United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Gerhard Weinberg
March 13, 2012
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PREFACE

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GERHARD WEINBERG
March 13, 2012

Question: Hello, we're here in **Chapel Hill** to record an interview with Dr. **Gerhard Weinberg**. The interview has been commissioned by the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**, and is hosted by the University of **North Carolina**, **Chapel Hill**. The interview will then becar – become part of the Holocaust Museum's archive, part of a collection of conversations with the first generation of Holocaust scholars in the **United States**. My name is **Astrid M**. **Eckert**. I teach Modern European History at **Emory** University in **Atlanta**. **Gerhard Weinberg** was born in **Hannover**, **Germany** in 1928, and spent the first 10 years of his life there. He and his family had to leave Nazi **Germany** after **Kristallnacht**. They first went to **Great Britain**, and then onto the **United States**, where he could continue his education. In 1951, he earned a **PhD** in history from the University of **Chicago**, and launched a successful career as a historian. Professor **Weinberg** taught at the University of **Chicago**, the University of **Kentucky**, the University of **Michigan** and since 1974, at the University of **North Carolina**, **Chapel Hill**. He is now **UNC's William Rand Kenan** Professor Emeritus of History. His public persona is that of a leading World War II scholar, who has written, edited – or who edited no less than 10 books, and over a hundred articles and chapters, and who is well-known inside academia for his spot-on book

reviews. In today's conversation, we want to address the experiences of Dr. **Weinberg** and his family in Nazi **Germany**, but above all, we want to trace the making of a Holocaust scholar. Dr. **Weinberg**, welcome, and thank you for taking the time to record this interview. I thought we'd start with some conversations about your family. If you could say something about your father, your father's occupation, your mother's background. How would you describe the social position of your family back in **Hannover**?

Answer: My father had gone to the university to train in law. Was a judge briefly, before the first World War, and served in the German army. Wounded, and promoted, and so on. After the war, he was dissatisfied with the atmosphere in the judiciary, and transferred to the new Ministry of Finance. He was, to begin with, assigned to **Turnowiec**(ph) in **Upper Silesia**, and after the plebiscite, when that area voted for **Poland**, he was, in fact, the last German official to turn the town over to the Poles. He was then reassigned to **Hannover**. And that's how the family came to be in **Hannover**. He then – he married a woman, my mother, who came from the **Rhineland**, and whose father was also a judge, actually. And they lived – we lived in a house in **Hannover**, which was one of these typical, I think, four or five story attached houses. And we lived on what they call the first floor, but Americans would call the second floor.

Q: Yeah.

A: And the other floors were either rented as a whole, or in a couple instances, I think divided into two apartments. My father owned the building, and we had a teeny garden in the front, and a slightly larger one in the back. And my – I had an old – still have an older sister, an older brother, and I'm the baby in the family. I would say that my parents belonged to what one would call a middle class. And as I said, the whole time that I lived in **Hannover** was in this apartment.

Q: And when you said that your father served in World War I, could you say a bit more about his experiences during the war?

A: My father went in in 1914, was assigned as a replacement on the western front, and for a time was in the trenches, with a pair of field glasses, to locate where their shells were fa – were landing, from their artillery, to correct that. He was promoted to noncommissioned officer. And when the battalion commander put him in for a field commission, the regimental commander turned it down. As he explained, that is the regimental commander, this is a Prussian guard reserve regiment, and we cannot have a Jewish officer. Subsequently, I believe in 1916, the unit was transferred to the eastern front. And in the fighting before **Riga**, and what is today **Latvia**, my father was badly wounded in the arm. And since it was his right arm, he could no longer fire a weapon. So that after he recovered, they recalled that he had

legal training, and made him the legal officer, the chief legal officer of one of these scratch divisions put together for occupation duty in the east. And he spent – but he was, by this time, promoted, and was what the Germans call a **Rittmeister**, and that would be the equivalent of a captain in the American army. And he served that way until demobilization in 1918. And then, as I said, instead of going back into the judiciary, transferred to the new German national ministry of finance, something that **Germany** had not had between 1871 and 1919.

Q: Right. If you think of your extended family, were there noteworthy personalities?

A: I suppose there were two. My grandfather on mother's side was a judge in the **Rhineland**, and came to be what the Germans called an **Oberlandesgerichtshof**, which would be the equivalent of a associate judge in the state supreme court in this country. And he was not promoted to chief judge, because he would have had to convert, and he was not about to do that, when it was offered to him. A slightly more distant relative lived not in **Prussia**, as my grandfather did, but in the Grand Duchy **Oldenburg**, which is in northwest **Germany**. And before the first World War, he was on the top court of **Oldenburg**. And when the chief justice of **Oldenburg** died, they discovered to their horror – that is, the grand duke, and the minister of justice, that the next senior judge was a Roman Catholic. And in that

part of **Germany**, which is traditionally overwhelmingly Protestant, they did not think that that would work very well. The next senior judge was a Protestant. But by the time we're talking about, 1912, or thereabouts, **Oldenburg**, because of port and industrial development had a substantial Catholic minority. I don't know what the percentage would be, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was 10 - 15 percent. And the grand duke, and the minister of ju – prime minister and minister of justice were concerned that if they obviously passed over a Catholic, to appoint a Protestant, this Catholic minority would be very unhappy. So they decided to pass over both of them. And the last chief justice of the Grand Duchy of **Oldenburg** was Jewish. I've always thought as a historian, that this is an example how people can trap themselves into absolute stupidity, because of course, this had nothing to do with qualifications, politics, or anything of that sort. It was just that they couldn't have a Catholic chief justice, and they couldn't annoy the Catholic minority, by putting in the next, so I guess they annoyed them all, by arranging to have a Jewish chief justice as the last chief justice of the Grand Duchy. **[technical interruption]**

Q: Can I – can I ask you about experiences with anti-Semitism? With social anti-Semitism, and you know, like I mean, pre '33? Because you're already touching on it, like you know, the very fact that somebody would have to convert to become –

you know, to take on a position is a – of course, you know, pointing to ingrained anti-Semitism. I mean, the camera is off right now, I would –

A: Oh, I see, okay. Yeah, well we can talk about – I'll talk about that briefly.

Q: Okay, all right. And was your family observing? Did your family have strong ties into the Jewish community in **Hannover**?

A: My family belonged to the – what in **Germany** would be called the Reform Jewish congregation in **Hannover**, though by American standards, I believe these would be considered a Conservative congregation. And we went on the high holidays, occasionally on other times. We celebrated Friday evenings regularly at home; you know, Passover, Chanukah, and other such events, so that – and in time each of us went to a religious school for some training. So, there was no doubt about the affiliation of the family.

Q: How many Jews lived in **Hannover** at the time, do you know?

A: **Hannover** at the time – excuse me – was a city of about half a million, and there about 5,500 roughly, just over one percent Jewish community there.

Q: And did your family have any experience with anti-Semitism before 1933?

A: Well, what one has to keep in mind is that **Germany** from 1871, until 1919, was a federal state. On the national level, there were not legal regulations specifically affecting Jews. But the states that made up **Germany**, had regu – their own

regulations. So that in **Prussia**, which is where the majority of Jews lived, and where my parents lived, no Jew could be an officer in the army. They all did their military duty, but they knew ahead of time they could – there were no such things as commissioned Jews. Whereas in **Bavaria**, the did it differently. There were Jews among the Bavarian officer corps. There was also a rule in **Prussia**, and I'm talking not about discrimination now, I'm talking about legally established regulations. Jews could not hold administrative positions. So that when my father grew up, he knew he could never be postmaster of the town where he lived. In the case of my grandfather, in other words, if he was going to be the chief justice, as the king of **Prussia** also, and pro – **Germany** had agreed, being the chief jus – of the justices meant administrative responsibilities, and he declined to convert to Christianity in order to accept that position. We tend to forget in this country that legal disabilities in **Europe** lasted very long. In **England**, the last major legal disabilities on Catholics and Jews don't disappear until the 1880s. In **Germany** the last legal disabilities end in 1919, because they were on the state level, not the national level. When my father was in the military, it was very clear as – as I said, you could not be an officer in this one unit, and then later became an officer in a different unit. There was also, of course, some discrimination. But since I was not alive and adult at the time, I did not really run into those sorts of things until after I became five,

six, seven years old, and was going to school, and noticed what was being done to Jews, and what was discussed at home about these things. After the – **Hitler** became chancellor in 1933, there was, as I said, on the one hand, until 1919, legal disabilities, I guess you would call them, and then, at the same time, some discrimination.

Q: What is your – what is your – what are your fondest memories of your childhood in **Germany**?

A: The fondest memories, I guess, are associated in part with a pet white mouse that I greatly enjoyed, and that became totally tame. And th-th – what was also important for me was that while Jews could not go to the swimming pool, I couldn't learn how to swim. And there were other such restrictions, for reasons that I've never figured out. There were, at least in those days, no prohibitions on Jews going to the zoo. And **Hannover** had – and still has, to the best of my knowledge, a very large, very nice zoo. And I enjoyed going there and watching the animals, and I particularly enjoyed the arrangement they had, where for a very small fee, the kids up to a certain weight – weight, could ride on a turtle. And I thought that riding on a **Galapagos** turtle was really very much a – a wonderful thing. Another thing that I enjoyed as a kid, was that great aunt and uncle, who lived in the **Rhineland**, outside **Essen**, had on their property – small estate, I guess you would call it, two royal

cranes that walked around. And I suspect today, because I was their height, they liked to walk around with me. And the idea of walking around with two cranes that wandered around with me, I thought was really very special and very nice. And since they had also a tennis court where they and guests played tennis, the three of us would sometimes walk over there and watch people play tennis. Unfortunately, nobody had sense enough to take a picture, but I – I just thought that walking around with two tall cranes, exactly my height, and not on a leash or anything, but that just decided that they would walk around with me, was really very, very special. I also very much enjoyed this grandfather, who by this time had retired from being a judge. We would go to a woods near **Dusseldorf** where they lived, and feed what were essentially tame deer. And I thought that that was very nice. The other thing he would do, which was probably not nice for him, but for me, was there was a switching yard, where there were those small steam engines that put freight trains together. And we'd go puff puff. Well, we were under the bridge that we walked on, and we would disappear in the smoke, and then reappear. And that too, I thought was really great, good fun.

Q: Wonderful. Well, you touched already, about the changes that came with 1933. I mean, how did you, as a child, experience the onset of national socialism in

Germany? I mean, how and when did Nazi rule begin to impact your everyday life?

