A: I, I don't know. A million, I don't know. I don't remember.

Q: Well it was a vast undertaking. When you talk about the Americans having done that. And I was not aware of that either, that this was not an allied undertaking. I always was under the impression that this was a cooperative undertaking.

A: NO this was American. And the others had their own systems.

Q: Did they also call it de Nazification

A: I don't think so. I don't know what they had. I mean we had heard that the British were having tea with the Nazis and the French were just wrecking their stores and homes.

Q: So not a

A: Oh and the Russians were terrible you know. Everybody ran away from the Russians and said that they were monsters. They were so vengeful at the destruction that the Germans did of Russia.

Q: Well and also a lot of Russians died because of that.

A: Yeah.

Q: So let me ask you this. What would you say how did this experience affect you as a young person, in such a responsible position you know which involved really impacting the course of people's lives. Were you aware of your power. Were you troubled by the fact that you did not have experience in that area.

A: No, actually I think it matured me. I enjoyed it. we lived well. I mean we had a hotel room. We had a, we had a you know we lived in a hotel. We had dances. We had an orchestra. We had a bar. We I had a girlfriend. We had a chauffeur to go wherever we wanted to like to a play or an opera. Or a concert. It was a, it was a very educational experience. I mean I was so young, I had 3 years of college credit, which I had done in 2 years and so you know

Q: Did you pursue psychology in the end.

A: Yes, yeah I went on and got a PhD in psychology.

Q: Very nice, lovely. Well so you were telling me that so close after the war ended, this horrible war, they had already concerts, theater, opera and dances and everything else.

A: Yep.

Q: I guess people are very resilient.

A: Yes. Well Regensburg wasn't wrecked as much as some other cities.

Q: Yeah I know, but Hamburg was destroyed by 75%

A: Bombing.

Q: yeah and were you, you said you enjoyed it. so I assume you enjoyed the feeling of having power over these people.

A: Well it wasn't that. it was just having an important job. And having a lot of luxuries of, of you know living well. I knew there were also the problems of being away from home and living in you know still living in a hostile environment. I mean we weren't you know it was, it was dangerous to walk down the streets alone at night.

Q: You just answered my next question which really was how dangerous or how hostile were these people against the well the allies in general but the United States army soldiers that were in

A: Well there were, there were always stories about an attack. You know there were, there were German army veterans. There was Hitler Youth, former members that were true believers. There were stories that there were attacks on GIs and but I don't remember that anybody in our unit was attacked. But we were always careful. I mean I rambler walk, walking down the street, myself at night like if I took my girlfriend home and then I would walk back to my hotel, I would carry a knife.

Q: I see so you really did need a bit of protection after all.

A: Yeah.

Q: You were not welcomed with open arms.

A: Oh no. although many of them acted that way. oh yeah they acted that way.

Q: Well it probably netted them some chocolate and nylon stockings and other things.

A: That's right and they were glad the war was over. And cigarettes were very important, cigarettes and chocolate and stockings yeah.

Q: What days these were. Oh my god. I remember them quite well still. I had a question whether you had to follow a protocol in this process or whether it was you know partially your own instinct to realize who was honest, who was not honest, et cetera. What guided your work more, the protocol that you had to follow or the instinct that you felt when confronting some of these **fragebogen**.

A: Probably both. You know for instance if there was a contradictions in dates or functions. See I didn't, I wasn't an evaluator myself. I was a head of the unit so the evaluator would come to me with a question. They would say here is, here is this **fragebogen** where this guy answers this on this place in that and that place and it looks like a contradiction and so on. so they would come to me with questions. But they would, they would do the evaluations. I wouldn't. But I would train them.

Q: A question just came to my mind. Most of Germany was mobilized into the army.

A: Yeah.

Q: And these people that you dealt with were people who were holding office jobs or, or were working for the government in a different capacity, not in the army.

A: Yeah, right.

Q: How did they manage to stay out of the army.

A: I have no idea.

Q: but these guys in other words had that you were dealing with had not been in, in the military in the Wehrmacht.

A: I don't know. I think some were, some were. In both. Civilian and had been in the army too. I don't know. I think they were in the army and then they were this was peace time.

Q: Well just a few months, yeah they may have been demobilized by that time.

A: Right so maybe the records show that they were in the Nazi party and then they were in the army and now they were out in a job. And they were being screened in the job.

Q: how often did you come across or did they honestly

A: how what

Q: How often did you come across somebody who honestly said that he was a member of the SS.

A: Oh none, nobody.

Q: Nobody, I see

A: No, we didn't come we didn't come across many SS. I think they were picked up by other intelligence but maybe they were picked up before, before they got to us. I don't remember many, I don't remember many SS members. I remember some SA members.

Q: Yes well that was a forerunner.

A: **Sturm afitlung**

Q: Yes, well they were the forerunners to the SS actually I guess.

A: Yeah they were the brown shirts.

Q: Yeah the beginning of the whole business.

A: yeah.

Q: Ok. How did it affect you as a Jew to be put into this position to work with Nazis and trying to sort of get them back on the normal footing, on the, on the non-Nazi life style. Well non-Nazi outlook.

A: Well I was certainly motivated

Q: AS a Jew.

A: Yes. I was glad to pay them back and I was glad to see justice being done.

Q: What happened by the way to those people that were fired from their jobs and did not could not be reemployed and enter the government.

A: yeah that's a good question. I don't know. we always wondered about that. what happened to them. maybe they, they just did some kind of business by themselves.

Q: Well this was Germany has always been a big bureaucratic structure.

A: Yeah.

Q: but

A: Maybe they went into some kind of business or got a job in a business where

Q: But you don't', you don't know what I mean unless they ended up in prison. I suppose some of these people had a record or a record came where they actually

A: They weren't in prisons. They I mean some of them lost their homes. And

Q: well you said they, their finances were

A: yeah their bank account was frozen. They were allowed to take out just like \$200 a month, something like that. they were punished.

Q: Not enough.

A: No.

Q: Not enough but what can you do. You could have taken a whole nation and cut them off from the map of the world like Mr. Morgenthau wanted to do.

A: By the way I wanted to ask you. kind of a far out question.

Q: Yes, ok.

A: I have written a novel based on my experience there. it's called the Finishing Touch and it's about de-Nazification. And it has a love story woven in and out of it. but you know it's about an American who falls in love with a German woman and the German woman has two brothers. One of whom was a notorious Nazi and the and one died. And the one who was the Nazi took, takes on the identity of the one who died and tries to pass as the one who died. And so there is this intrigue about who which, which brother is this and trying to trace and find out and so on, so. It's a suspense novel. And I would like to find a publisher or an agent for it.

Q: oh my goodness. Sounds really very intriguing. You did that in recent years.

A: I just wrote it. I just finished it.

Q: how lovely. Well that's really a quite an undertaking.

A: yes.

Q: Well that's always very, very difficult to find a publisher but I suppose you could approach a number of you know known publishers and send them the manuscript.. I guess that's how you go about it. or you can go through some of the universities publish books. But I don't know whether you know, as a novel, but it's really a historic novel I assume.

A: Yeah it's a historical novel. It tells all about these kind of things that we talked about.

Q: So possibly some of the universities might be interested. I mean you have to start somewhere and usually you know one person gives you an idea and another person and eventually you may find somebody who does, sounds fascinating to me.

A: Well it's related to the Holocaust Museum. That's why I asked you.

Q: Yeah, yeah right. well we don't do any publishing. We have a book store that sells you know novels and mostly authentic stories about the Holocaust. And but these are all published book but we do not, we in the museum do not publish books.

A: By the way when I was in the infantry we had opened a, we had opened a concentration camp as, I was in Patton's army as we swept across France, Germany and Austria. And was almost like a different town every, every day. The advance was so fast. But we, we came upon a Mauthausen and our unit opened one of the camps of Mauthausen.

Q: You mean one of the sub camps.

A: Yeah the sub camps. Right. and that was interesting.

Q: I bet. And you found survivors there.

A: Oh yeah. Yeah. Lots of people, it's were, were there. we opened the gates and they streamed out.

Q: Mauthausen, was that in Austria or was it in Germany. Mauthausen was on the German side or Austrian.

A: I, I think it, I thought it was German. But

Q: Could be, I don't know. I'm not sure.

A: I mean our unit went farther west, farther east than any other.

Q: So how long were you in the army.

A: We, we met the Russians in, near Stier Austria. I was in the army for 3 years.

Q: You enlisted or you

A: Yeah I enlisted. I enlisted in 41.

Q: After Pearl Harbor

A: And then they had a program where you could stay in college. And so I didn't actually didn't actually go in until 43.

Q: I see. Those were the worst years I guess.

A: 43 and 46. And then I was I was put in the infantry. So but I was put in classification so I was the head of the classification part of the infantry regiment which is a personnel so

Q: So you saw a lot of battle though

A: A lot of what

Q: Battle. I mean active warfare.

A: I saw a lot of what.