A: Well, it began to impact my everyday life in two ways when I started school in ’34. In the school itself, there were nasty comments from other kids. In the **Germany** of the time, all kids went to gender segregated public schools for four years. And while in the first part of that, that is, ’34, ’35, ’36, the teacher I have **[indecipherable]** kind of restrained, I think it would be best to say, other kids. It was rather unpleasant, and in the later years in the grade school, the kids would beat up on me, and I would have to try to make my way home by devious ways, because I didn’t want to get beaten up so badly. And I carried with me for the next 10 - 20 years, a tendency to get very bad nosebleeds. In 1934, when my father was tossed out of his job – he had been allowed to keep it, in the local office of the ministry of finance, because he was front veteran at the first World War. But when President **Hindenburg** died in, I believe it’s August of ’34, then those people were also tossed out. So he normal – no longer went to work, off every morning, and instead d-decided to earn his living by what the Germans call a **devisen berauter**, a foreign exchange advisor, and in practice what it meant was that because of his background, he understood the constantly changing regulations on what people leaving **Germany** could take with them. And so, our living room was converted into his

office, where he met clients. And the front hall, where you came into the apartment, became a waiting room. In other words, people would wait there, and then see my father. So the apartment changed in a way, and Dad did this – that is to say, did this kind of work from 1934 until my parents left **Germany** in the spring of '39. And the fact that we didn't have a living room any more, and the front hall wasn't available, in a sense, certainly made a change in life. But the main change wa – I would say, a sense of – that the country didn't want you there, and that other kids were very unfriendly – with a few exceptions, not all. And my brother, a year and a half older, found this an impossible situation. My parents took him out of school, sent him to live with a family in **Berlin**, and he went to school there. So that during the school year, my brother was not at home. He was, as I said, living in **Berlin**. Evidently, from what I gathered from my sister, she did not have – I mean, not that everybody was friendly with her, but she didn't have that kind of situation. It got substantially worse after a couple of years, because we were told that the teacher that – whom I mentioned, was ill, and retired. My parents told me many years later that he had been a Quaker, and had been fired. And so, we got another teacher, who did not restrain the kids. So that was –

Q: Which – which grade was this? Were you third grade, fourth grade?

A: This was the third and fourth grade. And then, my parents were talking about leaving the country. And first thought that they would li – stay out their lives in **Germany**, but th – there was no future for the three of us. We had relatives in this country, and they applied for quota numbers to come to this country, and in fact sent us to start learning English. There were two elderly ladies, sisters, who lived in **Hannover**, who were from **England**, and we went – started to learn English from them. Though I have to admit that I was probably more intrigued by their parrot than th – by their English lessons. And then in the – after the four years, in the **Germany** of the time, you went to – either you stayed, or you went to what was essentially a university preparatory system, a gymnasium, and I moved to that. And there we started English. And so I learned a little English there. But of course, then in November ’38, I was kicked out. But I started learning English more systematically in school in 1938.

Q: Yeah. And did the behavior of your neighbors change in any way? People who also lived in your house? Anything you remember there?

A: **[coughing]** Excuse me. Well, if it did, I was not aware of it. The – for reasons that I honestly don’t know, the people who lived in the house above us and below us, simply had very little contact with each other in those years. They all – everybody lived their own lives, in a sense. And so if they behaved differently

towards my parents, or us afterwards, I didn't notice it. And we had had, of course, some friends and acquaintances, my parents did in town, but if that changed, I frankly don't know.

Q: The synagogue in **Hannover** was attacked very early on, already in March 1933 was the first attack on the synagogue. Was **Hannover** a particularly anti-Semitic town?

A: I'm inclined, frankly, to doubt that, because whatever happened in this incident in 1933, when I was knowingly going there with some regularity with my parents, there were no incidents until 1938. So that in the period in between, there weren't, to my knowledge, problems and I think it unlikely that **Hannover** was in any way, substantially different from other cities of some size in the **Germany** of the time.

Q: And what happened to your father during **Kristallnacht**, 1938?

A: In November '38, as soon as things started going wild, the folks in **Berlin** put my brother on a train and sent him back to **Hannover**. I continued to go to school. On the 10th or 11th of November, I was still during the day in school at this point, my brother was at home, and my sister was also still in school, the police came. So when I came home from school, Dad was gone. The police had come to the apartment, whereas I said, my father worked at home, so he would be home during the day, and took him to the local police lockup. They clearly were operating from a

list that had been prepared long before, because the man who opened the door for them, who together with his wife and boy, lived with us, was Jewish and was not picked up. And they asked, as I was told when I got home, for a man who lived in the upstairs apartment, who had died months before, but who was still on their list. They took him to the local police lockup. And the one thing I recall, and the other I learned later – the thing I recall was that Mother called the three of us together, and asked us if we had any cash, and if we had any unused postage stamps, because the government had frozen all accounts, and she might have to buy some groceries, or some stamps to write letters. The other thing I only learned later. Dad came home after something like three days, and I learned that what had happened was, that Mother had gone to his former boss, the finance president – that is, the head of the finance office, who had originally, back in the 20s, been very upset when a Jewish official was assigned to his office, who would have nothing to do with my parents socially, until Dad was kicked out. Then he called on my parents. One didn't treat people that way. So in '38, four years la – four years and some months later, my mother went to see him. And he called the head of the police and told him to let the – Dr. **Weinberg** out. And when the finance president calls the poli – **[indecipherable]** president, something happens. And so Dad got home. We learned, however, that his twin brother – he had one twin brother and no other siblings – was

arrested and sent to a concentration camp. A couple of other, more distant relatives also were arrested and put in concentration camps. But as I said, Dad was let out of the local police lockup, before those people were sent from there to a nearby concentration camp. And many, many, many years later, when I was working in the captured German records in **Alexandria**, one of the soldiers there came by to see me one day and said, **Gerhard**, didn't you live in **Hannover**? And I said yes, I did. He said, well here are the November '38 records on **Hannover**. And there was the arrest list, with my father's name on it. But, as I said, he was very fortunate in this regard, that a man who didn't like him, and didn't want him in his office, still would get him sprung from this. And that meant that he di – was not sent to a concentration camp.

Q: Do you know which camp your uncle was taken to?

A: H-He was taken to **Buchenwald**.

Q: Did he ever talk about that time?

A: He was there for several months, and then, under circumstances similar to ours, went to **England** with his wife and kids. And when I si – was back in **Europe** for – for the first time again in '62, I asked him not about there, but I – he was in the army, of course, in the first World War, and he was at the Battle of **Verdun**, in 1916 on the western front. And I asked him – by this time I'm an associate

professor of history – if he would talk to me about **Verdun**. And he said no, **Gerhard**, I won't talk about that. And the next time I'm in **London**, he has died in the meantime. He never really recovered fully from his months in the concentration camp, and I asked my aunt, his widow, and I – had he ever talked about **Verdun**? And she said no. And I asked her, well, did you ever ask him? And she said yes, but there were two parts of his life he would never talk to me about; his time at **Verdun**, and his months in **Buchenwald**. So he would never – I – I never had the nerve to ask him about that, but I thought maybe by 1962, he would talk about 1916. But that was something he would never talk about, and he was never quite the same after he was released around March, or thereabouts, o-of 1939.

Q: You mentioned already a little bit, the preparations for emigration. How did the decision to emigrate take shape in your family? When did your farents – parents first consider it? Who first had the idea, or saw most clearly what had to be done?

A: Well, I think it came in a – if you will, in two stages. I cannot give you the exact dates, but they started talking about this. And in 19- fi – '35 - '36, and they were talking primarily about the three of us, that is my sister, brother and myself, on the assumption that there was no future for us in the country. And then, not much later, they began to realize that maybe they should go. And by that time, some other members of th – our family, were – either had left, or were in the process of getting

ready to leave. And a critical element in this were two individuals; a great-uncle of my mother's, who had come to the **United States** around the turn of the century, had married and lived in – in this coun – in the **United States**, was a brilliant metallurgical engineer, made a fortune on his patents. And used – saved it apparently, during the great depression, and used a lot of this money to help members of his family; brothers, sisters, cousins, all come a – **[indecipherable]**. In the 1920s, the older brother of my mother all decided to leave **Germany**, and also came to this coun – the **United States**, married here, and also then would play a part in helping people to get out. So, what it meant really, was that we had – I mean, their families and so on and so forth, that we had family in this country, family is also whom family members in **Germany** had occasionally visited, as people once in a while did, not as often as they do now flying, but in those days by boat, and once in a while visited, so that the idea of another country where there was family, seemed a little bit more plausible, I think it would be fair to say. And so when my parents applied for what in those days were quota numbers, to come to this country, and as I said, started us on English lessons, on the assumption that this is the country we would – the three of us would eventually grow up in, and this all then obviously changed in the more dramatic and urgent way, after November 1938.

Q: How's – how – can you say something about the process of a – obtaining these – these numbers, and of obtaining a visa? How strenuous was that process?

A: It was extremely strenuous, because you had to have someone who would promise to support you for the rest of your life, after the German government had taken just about everything you had, so you would expect to arrive, essentially, financially as a pauper in another country, during the Great Depression, when the welfare systems of all countries were about as strained as they could be. But somebody had to promise and show that they could honor the promise, that they would support you for the rest of your life. We were very fortunate that – that we had this great-uncle – or ma – my mother's uncle. And if you didn't have that, there were a few instances, but not in my family, where an organization, a char – Jewish charitable organization might find a way of providing what was called an affidavit. That is to say a commitment. We would say today, a commitment is necessary for lifetime support, because of course, the people who were coming out, and were trying to come to the **United States**, like my parents, and my aunt and uncle, and so on, didn't know German, and had, in many instances, no training for a readily transferrable kind of job into a country where there were millions of jobless anyway. And of course my father's legal training was irrelevant to the **United States**, because it was, like most euro – **Germany** – like most European continents

had Roman law, not common law basis, so that his doctorate was nice for a title in **Germany**, but hopelessly useless in the – in the **United States**. So what it was really that you had to get these affidavits, go through endless amounts of paperwork, which needless to say, either my uncle, or my great-uncle and my parents did, not us kids. And then you had to apply, and eventually you would get a number. And a certain proportion of these numbers would be called up each year, and then you could, in fact, go through the emigration procedure at the German end, and that's – is how this worked, but it was a very complicated, time consuming, expensive and chancy matter.

Q: When you first went to **Britain**, when did you depart?

A: What happened was, that after the November pogrom, the British government was the only one on earth that changed its immigration rules. It decided that people who were waiting to go somewheres else, whether that was the **United States**, or some other country, could do their waiting in **England**, if they could be supported there without trying to work. In **England** then, a batch of – a number of people in the – what they call the Friends, we would call the Quakers, went around to what the English call public schools and we would call private boarding schools, and asked them if they would take Jewish refugee children at reduced rates. And there was a school on the south coast in a little town called **Swanage**, which said, we'll

take two boys. And there was a school in **Bournemouth**, which is also on the south coast, not so far from there, which said, we'll take a girl. So parents took the three of us, at the end of December 1938, and took us by train to **Hamburg**, and put us on a boat, on an American ship, and that went – that stopped at the **Le Havre** in **France**, and then **Southampton** in **England**, before crossing the **Atlantic** to the **United States**. And needless to say, the three of us got off in **Southampton**. And so that's how we got out. My parents, at that point did not yet have their exit permits from **Germany**, but they got them a few months later, and then also came to **England**, to wait for the time when our numbers would come up. But of course, this was all in the background of the November pogrom. And the part of that which really upset me the most was the burning of the synagogue. I knew that people sometimes don't like other people, and beat up on them, throw rocks at them. I knew, bec – we tend to forget how much the first World War dominated thinking in the 1930s, still. I knew that people killed each other in enormous numbers. And then somebody had shot and wounded my father. That people were angry at each other and did terrible things to each other. But to know – and that's not nice, but that was a part of life. But why would people, mad at God? A synagogue or church in **Germany** would be called a **Gottes Haus**, the house of God. And that people were so mad at God that they would burn down God's house. That to me, as a 10

year old, that just seemed more puzzling and awful than anything else. How – how – what did they think God had done to them, that they would burn down the house? And I suppose that was reinforced by the fact that, after I was kicked out of school, I attended for a few weeks in November, early December of ’38, a Jewish school in **Hannover**, which was the old Jewish building across the street from where the synagogue was. So that each day, when I went into school, the ruins – I passed the ruins, let me phrase it that way. But that was certainly the part of this all that seemed even more awful than what they did to people. How could people get mad enough at God to go about deliberately destroying God’s house? That – that just did not seem to fit with anything that I had ever heard, experienced, or thought about.

Q: When did you first go back to **Hannover**, after the war?

A: I was back there very briefly, only for a few hours in ’62.

Q: What did you do, during those few hours?

A: Oh, I just kind of looked around, and went back to the street where we had lived, and burst out laughing. And I burst out laughing because in these row houses on both sides of the street in that block, every building was obviously a postwar reconstruction, except the one we’d lived in. And I’ve often kidded, you see, that the British area bombing was much more careful than people have ever been willing to believe. The one building they didn’t hit, was the one that we had lived in. I

didn't go in, I wasn't gonna bother anybody, but I just – I just could not help cracking up, and standing across the street, laughing.

Q: What happened to your family's assets; **[indecipherable]** furniture, household items? Could you bring anything, could the – your parents bring anything, or was everything confiscated?

A: No. The rules on this changed steadily during the 30s and early 40s. That meant that when my parents were leaving in early '39, it was whatever rules applied then. You could take furniture, and my parents were able to do that. You had them packed in what was called a lift, a huge crate that would then be shipped. Some of our pictures they could take, but the most valuable one, an **Ostade**, was confiscated. You could take a certain amount of clothing. And other parts of clothing, do not ask me why, they could not take. Many years later, about a little over a decade ago, I was in **Hannover** to get a – they wanted to give me an honorary degree, and there, one of the faculty member that had graduate students studying the records of the local finance office on the persecution of Jewish families there. And they **Xeroxed** for me the file on my family, including the records of the number of pieces of underwear my mother had been allowed to take, and not take. Obviously, in November, in late '38 - '39, folks in **Germany** had nothing else to do but to type up lists of clothing items, and pots and pans and whatnot. And as I said, these very

kind people in **Hannover** gave me copies of these documents. As to what, under the then existing rules, my parents had been allowed to take with them, and things they had not. And the part that was in a – in its own weird way, particularly conspicuous in this regard was that families of the kind of social status that my parents were in, who would have a silver service of knives, forks, spoons and whatnot. And the rule at the time was that you could take with you out of what was usually a dozen fish forks, and a dozen teaspoons and whatnot, you could take one for each member of the family and two for guests. So, since we were five, my parents and the three of us, that meant, higher arithmetic, seven. So out of each dozen pieces of silverware, quite literally, they took five and kept them, and my parents were allowed to pack up seven. And all of those things were put into this huge crate, literally, a – a lift. That was then shipped, at their expense, from **Hamburg** to **New York**, and my – this uncle whom I mentioned before, my mother's older brother, paid for storage here, until eventually we came to this country, and then that was unpacked, and was our furniture.

Q: How long did you stay in **Britain**?

A: We – we stayed in **Britain** all of 1939, and until September of 1940. So I was in this – my brother and I were in this boarding school all of '39, and then in the summer of 1940, our quota numbers came up. So in July, we went to **London**.

Q: And how was your life at the boarding school?

A: That was a – that was a wa – literally wonderful experience. It's there that, obviously my English improved immensely quickly, since nobody there spoke a word of German. We not only learned English, but we had to start learning French and Latin. And to the amusement of fellow students at lunch or dinnertime, I would occasionally ask for the – something in the wrong language. But the kids were friendly and nice. The headmaster was great, who taught some classes. The two teachers – other teachers were very good. And that's when, at the ripe age of 11, I decided that that's what I'm gonna do. I decided I was going to be a teacher, and never changed my mind. It was a very, very good experience, and my brother and I, although the only Jewish kids in the school, were not as extraordinary as might have seemed, because what we forget is that in those days, when there was still a British empire, families around the empire would send their kids to **England**, to one of these boarding schools. So in the school where **Bert** and I were, there was a – a youngster whose parents were in **Singapore**. There were two boys whose father was, you know, a high government official in **Kenya**. There was one boy – and of course, this is all boys, this is all gender segregated – one boy whose family was in **Tangier**. And one boy who was very important in this regard, whose family was in **India**. And his talk about tigers and elephants and whatnot, was considerably more

exotic than anything that had happened to my brother and me. So, the notion of someone from elsewhere, let me phrase it that way, was much more a normal part of life in a school like this, and I suspect other schools, than one might, at first sight, expect. And so, that worked out well. Then, of course, came the defeat of **France**. And we got to watch some of the Battle of **Britain** overhead. And a huge sense, obviously these – there were several – **Swanage** had two industries. One was summer resort on the coast, lovely beach. But that was all covered with barbed wire against a German invasion at that point. And the other was, there was a ver – considerable number of these public schools, private boarding schools in the area. And that obviously, the German air force thought it was an important target, and they dropped a huge one into the yard of our school, but fortunately, it didn't go off, or I wouldn't be here. So we spent a lot of time in the air raid shelter there. And then, when in July, it – we moved to **London**. I lived with an aunt and uncle there, and my brother lived with his grandparents. That, of course, was the beginning of the blitz. So we got to spend time in an air raid shelter in **London**.

Q: What was your – the experience of your parents in **England**?

A: My parents decided that while they were waiting for the quota numbers to come up, they would live in **Bournemouth**, in an apartment, so that **Laura**, my sister, who was by herself obviously, could be with them. In May - June of 1940, the

British government got hysterical about a possible fifth column, and proceeded to an internment and dispersal policy. What they did was, intern the men over a certain age, I believe it was 15 or 16. So my father was interned. My brother and I were not, because we were under the age limit. And the women about that age could not live within 50 miles of the coast. Which meant that my mother and sister had to leave **Bournemouth**, and they were presumably less dangerous in **London** than in **Bournemouth**. Do not ask me to explain why or how. But in any case, they then went to live in **London**, and my sister, in fact, went to school there for a short time. And Dad was, as I said, first interned in **Litchfield**, and then sent to the **Isle of Man**. And Mother lived in **London**, and my sister lived in **London**, until, in the summer of 1940, our quota numbers came up. And then, first the four of us, that is the – the mother and us three kids, were processed. And then what the British did was bring a batch of men, whose families and whose numbers were all lined up, brought them to **London** to go through the procedures. And so, in **Glasgow**, from which we – where we were to get our ship to the **United States**, the families were reunited, so to speak, when they got out of the train, and got onto the boat.

Q: So for how long did your mother not see her husband?

A: Well, she got to wave to him when he was processed in **London**, cause we went to **Grosvenor Square** to see – and that would have been about three, four months.

Q: So you arrived in **New York**, September 1940, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. And where did you first stay?

A: We first stayed with this uncle and his wife, my aunt, and their three children in a suburb of **New York City**. And my parents had to decide where to live in this country. Because the dad had been shot through the arm, he could not drive, and originally in **Hannover**, we had had a car for a while, before Jews were prohibited from driving cars, and Mother drove. Which in those days, for the woman to drive the car was very unusual in **Germany**. But Dad, because of his bad right arm, couldn't. They then borrowed – the family then lent them a car, and Mother drove a little bit around **New York** state and nearby areas. And they decided to settle in **Albany**, **New York**, which is about 150 miles north of **New York City**, so they weren't that far away from others in the family, but they didn't want to live in the city, and **Albany** had the reputation as having good public schools, which with three kids headed for schools, it was, of course, a concern of some importance. So, in December of 1940, we moved into a rented house in **Albany**. The lift with the furniture, etcetera, was unpacked, and we then lived there, and continued to live there and go to school there. And after some years, my parents moved to another house. But Dad lived out his life there, and Mother, well she had to be in a special

home for a while, lived out – they lived out their lives in **Albany**. And my brother lives in a suburb of **Albany** with his wife today. And it was there that I went to school, and then to college.

Q: Was it an issue among your schoolmates that you were a Jewish refugee from **Germany**, was that an issue at all, in any way?

A: Not really. The only thing that was – that my schoolmates found strange, was first in **Scarsdale**, when I first came to this country, and then the first few months in **Albany** was my English accent. Because of course, I spoke English with an English accent. And that was, in a way, for my fellow students, more peculiar, if you will, than anything else. And over a period of not that long time, my English accent evaporated, and got replaced by what I guess you would call a standard **New York** type of speech.

Q: Right. Did you see yourself as part of a network of German-Jewish immigrants in the **United States**?

A: In a small way, yes. There were several other Jewish refugee families, as they call themselves, in the **Albany** area, and my parents and we associated, or would see them. And one of them, in fact, benefited in an ironic way, from what I've always thought was the only good thing that happened in November '38. And that is, my family had insisted that I take violin lessons. And those ended in November

’38, and that’s just as well, because as you must know, in this country there is a constitutional bar on cruel and unusual punishment. And I would not want anybody to have to listen to me playing a violin. When the lift was packed in **Hannover** in ’39, my parents, for reasons I don’t understand, packed the violin. And it turned out that one of the refugee families in the **Albany** area had a daughter who wanted to play the violin, but they couldn’t afford one. And with considerable pleasure on my part, my parents gave them the violin. But that was, if you will, in the – in the family area. And what also happened was after the war, when the German government began to – west German government began to pass restitution laws, my father, who had, at one time helped people find out what they could take out of the country, now provided free advice for – to people on a – what they were entitled to under these very complicated rules, that the ordinary refugee family in upstate **New York** didn’t understand. But given his background and training, this was something that Dad understood very well, so he would help, without charging them – people in the **Albany** area and some other nearby towns, on what they were entitled to under the restitution laws, and th – especially in the 1950s, early 60s, as refugees.

Q: Do you remember any other immigrant children who were – who were classmates or playmates? Any names coming up?

A: N-No. There is the sad part, you see, that my best friend in **Hannover** was the son of this couple who lived with us, and he was killed, along with his parents. **Horst**. And the only other Jewish boy in my class, who was kicked out with me at the same time, on the same morning, in November ’38, that was a family that we were not in touch with, so I have no idea, frankly, what happened to him, and whether he got out, or not. The only person that we sort of kept in a certain amount of contact with was, that the school in **England** that I mentioned, they took another Jewish refugee boy, who is now retired as a surgeon, living in **Santa Monica**, **California**. And we have sort of kept a little bit, and – especially my brother, in touch with this man, as he left je – **England** for the **United States**, grew up, married, raised a family here, as I said, on the west coast. Now – but o-otherwise that just simply did not occur.