Q: Of active warfare. Of, of battles.

A: Warfare.

Q: Yeah, I mean you were in the trenches.

A: Oh yeah, yeah right. No I saw a lot but I was not in, I was not actually in the front line. I was in service, service company which is, which is in, it's an infantry regiment but it's, it's the clerks and the drivers and the supply people so we were, we were a little behind. we were not in

the foxholes.

Q: I see. Did you, you had a staff that worked with you, yes.

A: in the, in de-Nazification. Oh yes.

Q: How large a staff would you say.

A: Oh there were 35 people altogether.

Q: and you were, you were the supervisor. Of these 35 people.

A: yeah.

Q: And they had to report back to you of their findings et cetera.

A: Yes.

Q: Ok. And who were they mostly. They

A: They were mostly Germans and DPs.

Q: Oh I see, not the American soldiers.

A: there were, there were a few American soldiers but they were not the evaluators. The evaluators were all German speaking.

Q: I see, so they were Germans out of the population of Germany.

A: Some, some were Germans and some were DPs. From, from other countries.

Q: they spoke German.

A: Yes.

Q: And DPs, also Jewish DPs.

A: There were a few but most of the DPs were not Jewish.

Q: I see. Well that's interesting.

A: There were a few, I remember there was a Polish, couple of Polish Jews. There were a couple that were in concentration camps. And there were others that were hidden or escaped. But the majority were not Jewish, but there were some Jews.

Q: How long would you say that this whole program last.

A: Well as I understand as I understood it, it didn't last much longer after I left. That somehow with the new government they changed the thing. Maybe the whole program lasted a year or a year and a half.

Q: So that's not very, no I excuse me. I remember as a teenager hearing about this, papers were full of this de-Nazification, de-Nazification but I don't think that we ever had really a concept of what that really involved. I think that perhaps maybe only in my own mind, I thought that it really was kind of a how shall I say it, yeah a curriculum that's probably the right way.

A: Oh unh hunh.

Q: I thought it was like a curriculum of changing these people's outlook

A: No, no

Q: But you're telling me now that this was not it at all.

A: No it was never, It was never like that. it was political screening. Cleansing of job holding. But I think they, I think they let Nazis back in because they needed them. They needed their job skills. And also the whole scientific and technical development.

Q: And then you have the scientists that they needed

A: Yeah.

Q: What were the dynamics between your team members.

A: And

Q: No I said the dynamic between your team members, among themselves, the 35 or whatever, yeah, especially in view of the , of what you just told me that there were DP people and there were Germans and then there was the army so how did all that work.

A: It was every, it was fine. I mean everybody worked together and everybody was changing, everybody got along. Everybody had stories to tell about their own hardships.

Q: Well that I would believe yeah. You remember some of those stories among those hardships that people

A: Well you know as I said a couple, a couple were in concentration camps. Some you know had to leave their homes and travel, escape, were in hiding. For many years. No I, as I recall everybody got along fine. There were no frictions.

Q: Even among the people who were in a concentration camp and the Germans that they were

A: Well the Germans on our staff were anti-Nazi.

Q: Yeah that I can understand, sure.

A: So that was ok.

Q: But among themselves, they got along you say.

A: Yeah seems to me they got along. I don't know. I

Q: You did not notice any frictions.

A: No.

Q: Well I guess maybe they were all out to do the same thing.

A: Yeah exactly. No we were all doing an important job. We realized that and it was, it was Nazi hunting. And you know somebody would find a **fragebogen** that would have contradiction in it or show something or, or some, something would come up from the record center, showing that somebody that we had screened turned out to be an important Nazi office holder. They would come into my office and, and hold it up like a victory.

Q: That flag.

A: yeah look what we found. That was, those were the high spots was discovering somebody who had been cheating or finding a

Q: Do you, well I can imagine. That that was regarded as a major victory.

A: Yes.

Q: Well I don't know. whatever we tried to do I hope we accomplished it in some way or the other. Was this an emotional situation for you.

A: Yeah. somewhat I guess.

Q: As an American or as a Jew.

A: Well my family did not, my family, my parents and grandparents did not come from Germany. They had, they had the were American immigrants. They came from Russia and they came a lot earlier so they were not affected by what was going on in Germany with Hitler. But everybody of course was very involved and very interested in, and cared a lot about what was happening in Germany. So, so my work there in military government was, was highly respected.

Q: I can imagine yeah. and I can imagine. Well.

A: But the same thing was that it didn't last very long. that you know within a year after I was out it went back into German hands.