Q: And was there anything that you found curious about life in the **United States**? Anything that you felt you had to adjust to?

A: Well, obviously, at first I thought the people in this country spoke a very unusual form of English, for which I had to adjust and adapt over a while. I had never eaten corn on the cob. In those days, corn in – or maize, as they call it in **Germany**, is only used as animal feed. And what we call sweet corn, was in those days, completely unknown. And so, when I first was presented with this contraption, of

which to eat, I must say I was slightly puzzled, until I watched other people in the family, who knew how to cope with this particular vegetable. And there were a couple of other vegetables that were simply knew to us, broccoli for one. But that was a little easier to get used to than corn on the cob. It so happened that when I came to this country in September, as I mentioned, in October, of course, came Halloween. And we went with the kids of my aunt and uncle, and the idea of going around collecting candy was, I thought, a rather unusual habit, but one that I easily approved of. The one other thing that at first, again, was odd, was that a couple of times, my aunt would come to wake me up in the morning, and discover, to her horror that was lying under the bed. And of course what had happened was that during the night, a police car or ambulance had been in the area. I had heard a siren, and when you hear a siren, that means an air raid. And I had automatically gotten under the bed. But I got over that, just as I learned to eat corn on the cob, and quite like it now, I got over being accustomed to hearing a siren not meaning an air raid, but meaning that there is an ambulance going by, or the police is chasing a – a traffic violation, o-or whatever. Those things did, I must admit, seem at first a little different to me, but they're not the sort of things that, as a youngster, take very long to get used to.

Q: Were you ever homesick? Did you have a feeling of – of loss?

A: No.

Q: **[indecipherable]** had to leave?

A: No, I really did not. My pet white mouse died just before we left **Hannover**, and the last experiences and the events there were so unpleasant. The way I was kicked out of school, you see, was particularly unpleasant. The headmaster came into the classroom, read the announcement, and one other boy and I got up, picked up our things and left. I repressed that memory until I was reminded of it at this ceremony when I got my honorary degree, and the two of my former schoolmates were there, and told me about it. But that – that – no, I wa – there was a certain curiosity, which is why, as I told you, in '62, I – I went back, just to see what the place was like. And then I was there again in '83, when I was in **Germany** for quite a while, and I have since been back there to lecture and received an honorary degree. But there was never any sense that this was a place that I had lost. After all, they had kicked me out, rather emphatically. And so there was never a – a – a-any sense of an – at home was **Albany**, and remained that.

Q: Well, and – do you remember where you were on December 7th, 1941?

A: Yes. I had made very good friends with a local boy who was in school with me in junior high school in the ninth grade, and – and was in the same high school, **Jimmy Lawson**. And we made it a habit to meet on Sunday afternoon, listen to the

Metropolitan opera while playing chess. And on December 7th – we took turns at his house and our house. We were at his house playing chess, listening to the Metropolitan Opera, when that was interrupted with the announcement that the country was at war. So that was a – a somewhat dramatic event that I remember rather clearly. The other side of this was, you see, that when we came to this country in September 1940, the striking thing was coming from a country all blacked out, to one where the – they were – everything was lit up. Cause the ship stayed in the outside part of **New York** harbor overnight, before pulling in to the pier. And we hadn't seen a city with lights for quite a while. A year and nine months.

Q: Yeah. Do you need a break?

A: No, I'm okay.

Q: Okay, great. Well, let's – let's move onto wartime then. You were too young to serve at the time, but you nonetheless served after the war. You were drafted into the **U**.**S**. Army. Do you want to talk about your experiences, what you did?

A: Yes, the – the rule at the time that we're talking about was that you registered for the draft, and were pulled in when you were 18. Well, which went that my older brother, of course, was already in, a year and a half older. When I got to be 18, and was drafted, and took my basic training in what was then called Camp **Polk**, and

now Fort **Polk** in **Louisiana**. Then, after that, when was – had a few days at home before going to Camp **Stoneman** which is in **California**, near **Oakland** Army base. I was then shipped to **Japan**. In **Japan** I first spent some months assigned to depot supply of the fourth replacement depot. And by being one of two people in emergency supply, things that they needed, or had to get rid of, it meant being the **G**.**I**. on truck convoys, otherwise driven and manned by veterans of the Imperial Japanese Army working for the Americans, either picking up or delivering things, and that got me a – a good look at the central part of **Honshu**, the largest of the Japanese home islands. And I was very interested in that. I'd taken a course in Japanese history in college before I was drafted. And in the process of doing this, discovered that in **Yokohama**, where headquarters Eighth Army was, the occupation army, there was a school for the soldiers. And I, one day, had the truck convoy stop outside the school, and went in and talked to the administrator, and this **[indecipherable]** lady. I had worked it out so that by the time I was drafted, I had three years of teachers' college behind me. And I asked, did they need any teachers? And she said, oh yeah, we certainly do, because they're being rotated home. I'll take you to see the head of the school, Major **Dwight**. Major **Dwight** was very interested in ha – getting me, but explained that he could not order a transfer, that I would have to ask the major in charge of supply at the fourth replacement depot if

he would let me go. And I asked, and the major said yes. So the rest of the time that I was in **Japan**, in the army of occupation, I was in information and education section of headquarters Eighth Army; teaching **G**.**I**.**s** in the **Yokohama a –** Peace Corps, teaching American government, teaching American history, and then after a couple months, I'm also teaching some literacy classes for **G**.**I**.**s** who needed to learn how to read and write. And then in '47, when the American army decided to get rid of its draftees, that is, until the Korean war. Nobody knew the Korean war was coming, but what I meant is that in that period of time, they had enough regular army people, so I was discharged honorably, having in the meantime acquired two stripes in the army, and went back to college.

Q: Where did you go to college?

A: Since, as I mentioned before, I wanted to be a teacher, I was very fortunate that my parents picked **Albany**, in which there was what was then called **New York** State College for Teachers, **Albany**, now the State University of **New York** at **Albany**. And I enrolled there, on the assumption that I was going to teach high school social studies and Latin. And I took classes there, and because – this is, the war is on, I started there in January of '44. And just as they had had in the high school, a program where you could do your senior year in half a year, which I had done, accelerated, so that young men could get as much in before they had to go in

the army, as possible. They also had an acceleration program in the college, where you could take 10 hours in the summer, and 18 each semester, credit hours. And that's what I did. So I had, with this combination, living at home, going to college there, and various part time jobs, to help the family and myself. So that when I was drafted, I had, as I said, three years of college. When I – during my time in the school in **Yokohama**, the army had a program where you could take certain classes. And I did that, and I got six hours credit when I came out of the army, and went back in '47, in the summer, and in the fall. So that although my diploma didn't come til June of '48, in fact, I finished my four years in January, took a semester and a summer session in **Albany**, and then went to the University of **Chicago** for graduate work, because by this time, the **G.I.** bill led me to think of the possibility, not of teaching secondary school, as I had originally planned, and I had done my practice teaching in the ninth grade, but the possibility of getting a **PhD** and going into college teaching. And for that, I went to **Chicago**.

Q: Right, and you earned your **PhD** in 1951, your doctoral advisor was **Hans Rothfels**. Can you tell us a bit more about your work with **Rothfels**? Did it matter that you were both immigrants from **Germany**?

A: Well, actually, what happened was, when I went to **Chicago**, my plan had been to work on the diplomatic history of the late 19th century. I was interested in how

the Europeans got themselves into the horrors of the first World War, not so much the final crisis, but the 1860s, 70s, 80s, 90s, how they got organized in a way that led them to disaster. And so I wrote my first seminar paper on the crisis of a – eastern crisis of 1876. But I discovered very quickly in working with ro – listening to **Rothfels** in the classroom, and working with him, that his views of this **[indecipherable]** were the opposite of mine. Since I could not afford to change universities, I changed centuries, and worked with him on 20th century diplomacy, rather than 19th century. And out of that came not only my shift to 20th century, but a very important development that would affect my life thereafter, into today, in a rather unexpected way. When I wrote a seminar paper for **Rothfels**, it was not on 1876, it was on the May Crisis in German and Czech relations of 1938. And at the time that we're talking about, 1949 - 50, the first volumes of the documents on German foreign policy were coming out. These were edited volumes of captured German diplomatic documents. And in the volume that dealt with the May Crisis of 1938, they had inserted not only German foreign ministry documents, but a number of military documents, concerning invasion plans and so on, so forth. And, because I was working on my Master's thesis already, and had decided to do them on German-Soviet relations in the nonaggression pact, '39 to '41, I was unpacking the huge collection of **Nuremberg** documents that the law library at **Chicago** had

acquired, and which is now the big collection of the center for research libraries in **Chicago**. I discovered very quickly, that at least in my opinion, the people in one hall in **England**, who were putting these volumes together were making mistakes with the military documents. And in the footnotes to my seminar paper, at the appropriate points, mentioned these. **Rothfels**, after returning the seminar paper to me, called me into his office, and said that I should pull these all together and look for any others, and prepare a critical note on these volumes for the "**Journal of Modern History**," one of the professional journals in the field, that is edited in and produced by the history department at **Chicago**. Needless to say, I did what **Rothfels** had told me to do, and wrote, and then the "**Journal of Modern History**" published in March of '51, a critical note on the documents on German foreign policy. At the time, as I was going towards the finishing of my **PhD** dissertation on the subject of German-Soviet relations, academic jobs in this country were practically nonexistent, because faculties everywhere were shrinking. This was the only time in modern American history when enrollments were dropping and dropping quite drastically in higher education, as the **G.I.s** were finishing their education. But I got a call – and so the university had no leads, or I had no leads whatsoever for any job, until I got a letter from a Dr. **Fritz Epstein**, who was recruiting for a documents project in the German archives, and who had seen this

critical note. I did not know at the time, that he was, in fact, one of the people that I was criticizing. But he read that, and he wrote to me and explained that he was recruiting staff for a documents program. He was flying to the west coast. Would I meet him at **Midway** airport, between planes, and we'd talk? Needless to say, I was very interested in meeting him at **Midway** airport, which under the circumstances seemed appropriate, since it's named for one of the critical battles of the second World War. And he and I started talking. And he was so interested, and I was so fascinated, that he decided to take a later plane than the one he was booked for. We spent hour – literally several hours just sitting, talking about documents and about the new edition which had just come out, by the do – of the **Hitler** table talk, and on all kinds of things. And we got through later, I got an offer of a job on the war documentation project. Needless to say, I accepted, and after defending the dissertation in August of '51, moved to **Alexandria**, where the records were. But it was essentially the suggestion that **Rothfels** had made, for me to do this, that got me into the – that job in the first place. The only other interesting contact that I had was, that he was the only faculty member in my three years at **Chicago**, who at one point had a group of us, myself included, graduate students, at his house, at his place. And all – at that – on that occasion, his wife told me what had happened to him in November of 1938. He was – he – the – both **Rothfels** and his wife were

very devout Lutherans, but the family background was Jewish. They came to collect him in November ’38, and his wife explained that he was in bed. He’d lost a leg in November in 1914 on the western front, and his prosthesis was being repaired. And the men who came to pick him up said, well, we’ll be back in half an hour – this is what she – what she told me, with a stretcher, and they did come back half an hour later with a stretcher, and took him to the local police lock up. And the sergeant in charge had been in **Rothfels** company in November 1914, and told the two men to take him out the back and take him home. Soon thereafter he moved to **England**, and ended up in the same internment camp as my father. Came from there then to **Brown** University for a short time, and from there to **Chicago**. So, that was the one time I was at their apartment in **Chicago**, and his wife told me this story about his rather unusual deliverance in November of 1938. I was his research assistant for a quarter. University of **Chicago**, at least then, was on a quarter system, not a semester system. And he was then beginning to go back to **Germany** semesters at a time, to **Tübingen**. So actually when I finished the **PhD**, he was not there, but I was, in effect, his last American **PhD**. And his classroom presence was in certain ways very – I think very influential for me, because he analyzed the students, and got students to look at ways which were unconventional in a way, compared to most of the textbooks, and the – I found that very challenging, and very interesting. And

perhaps that helped me a little bit later on when I was doing the teaching. And we stayed in touch, and I did go see him once in **Germany** before he died, in the 70s.

Q: Was he ever happy at **Chicago**? Was he ever happy in the **U**.**S**.? I mean, he did go back to a regular position. **[indecipherable]**

A: It – it's very hard for me to say, because he was not the kind of person to share his views and attitudes. I have no doubt that he was very pleased to have a decent job, in a first rate university. I did not have the impression that he and the other members of the history department were on very close terms. But, he continued to have at least a minimal tie to **Chicago** afterwards, and so – and he certainly had a succession of graduate students there, of whom I was chronologically the last, but certainly not the only one. And at least my predecessor in this situation **Phil Wolfson**, also played a larger role, and I a very minor role in the research that he did on the German opposition to **Hitler**, on which he produced the first important book.

Q: Well, let's move onto your early career. You mentioned already the war documentation project that **Epstein** recruited you for. Could you explain what that was, and what that work entailed?

A: The American air force, and offi – Human Resources Research Institute at **Maxwell** Air Force Base in **Alabama**, have made a contract with the Bureau for

Applied Social Research of **Columbia** University, to do some exploring in the captured German records that had been brought to this country. My work on this was physically located, if you will, in the old torpedo factory in **Alexandria**. This is a set of buildings crea – built in the first World War, for the making of mines and torpedoes that could be loaded directly onto ships on the **Potomac** River. In the second World War, it was the place where the American army deposited its World War II records, temporarily at least. And a portion of this was called the German Military Document Section, **GMDS**, where the captured German records were. To begin with, I was asked to do something slightly different, actually, than research in those records. At the time we're talking about now, '51 - '52 and thereafter, the captured records in American government custody, were all secured and classified. And we had to have a clearance to work there, in the building. But there were already substantial numbers of German captured records that one way or another, had ended up in all kinds of places in the **United States**. And in order to have some sense of what was going on, it seemed important to get some idea of what was where. And so, my first job really, was preparing what came to be my first book, the "**Guide to Captured German Documents**." Which was partly inventory, partly book listing of captured German records that had ended up in the Library of Congress, in the National Archives, in the Institute for Jewish Affairs in **New York**

City, in depositories elsewheres in the **United States**. And in fact that also meant that in the Library of Congress, where there was lots in the manuscript division, I was the one who got to organize these, and set them up, and try to organize them. Thereafter, like the others, for the most part on the War Documentation Project, were on what was called, Project **Alexander**. And Project **Alexander** was the very secret cover name for our research into Soviet partisans in World War II. There was an advisory committee on this, for this project, headed by **Phil Moseley**, Professor **Phil Moseley** of **Harvard** University. And what we were asked to do by the air force for them, obviously, they were paying for this, through **Columbia**, if you will, on a contract basis, was the – what – what was actually going on in the German occupied portions of the **Soviet Union** where there were all these guerillas? And the general – the decision as we worked on this was, using the German records that were in **Alexandria**, we decided to have two kinds of studies; topical and regional. I got to do the topical study, on the role of air power in partisan warfare. Needless to say, our air force was very interested in that study on how the Soviets used air power in support of partisan warfare, and how the Germans used air power in fighting partisan warfare. And I found that very interesting in studying the relevant records, insofar as they were available. And many, many, many, many we – decades later, in 2005, noticed when I was in **Minsk**, the capital of **Belarus**, and their

outdoor museum, World War II museum, they had what they call a decoder. A **DC3**, one of the many that we had provi – the **United States** provided to the Russians under **[indecipherable]** and which was the key airplane in Soviet support of partisan warfare, for flying in supplies, flying out wounded, bringing in officers and so on, so forth. But they had one of these American planes that I had written about, on display for me to look at in the original. The regional study that I was to make, was of the **Yelnya-Dorogobuzh** area in the **Smolensk Oblast**. And that proved very interesting, because it's really about the only anti-partisan campaign the Germans ever had in World War II that was, from their point of view, successful, as opposed to all the other anti-partisan campaigns that my colleagues worked on, **Bryansk**, o-on other parts of **Belarus**, on the **Ukraine**, on the **Caucasus**, and so on. And then we had specialized on psychological warfare, and partisan warfare and so on. And then these studies were published in classified form originally, by the air force, after they published my guide to captured German documents. And then they were declassified. And then one of the scholars who worked there, on the war documentation project, the – **John Armstrong**, who made his career in the University of **Wisconsin** in **Madison**, sort of edited them into one big book. And the other project that I then did, was to publish in English, captured partisan documents that the Germans had either seized from groups, or picked up

from dead partisans. And I published th – I mean, the air force published a big book of mine, "**Selected Soviet Documents on the Partisan Movement**." I also did a collection of Soviet partisan diaries that the Germans had seized. But for reasons which I don't understand, the air force never published that. So that exists, this collection of diaries exists, if it does anywhere, only in unpublished form. When Professor **Armstrong** published this big book that **Wisconsin** published, "**Soviet Partisans in World War II**," he added a number of these specialized studies, his own survey of the whole partisan movement and very substantial portions of my book of selected Soviet sources, but no part is my ri – remember, of the unpublished collection of partisan diaries. Before I left the project in '54, there were also – they were beginning to assign us some other specialized studies in this field. While I was working on the Soviet sources on the partisan movement, one of my colleagues, **Eric Waldman**, was doing one on the **Germany** – German locally recruited police, the **Ordnungspolizei**, and another member, **Alexander Dallin**, was doing a study which was published, on the Romanian occupied portion of the **Soviet Union**. That is to say, after the Germans and Romanians invaded **Russia** in '41, the Germans turned over to the Romanian government, a substantial portion of the **Ukraine** to administer. **Transnistria**, it was called. And **Dallin** was assigned to do a study of

what happened in this. And there were probably others, but by that time, I had left the project.

Q: Which other historians, or later historians did you meet at the war documentation project? You mentioned already **Dallin**, you mentioned **Armstrong**.

A: Okay, I mentioned **Eric – Eric Waldman**, whose later career was in **Canada**. **Willie Moll**, whose later career was in this country. Very important was **Raul Hilberg**, who at that point in time, unlike the rest of us, had not yet finished his **PhD** dissertation, but did so, in effect, at **Columbia**, while working in part – full time with us in the war documentation project, and who subsequently went on to a career most of his life at verm – University of **Vermont**. Another person was **Earl Ziemke**, who went from the war documentation project, a year or two after I did, to the office of the chief of military history, and published a number of very important books while there. And then moved to the University of **Georgia**, in **Athens**, **Georgia**, and published some more important books from there. There were a couple others who did not – I mean, who went on with their lives and careers, but did not play that important and professional role, as **Ziemke** and **Armstrong** and **Hilberg** did.

Q: And – and when you describe about the atmosphere there, in the torpedo factory, I mean how was it like to be the first to see these documents? I mean, how did you feel about that?

A: Well, it was very interesting. You got a sense of discovery that you couldn't get elsewhere, because while obviously some intelligence specialists and other had pawed through some of this stuff, mo-most of it you were looking at for the first time, and – and that could really be quite exciting and interesting. I never forget we sta – for reasons I cannot now tell you, we – we – one of the collections that I was set on early, was the **[speaks German]**, the **Reichs** commissioner for strengthening **Germandom**(ph). And there they were the files on the individual German military leaders, who expected to acquire huge estates in eastern **Europe**. And I never forget the **[indecipherable]** who spent, after he was canned, temp – on – in the winter of '41 - '42, and spent his time riding around **Poland**, looking for an estate that the government would steal for him before he returned to active duty in the spring of '43. And they eventually gave him one, that is, that they stole from the Poles, that was worth, he thought an inadequate one and a quarter million marks. And he was very unhappy that they didn't steal a bigger one for him. It gave me a kind of insight into the German military of World War II, that I had, I must admit, not had up to that point. And the whole business – I mean, I discovered later, and – when I

was working in the federal archiving **[indecipherable]** the files on the bribery of all of these top officials. But I must say, I was somewhat surprised, shall we say? And it was also interesting to – just to see the differences in local handling of things. That is to say that it – one German division would operate one way, and another division 20 miles away would operate somewhat differently. That is to say the extent to which local initiatives and different approaches to issues, in what people refer to as a totalitarian society, but in which there was more differentiation, if you will, at the local level than one might originally have anticipated. The other thing that really hit me was that – how the horror invaded everything. The welfare organizations end up with corpses that they don't know what to do with, you know. And the party organizations and welfare organizations are deciding whom to let starve. The – it's not somehow a segregated, carefully compartmentalized portion, the evil part, but rather, it's sort of pervasive. And that, I have to admit, came as something of a surprise. The other part of this that was interesting was that one could periodically help people, ei-either who were there and who needed help, or who came there. I was able to help the ger – indirectly, the German scholar with whom I was working on a biography of one of the key figures of the German resistance to **Hitler**, get some records declassified so that he could use them, since they were still under security classification, in a blanket way. A key figure of the

German resistance came to visit there. A man by the name of **Gisevius**, whose book, "**To the Bitter End**" is rather well known. I got to meet him. And then he asked me for help. He wanted to have **Xerox** copies o-of those parts of the police reports that mentioned him. And they had explained to him that th – he couldn't have them. And I went to ask, well what – why can't he have them? And it turned out to be very simple. They could lend and make photocopies for government agencies, but they had no way of taking money from anybody to buy anything. So we arranged for them to lend them to the photo duplication section of the Library of Congress, which they could do, and the people there could, of course, sell **Gisevius** photocopies of the documents he was interested in. And there were other such things where one could occasionally assist somebody o-out of simply no – working in this wa – what we refer to, since it was not air conditioned in the summer, the black hole of **Calcutta**. Because you're there on the **Potomac**, humidity is very high, and no air conditioning. It – it was not physically very pleasant, but the army people were very helpful, and so it was an intriguing way to begin working in the profession.