Q: That's really too bad. I didn't must confess that I did not realize it. but then at that point I had come to the United States and I guess you know you start a new life and a new language and a new everything. And somehow you leave these horrible events of the past behind.

A: Is your name Johanna

Q: Yes

A: So how old are you?

Q: Right now I'm 81.

A: Oh, ok. I'm 89. Oh so you yeah so you came to the states then.

Q: Yeah at 1946. After the war.

A: Then same as me.

Q: Yeah but you grew up here. I didn't.

A: Yeah right.

Q: My parents had the good fortune of finding

A: You know in the states during the 30s we knew German Jewish refugees

Q: Yeah well some of them came early. They were smart.

A: Yeah.

Q: Well my parents found out that Albania allowed Jews to come in and that's where we went and that's where we survived the war.

A: Albania. Oh.

Q: But you know the Germans occupied that country as well in 1943. Yeah but the Albanian people were exceptional among the nations. Of saving, they were exceptionally among the nations of saving Jews and not handing them over and not

A: Oh that's interesting. That's good.

Q: Yeah, yes it is and it's not much known, not well known at all and in fact you know I speak in many places, in schools et cetera to talk about that part of history. And it's really important that people have to know.

A: yeah, that's why I want my novel to be published. You know I wanted to ask you this

interview is going to be on, is going to be on CD, on a CD or something.

Q: I believe so but I have this is actually the first time that they have asked me to do an interview. You are my guinea pig. And so I really don't know the exact correct answer to your question. I believe it's going to be on a DVD yes.

A: Because yeah because we wanted the family wanted, wanted a DVD.

Q: Yeah I'm going to ask the young lady who talked to you earlier and who interviewed you the first time whether you know whether this will be on a DVD and whether they can send it to you.

A: Ok wonderful.

Q: But I think it you know certainly going to be here in the museum in the oral history department.

A: Oh good

Q: Yeah, yeah of course. Well that's the big aim right now to get as many survivors. And et cetera you know. interviewed before it's too late. But I can answer a question right now because the young lady just walked in so hold on one minute please.

A: Ok.

Q: He would like to know whether this interview will be on a DVD. And can you send him a copy.

(someone responds in background – mostly inaudible:

Q: You will be sent a copy.

A: Oh good, wonderful.

Q: How many copies would you want.

A: Oh a few.

Q: Ok I'll tell them. How many children do you have?

A: I have four, I have 3 living children. I had 4. I have five grandchildren and

Q: These are the little dividends. As they say. But very good.

A: My son was a, my son was in the army. He was a paratrooper. And he was not in any war though.

Q: That's the best way of being in the army.

A: Yeah.

Q: Well that's very good. Ok, you have any other little anecdotes or stories that you would like to relate at this point.

A: I can't think of any, can't think of anything else. I remember the hotel was the Carmelita hotel.

Q: In Regensburg

A: In Regensburg, yeah. and I remember the narrow streets and

Q: These are all very romantic little cities aren't they.

A: Oh yeah with the famous church. And I remember we had a dance every week. I think every Friday evening or something. And that was it. it was an interesting time for a young kid.

Q: I'm sure and what happened not trying to be indiscreet. What happened to the girlfriend.

A: She was a lot older than I was and she was from she was from Estonia. And I wanted to get discharged and come back to the States. I wanted to go back to college and so we just separated.

Q: Parted ways.

A: And we were, we corresponded for a little while and each found our own partners eventually.

Q: Very good. At any rate it was a great pleasure talking to you.

A: thank you

Q: and I think you very much for your time. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, we all thank you very much for your time and

A: Oh thank you. I enjoyed visiting there. and I was very pleased to hear them tell me that they didn't have much information about de-Nazification.

Q: right. I am sure that there is so much material out there on many different issues and many different topics that we do not have information on so you know we're trying to get as much as possible. You know this is really the only source that people can come to and our how shall I say, big aim in a way is to educate the youth, the next generation and the next generation. Unless we have all of this material on the website or available for students, for teachers, et cetera we are really missing a lot.

A: Right well that's wonderful. I'm glad to do my part.

Q: I'm very glad that you did. Ok. Keep well.

A: It was a pleasure talking to you. thank you very much.

Q: And likewise it was a pleasure

A: Will I be getting a letter or something about, about doing this so we could have it in a family file.

Q: Of course, I will tell them. I will ask them and I will tell them, probably together with the DVD or maybe even earlier ok.

A: That would be great. Thank you, have a good one

Q: And you keep well

A: Same to you.

Q: Thank you, good by.

(end)