Q: Yeah. And after two one year teaching positions, you were hired again, to work with the captured German records. This was in 1956, and the assignment was to microfilm all – captured German records before they were returned to **Germany**.

And this project was under the auspices of the American Historical Association, went on for several years. Could you talk about this project, and what your role was?

A: What happened was this: when the – the governments of – of the **United States** and **Great Britain**, and they each – they jointly controlled, and there was a British representative in **Alexandria**, as there was an American one in **England**, decided to start sending the records home, under an arrangement of their being American records. And if you want, I'll explain how that came to be. But people then became scholars in this country, became very alarmed that – how could we assure access to these records, after they were back in **Germany**? And a group of scholars operating privately and independently in **New York**, got together and set up a committee for the study of war documents. They got money from the **Ford** Foundation. They had a meeting with government officials, in the Library of Congress, with **Verner Clapp**, who was then the deputy librarian of Congress. And I was invited to this meeting, from **Kentucky**, where I was then teaching **[coughs]** Excuse me. I suspect on **Fritz Epstein's** recommendation. And it was agreed that we would try to film, with the army's agreement, cooperation, as the records were declassified, so that there would be this sequence, declassification, microfilming, return to the federal republic. The American Historical Association, and the **Ford** Foundation agreed

that the hand – the financial handling would be through the **AHA**. And then subsequently, after the **Ford** Foundation money ran out – excuse me **[coughing]** da – **Lillian Dowman**(ph) put up money for a while. And then, the Old Dominion Foundation paid for many years of it. But the money went through the American Historical Association, and this independent committee became the committee on war documents of the **AHA**. I was ha – hired by the **AHA** in the technical sense then, to be the first director, and had the money to hire one professional, and one secretarial assistant. And to pay for one person who was a micro-photographer, but who was, in effect, provided by the National Archives. So, in May of ’56, I moved to **Washington**, and set up this program, and the policies for it. And han – at the beginning, very important decisions and influences to consider. I had managed to persuade the committee to put the microfilms that we were going to make, into the National Archives, not the Library of Congress. And I was persuaded by – or indoctrinated perhaps is the best term, by the head of exhibits and publications of the National Archives, a man by the name of **Lysinger**(ph), that it was a mistake to film selectively. And I fell in with this very, very quickly, because I had been using, in the National Archives, for my own research, some of the microfilm the State Department had deposited there from the foreign office microfilm. And whatever they thought they were doing in **[indecipherable]** hall, it was editing, and it always

meant that the same German file either didn't get filmed at all, or got filmed in bits and pieces on different rolls of microfilm, sometimes as many as six. And then eventually, if you wanted to make sure you had everything, you'd have to go to **Germany** and look at the original file, which in fact I ended up doing. Furthermore, as **Lysinger**(ph) explained to me that there were two other reasons to film, occasionally selectively, but generally throughout, was that you spend your money on filming, not on selecting, which meant that you could produce much more. And there's no question that this helped us sustain the program, because as Professor **Hale**(ph), who was the third head of the committee, but headed it longer than anybody else, told me that if you go to a foundation for microfilm, they're not much interested. But if you can tell them that for 30 or 35,000 dollars a year, you can turn a million frames into the National Archives, they are somewhat more interested. The other thing that **Lysinger**(ph) explained to me, that I was barely conscious of from my earlier work with the **Nuremberg** material, was that of course, all governments in World War II, used the poorest paper possible, because they wanted to use their resources for things which were a lot more important than requisitions for paper clips. And therefore, we needed to film, in part for access, to be sure, which was the original concept of the committee; that American, German, British, any other scholars could have acc – could be guaranteed access. But that we were

also filming for preservation. And having seen some of the **Nuremberg** mimeographed stuff starting to crumble, I did not take much indoctrination. But, as I said, **Lysinger**(ph) really put these things to me in a way so that I – when I set this whole thing up, we did a teeny bit of selective, but mostly filming throughout, and that then continued thereafter, long after I was out of it on the – teaching in **Kentucky** or in **Michigan**. But that meant in that – that it was afterwards possible for the army and the project to cooperate. When the army started putting money in, especially for the filming of the military records, they would contract with a micor – with a – for the microfilming, and the committee's professional people would do the descriptions. So that when it was all over, of the material that was at one time in **Alexandria**, let me put it this way. Somewheres between 90 and 95 percent was film. The material that was in **England**, at least 85 percent, and probably 90 percent went back to **Germany** un-filmed. And I remain convinced of the importance of this, and I have to say I have become more convinced in recent years, of the importance of filming throughout, because while lots of people are increasingly thinking about what to do about the fact that the Holocaust survivors are either dead or not going to be with us very much longer, the papers, the records of the Holocaust era, are disappearing too. Either physically, for the paper, or electronically if they're electronic records. So that in 50 years or a hundred years

from now, not only will there be no human witnesses of those terrible events, any paper, or any electronic records will be either gone, or inaccessible. So on this particular side of the issue, I have become, if you will, more convinced of the necessity of total reproduction, either in microfilm, or in high density engraving on plates, than I was when we started. And the other policy that I insisted on at the beginning, and that to the best of my knowledge was followed for – through the rest of the project, was that where the western allies had not acquired what I would call the – the top level records – and the two examples that I recall very distinctly were the German labor front, and the German welfare – the Nazi welfare organization. As a general policy, whatever was there should be filmed, so that people would have at least something from lower levels, that would give them some idea of what the – the policies and issues were. And later on, when the army was beginning to run out of money for filming, I urged them, and I believe they followed, on a somewhat similar basis. That is to say, all the top level military records were filmed. But when they had to choose among the division records, after a while, I told them all the air force field divisions, whatever there is, all the security divisions, whatever there is. Whatever the field training divisions, whatever there is, because there you – you were again dealing with an important subject, but only fragmentary surviving records.

Q: Yet, if you were to summarize, what did the microfilming project achieve? What does it mean for scholarship, just to get that idea across?

A: Well, it means that there is access, now and into the future, of an enormous quantity of German records from the 1930s and 40s, on essentially all aspects of events, and that can be accessed in **Washington**, that can be accessed elsewheres by either purchase or borrowing. And that for one of the most dramatic areas of world history, and the largest war ever fought that we know about, and the horrendous catastrophe of the Holocaust, there are records that people who are interested can have access to, essentially today, without restrictions, and that they can make the most of. And that there was no opportunity, as there was after the first World War, for the postwar German government to restrict access, even if it wanted to. I'm not suggesting that with certain exceptions, the German postwar government has wanted to, but needless to say, in the 1950s, nobody knew this, and we were looking at the past experience, which people had, as opposed to the future experience, which for very good reasons, people hadn't had yet. And there was one other aspect to this that I think is important, and that is, it created, if you will, a kind of precedent. Why keep the records of country **X** closed, if those of country **Y** are open and accessible? Why not open American records for the period on which the German records are open? So that there is, if you will, a – a – a certain impetus, if

you will, that the declassification, and then microfilming of German records has had for the opening of other records. There is one final point that's closely related to this, I would argue, and that is that those who might have preferred closure of German records in postwar **Germany**, realistically didn't have a chance. And the dramatic example of this that I would site, is the German scholar **Derscha**(ph), who wanted access to some personnel records of the German foreign ministry, which were denied to him. And who then discovered that they were on microfilm in **Washington**. The – the possibilities, in other words, and the temptations simply haven't been there. And while I don't want this to be read as a general attack, cause as I said, the – the German government of federal republic was on the whole, very cooperative. There was never much of a temptation to go in another direction.

Q: Yeah. One of your major publications after the dissertation is related to your work with the captured records, you published **Hitler's** second book. Republished it in German, with a German publisher in 1961. What is this second book? What is the story behind this peculiar document?

A: In the 19 later 50s and 60s, I was working on the origins of the second World War and German foreign policy. In the process I saw a couple of references to **Hitler** having dictated another book. I was back teaching, first at **Kentucky**, then at **Michigan**. But in the summer of '58, I went back to assist my successor as director

of the project, Dr. **Dagmar Perman**, and was going through piles of stuff to describe and set up for microfilming and came across this one sheaf, it's around 300 pages of typescript, which was labeled as a draft, or partial draft of "**Mein Kampf**." And when I started reading it, it was perfectly obvious this is no draft of "**Mein Kampf**," it's clear from the opening lines, literally, that this was a second book. Not long after, two things happened, which made the publication possible. One was, that it turned out that back in '45, after this document was confiscated at the Nazi public party's publishing house in **Munich** by the Americans, they had made a microfilm of it back in '45, and provided it to the British. And under those circumstances, the British representative in **Alexandria** allowed me to have a copy made from their microfilm, so I could start working on preparing a text for publication. I got subseq – abou – a few months later, a letter from **Rothfels**, who by this time was associated with the Institute for Contemporary History in **Munich**, that they had heard about this book, and he sent me the correspondence, and I wrote back and told him yes, I just found it. And so, it seemed best to publish it in **Germany**, in the Institute's publication series. And i-it took a while, and there were problems with the Bavarian government, which was very hesitant and put a publication run limit on the print of the book. And the, excuse me, Institute had to deal with the **Hitler** heirs, to make sure there weren't going to be problems about the rights, which they bought for a

few hundred marks from them. And so then I put it out in 1961 in German, and it took me til 2003 to get a publisher to put it out in English.

Q: During the 70s and 80s, you were very much known as the specialist on Nazi foreign policy. You published two volumes, "**The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany**," and they're still among the standard works on – on the topic. Why did you choose the topic of Nazi foreign policy at the time?

A: I chose the topic because then, as I might add, still today, there is a new book on the origins of World War I every six weeks. But there didn't seem to – there doesn't seem to be similar interest in the origins of World War II. And while I have nothing against people studying the origins of World War I, having at one time myself thought of doing something on the diplomacy of the late 19th century, that set the stage for the first World War, it seemed to me preposterous that nobody had done anything similar, seriously looking at the origins of World War II. I was convinced, and I'm must – then, when I started on this, and remain convinced today, that after the experience of World War I, which was most unpleasant for all concerned, winners and losers, there was no one else on the face of the globe who was going to start another World War, than the Germans. It was true, and it happened, that local wars would be started by others. A civil war in **Spain**. But that was a civil war. The Italians were going to revenge their earlier defeat by the people of **Abyssinia**, and

what you really had was the last of the great colonial wars. The Japanese had fought one war with **China** and one with **Russia**, and now would fight another one with **China**. There was always the possibility of another war in **South America** between countries that had been at war repeatedly in the 19th century. There was always the possibility of some war between who knows, the Hungarians and the Romanians, who were always itching to do that, but fortunately didn't. But starting another World War, nobody after 1918, other than possibly the Germans, were going to do that. And so, I figured that since nobody else was doing anything seriously on the origins of World War II, the best way to do this was to organize it around the place where the initiative came from. And while there were people in **Germany** in the per – in the 1920s, who were thinking seriously of the possibility of maybe trying to take back some of the land they'd been forced to return to **Poland**, or – o-or who knows what else, no one other than **Hitler** was thinking of anything bigger. And so, I decided that the way to organize an origins of World War II book, was around German foreign policy after 1933. And aster – after I had gotten into it for a while, it became clear to me, and by discussion with a man who was doing this from the institutional side, whom I got to know, Professor **[indecipherable] Jacobson**(ph), that I'd best do this in two books, rather than one. Now, they are now available in

one book, but I'm talking about when I was doing them, at the time, so out of this came the two books on **Hitler's** foreign policy.

Q: From our perspective, 2012, do you think that Nazi foreign policy and international diplomacy during the 1930s are topics still worth exploring, or have they run their course?

A: Well, there is now, ironically it appeared last year, what literally one other book in the field, and this was the British historian **Zara Steiner**, who had written the book, "**The Triumph of the Dark**," which is an European international history of the 30 – of the '33 - '39 period. And I have a very high opinion of her, and of her work, which follows a book she did on the 1920s. Big book, very big book. But I think that there may well be issues in there that are still worth looking at. But other than her, and as I said, the book just came out last year. People just don't seem much interested. They're interested in the war itself, and they continue, as I s – told y – mentioned, to turn out books on the origins of the first World War, another one comes out every year. But I do not feel, frankly, that I have a copyright on either the 1930s or the war, and that if someone else would like to do this, they are welcome. The one caution that I would put in there is that the amount of records that is available, is very big, and you better be prepared to spend a lot of time.

Q: Yeah. The – the German foreign office itself, as an institution, has recently attracted renewed attention. There was a – a German historical commission looking in to the history of the German foreign office during the 1930s, and during the war and the Holocaust. And the book was published in 2010, called "**The German das amt**(ph)." Made a bit of splash in the German press. What do you think of that study?

A: Well, I wa – I have the book and I've read it, but it's a very interesting and I know at least a few of the people who've been involved in preparing it. I think it's quite thoughtful, but it does not, in my judgment dig sufficiently carefully into some of the people involved, and their actions. Let me – the best way to put this clear is an example. One of the central figures in the German foreign ministry in the 30s and 40s, was **Ribbentrop's** Secretary of State, **Ernst von Weizsäcker**, who was tried after the war, sent to jail for a few years. At one time during the war, when the Germans were rounding up Jews to be killed, they also tried to get them from the occupied countries. And when they started after the Jews of **Norway**, the Finnish – excuse me, the Swedish government, informally sounded in **Berlin**, whether it would satisfy the Germans if they took these Jews into **Sweden**. That sounding was made to **Weizsäcker**, and he waved it off. The document was published, in fact, by the Germans, in the series a – the German edited series of the wartime foreign office

documents from December ’41 to May of ’45. This, of course, is why the next year, when the Germans went after the Danish Jews, the Swedish government, instead of quietly asking, is it okay if we take them, announced on the radio, we will take them, and the Danes put the Jews on boats and sent them to **Sweden**. Now, that complex is completely missing from this. **Weizsäcker’s** role, in the negative sense, which ironically would have a positive impact for the Danish Jews, but negative for many from **Norway**. And yet, it seems to me that that’s an area where the people who put together **Das Amt**(ph) certainly did not dig carefully enough into, in this instance, the published record. We’re not talking about some great secret here. The document – the relevant key document was published many years ago, and is in libraries, and not just in mine. And I think that there are other areas where a more careful look – now what, of course, I don’t know, is what, if anything, was edited out by the official authors of the book, who had people working for them, who may very well – I have no way – no inside knowledge here – turn up things that for one reason or another they didn’t include, or get around to. But it is, at least, I would argue, a respectable start into a set of issues about continuity and change, that is helpful.

Q: If you turn to your – your own work, your opus **[indecipherable]** the book that most contemporaries now associate you with, is the one **[indecipherable]** history of

World War II, "**A World At Arms**," which appeared in 1994. What moved you to take on such a vast project?

A: In 1978, I sent off to the University of **Chicago** press, the text of the second volume of the study of **Hitler's** foreign policy. And I had to decide what to do next. And I will tell you why, of the various possibilities, which I won't go into, I decided to do a World War II history. I'm talking about '78. I was very dissatisfied with the existing literature on the war, for the following reasons, most of which, I'm afraid, still hold. One was that most of those who've written on the war, make the same mistake the Germans and Japanese made during the war, it never occurred to them that the earth is round. You would get long discussions of the war in **Europe**, quite separate from long discussions of the war in the **Pacific**. But the leaders had to make decisions about both, as they were both going on. The most recent edition of one of the major, well-known books on the war, I won't mention the authors here, in fact comes out in two volumes. The European war, the **Pacific** war. But they did not take place on different planets, in different centuries. They took place on the same cent – in the same century, on the same planet, and choices, allocation of resources, decisions about where to launch offensives or defensive **[indecipherable]** process, all had to be made by the folks at the top, about both simultaneously. From – a second aspect of the literature that I was very disturbed

about was – especially in this country and **England**, was a reliance on German military memoirs, especially those translated into English. And since this is, to a very considerable extent, a collection of garbage, the – people had been, and allowed themselves to be misled. I see recently – I won't mention the author, a big book on World War II, where the person still believes the fairy tale that Field Marshall **Manstein** put into his personal memoirs, that he had ordered **[indecipherable]** isolated in **Stalingrad** to break out. The reality is he made – gave no such order, but fabricated it in his memoirs. The oten – third factor that I found very troubling, was the absence of purpose from most of the literature. The Germans did not start the war because the French would not allow **Hitler** to see the **Eiffel Tower**. There was a purpose to the war, and it was not that they had an army they didn't know what to do with one weekend. The war was to start a demographic revolution on the globe, of which killing all Jews was to be a central part. Now I've always argued it is not a coincidence that when **Hitler** ordered in writing, the killing of the handicapped, in late October '39, he dated it for September '39. And nobody can persuade me that that's because they didn't have a calendar. He also, in his speeches, published by the Nazi regime, in – during the war, would repeatedly refer to his promise to kill all Jews in **Europe**, on 30 – January '39, always said he did it on – for September '39. Now these two quite deliberate mis-datings, are, in my

personal opinion, an interesting way of providing insight into the way **Hitler** and his associates were thinking. That is to say, the demographic revolution was what the globe – what the war was about. It was not that he always wanted to see **Warsaw**, okay? When a killing squad is assigned to **Rommel** in the summer of ’42, it was not because **Rommel** was sent into **Egypt** so that they could dismantle the pyramids, and re-erect them outside **Berlin**. It was so that they – he could supervise the killing of all Jews in **Egypt** and **Palestine**, before the area was turned over to **Italy**, as **Hitler** planned to do, and he didn’t trust the Italians to do a thorough job. And he had very good reasons for – for this. The war wasn’t started, as I said, without some purpose. And much of the literature on the war, completely disregards what was about. And I’ve always thought it was very interesting, that in the winter of ’41 - ’42, in the German records, the diary of **Fremborg**(ph), the correspondence of **Stief**(ph), they comment on the fact, there are no trains to send winter uniforms to our soldiers who are freezing to death. While on the same tracks there are plenty of trains to take Jews from central **Europe** to eastern – to be killed. The priorities of the regime, from time to time, were very clear, but that was missing from the literature. A fourth part of the literature that alarmed me back in ’78, was that there had been, in the earlier 70s, and mid-70s, very large scale declassification of documents. And most people writing on the wall, found it most expedient not to

look at them. And I knew from my work on foreign policy, that that's a very time consuming business, and you have to get some grant money to spend time in archives, but wasn't it about time that these things were utilized? So I decided – and by this time, you understand, I'm ho – I'm holding an endowed chair professorship at the university. With it comes a research and travel allocation that – that's what I'm gonna do. Although it takes a whil – it's gonna take quite a while, but since nobody else has done it, which is part of why I did my book on the origins of World War II, I figured I'd give it a try.

Q: And it took you 16 years? Did I calculate it correctly?

A: Not quite, it took 14.

Q: Okay.

A: Because it took two years for them to get out the book.

Q: I see.

A: But the – but the text went off to the publisher in '92.

Q: Right. Was it easy to find a publisher for such an ambitious project?

A: Well, the first publisher, after they saw being part of it, decided that they could not publish a thousand page book on World War II, and so I said okay, though they subsequently published a thousand page book on the British navy in World War II. And I kid them periodically as to the number of copies of that that they may have

sold. The next publisher was a university publisher in this country, who got confused as to what to do, and so on, so forth, so I shifted. The **Cambridge** University Press editor came to this country to see me. And they decided they would do it, and a – since they had just published a book on an important figure, for which they were charging either 80 or 90 dollars, I insisted I would not sign with them, unless they would promise to keep the cost of the hard bound book under 40 dollars, which they proceeded to do. And it was kind of interesting that when they sent – I suggested that they keep the margins smaller, and that would keep down the number of pages. And they assured to – I was informed, politely, that they had been publishing books in a certain way for several hundred years, and they were not going to change, even if it would save a hundred pages. So, it came out, and – in '94, and they had a marvelous copy editor, whom I got to know, who was in the **Wrens**, the women's navy, British navy in World War II, and who was very good, and did a fabulous job of copy editing. And they printed it, and at least to begin with, the hardbound was, I think, 35.95, or 36.95, and the softbound was well under 20 dollars.

Q: So beyond the competitive pricing of the book, how do you explain the success of this book? Which nerve did you hit with it?

A: Well, I think that there are a number of people who have told me they like the comprehensive coverage. They like the fact that if they want to, they can dip into it, read a chapter on the home front, read a chapter on weapons systems. Read something about the **Pacific** war, if they're interested, read something about the war in **Europe**. They – the style appears to appeal to people. Scholars like it because in the back notes, I refer to the archives, and to issues that still need to be investigated. And although I repeatedly am told that the – when faculty assign it as a text in World War II courses, at first the students are aghast, because they see the size of the book. They then like it. It reads well, they tell me, and in one school, where it was dropped for another, the students rebelled and said, we want that one back. The price has – has unquestionably helped, and of course, by the time tens, and by now hundred thousands are in print, that means that the students who use their computers, or their bookstores, can find used copies at very reasonable prices, at a time when other textbooks, including ones in this field, are getting more and more and more expensive, a-and this one is accessible financially. And of course, I always remind people who talk about the size, I tell them it was a big war, and that's not my fault. And that they are – that is is a multiuse book. That in the summer they can use it as a doorstop, and that in the winter they can keep it in the trunk of their car, and then they will not skid on ice, and if they run into a snowdrift,

they have something to read. So there are all kinds of advantages, in addition to the actual contents o-of it. And th-there's been translated into German, Spanish, Polish, I thi – I'm not – Italian. And it's supposed to be translated into one or two other languages, but I have no idea whether it will or not. The only one that I checked against the original was the German edition.

Q: Okay. **[break]** Which are the major scholarly debates you found yourself involved in, over the course of your career?

A: Well, the first one came when I was asked by the quarterly for contemporary history in **Munich**, in view of my prior writings and work, to write a article on the German decision to invade the **Soviet Union**. And since I had worked on this a good deal, I wrote an article for them in German, had the German corrected by my father, and sent it off, and they published it. We're talking about around '54 or five. And then, two German scholars responded with an article arguing quite differently, and I was given the opportunity to respond to them. Ironically, the key figure who wrote disputing what I had written was **Andreas Hillgruber**, a German scholar who ironically then eventually came around to my view, and in his bi – big book on the subject of **Hitler's** strategy, took my position rather than the one, that along with **Seraphim**, who had been his dissertation director, had taken in their response to me. Thereafter, I was not really so much in direct disputes, as taking positions

that others very often did not agree with. And that continues to be the case. And that is true, particularly I would argue, i-in relation to Holocaust studies, where the tendency in the last 30 years or so, has been to do **Hamlet** without the Prince of **Denmark**. Everybody wants to look and does look at this district commissioner, that military figure, that local governor, that Gauleiter, or whatnot, but nobody wants to look at **Hitler** any more. And that's one area there, where I rather disagree. That is to say, in a society, not just in a dictatorial society, but also in a democratic society, the tone is set at the top. And then people try to accommodate themselves. They have lots of discretion and accommodate themselves in different ways, and do it differently. But unless one looks at where and what the impetus is, people miss what's going on. And I think it is interesting, to take just the one rather dramatic example, but there has just appeared a big book on the Holocaust in **Romania** by **Jean Ancel**. And he makes it very clear that there's lots of persecution of Jews in **Romania** and by Romanians; the Iron Guard, the government and so on. And there are some pogroms. But it's when the dictator of **Romania**, **Antonescu** meets with **Hitler** personally on the 12th of June, 1941, and **Hitler** tells him that after – that when the newly occupied territories fall under German and Romanian control, all the Jews there are to be killed. And it is then that the Romanians change. And having killed and persecuted lots of Jews before, and having killed maybe a couple

thousand, in the following two years they kill over 400,000. I would suggest that there is a difference when a degree becomes a differ – difference in kind. That aspect, you see, I – I see differently from most. The other aspect which I see differently from most is that people keep yakking about killing the Jews in **Europe**, and being unwilling to face up to **Hitler's** view that all on earth needed to be killed. When the Germans killed the Jews in the **Dodecanese** islands in the **Aegean**, they are living in what by German definition is a part of **Asia**. When they attach a killing squad to **Rommel's** headquarters in north **Africa**, at least on my atlas, neither **Egypt** nor **Palestine** is a part of **Europe**. And what people simply don't want to face up to is that **Hitler** personally at great length explained to the grand ra – mufti of **Jerusalem**, that Jews on the whole earth have to be killed. But people find that too frightening, I guess, to think about. And s-so therefore, they keep talking about **Europe**, **Europe**, **Europe**, **Europe**, and ignore the fact that it was the military operations of the **Soviet Union**, **Great Britain** and the **United States** that essentially confined a worldwide scheme, to **Europe**. So there are some issues there, which I continue to see differently from most. The other – another area, I guess where – although it's only been explicit once, I see it differently from many, not all, is on the German military leadership of the second World War, which I would suggest that the top and strategy was generally incompetent, when others

think was competent. And that it has become a kind of cliché, that they always disagreed with **Hitler**, and they were right and he was wrong. And usually they agreed with him, and very often when they disagreed, he was as often right as they were. In the **Pacific** war, I have, for many years been intrigued by the total neglect and the discussion of the Japanese plans of which we knew, to kill all allied prisoners of war. And of the Japanese agreement at the top, that when the allies invaded the home islands, Japanese casualties would be 20 million. It may well be, I have often thought, that the Japanese award in the 60s, of the highest decoration to a foreigner, to General **LeMay**, who commanded the assault on – air assault on the home islands, including the great fire raid on **Tokyo**, and the atomic bombs. Perhaps they realized that 150,000 is considerably smaller number than 20 million, but many of my colleagues in American history cannot get that arithmetic as straight as evidently the Japanese have.

Q: You have taught at four universities; **Kentucky**, **Michigan**, **Chicago**, **North Carolina**. You had a long, fruitful career as a teacher. When, and under what circumstances did you begin to teach the Holocaust?

A: There are two quite separate answers to that. I have taught the Holocaust as a part of modern **Europe**, modern German, and World War II history as long as I've taught, starting, ironically, back in 1954. The first time I have taught a course

entitled Holocaust was here at **Chapel Hill**, and that would have been, I would say a little – 20, or a little over 20 years ago. The – the history department at this university has a program of undergraduate seminars called, History 90s, because that's their number in the catalog. These are limited to 15. I introduced a History 90 on the Holocaust, which was the first Holocaust taught – ever taught here, around 20 years ago, or a little more. And it always filled. But, at the same time, I had lots of other teaching responsibilities, and the survey courses; Western Civ, the World since 1945, a big course I introduced. German history, European 20th century. So I would teach this, if you will, one Holocaust seminar for undergraduates, over and o – a number of times over the years.

Q: And what were the reactions to this new course? I mean, what – how did the students react to it, how did other faculty react to it?

A: Well, other faculty reacted to it in a normal way that a committee has to approve courses, and they did. With more or less enthusiasm, I frankly don't know, because that is essentially a routine operation. The students filled it up every time, and then when it got to 15, it was closed, because that was the way that type of course is set up in the department. And while once or twice, under very special conditions, with appropriate paperwork, we got a 16th student in. But these were never big lecture classes of any sort.

Q: And do you think that Holocaust education is now well established in American high schools and colleges, or do you think that interest might wane at some point? Or, put differently, what challenges do you see for Holocaust education in the future?

A: Well, i-it seems to me, I don't really know enough about secondary education, and I know that it is taught in many insto – institu – high schools in the country. And that in many states there are requirements in this field, and in many states efforts are made to prepare teachers, that is public school teachers, properly, so they can do this. I do know a little bit ki – more about the college and university system, and there it is reasonably well established, I would argue, for a couple of reasons. One of them is that there are many scholars who have worked in the field, who accept positions in modern European or modern German history, and who are interested in offering a course on the Holocaust. And the other side of this, very closely related to this, is that departments who need large numbers of enrollments, to offset courses they need to offer, in things like medieval history, where they're not going to get large numbers of students, but need to offer them, are interested in the fact that Holocaust courses are always filled. And I know, both from my own **PhDs** around the country, and others, that when there is a course offered, the chairs are filled. And if you ask, well, why are the chairs filled, it is not because these

courses are required. It is – they are filled because there is a general public interest, and students are interested. Whether it satisfies a particular degree requirement or not, or can be used as one of a vast number of courses that would fulfill a particular requirement, th-the reality is that the students go to the courses on the Holocaust because they have an interest. They've heard about this, they want to know something about it. And if it's offered, that's it. And the other side of this is that department chairs know that if one of their faculty members is going to offer a course, it's going to be full. And so, because of the interest out there, not because of a requirement that students take it. Under those circumstances, I would argue that the field is reasonably well established. That doesn't mean that there are no issues or problems, and I would suggest that the future here depends heavily on faculty members being honest and forthright about a differentiation between the Holocaust and other genocides. That doesn't mean that one is a hierarchy of better or worse, but what I would argue is a sense of differentia – differentiation. And it is in this regard that the issue I just alluded to, that is to say where I differ with many in this, the concept of a worldwide killing program. All other genocides of which we know, are geographically defined. The Turks wanted to kill Armenians in **Armenia**. They had not the slightest interest in Armenians who had emigrated to **France** or **Argentina** or the **United States**. The **Ustaše** in World War II **Croatia** wanted to

kill Serbs who lived in **Croatia**. The fact that there are lots of Serbs living – or people of Serb descent living in **Chicago**, they assumed they wouldn't like when they hear about this, but there was no particular interest in going to **Chicago** to kill people of Serb background. One of the major differentiations I would argue, between the Holocaust and all other known forms of genocide, was the concept of a worldwide program. And I think that in the future, as the time in which the Holocaust occurred, recedes further and further into the past, and other genocides, like the one in **Rwanda**, are chronologically seen 50 or a hundred years from now, as being about the same time. I think that unless those who do work on the Holocaust, both in their research and in their teaching, are ho-honest about differentiations, not that one is worse than another; people are dead whether they are killed in one or the other, but that the conceptualization of this was different, and novel in its own way, as well as the implementation on an industrial scale. I think that is an issue that the teaching of the Holocaust, at the college and university level in the future, has to – what to engage, the reality as a future generation of students looks back on a variety of mass killings, none of which was better or worse than the other mass killings, but out of which group, the Holocaust stands apart. Not above, not below, but apart, in a category by itself.

Interview with Gerhard Weinberg
March 13, 2012

Q: Dr. **Weinberg**, as you look back on your successful and eventful life, what do you remember as the most exciting moments of your scholarly career? Like a discovery, recognition and insight, which moment do you remember as particularly exciting?

A: Well, I'm not sure that I remember one more than another. I was very excited when I got my first opportunity to teach at the University of **Chicago**, because I had not had that opportunity before, at a college university level. I was quite excited when I, in the summer of '58, I looked at what turned out to be not a draft of "**Mein Kampf**," but this other book of **Hitler's** which, since I was working on German foreign policy, here was **Adolf** himself writing on foreign policy. I thought that that was a very good coincidence. And I guess the other moment was when my wife **Janet** took a picture of me at the post office, when I was sending to **Chicago**, in a huge crate, two copies of the World War II book manuscript.

Q: And what did you find most rewarding, most gratifying in being a scholar and a teacher?

A: The response of students. I like my students, even the ones that didn't do so well. But I like getting a sense of looking at students while I was speaking, when their faces sort of lit up a little bit. Oh, I get that. And I was very pleased to have a succession of graduate students who moved forward in their graduate work, and

none of whom is unemployed today. And a – a majority of whom went into academic careers, but a substantial number into other careers in the government, and in archives. And that is always very interesting, because of course, they learn more about the subject they're working on than I ever had learned. And it was very interesting to have this combination of individuals, and their – their relationship with me, both then and after they had finished, a-and to see other people make new discoveries, this – find new connections, and then go forth into the world – the academic or the government world, and make successful careers for themselves.

Q: Is there anything you wish to add to this interview?

A: Well, perhaps I should mention the two monuments that aren't up, that I think should be up. One monument should be up in ger – or at least plaque should be up in **Germany**, the other in **England**. Eng – 1955, the Austrian state treaty provided for an independent **Austria**, and the allied occupation troops to leave. When the American occupation troops left their zone **[indecipherable]** area around **Linz**. And in one of the barracks that they had ta – the Americans had taken over from the Germans, they found a bunch of records. And those records, it turned out, were the records of the area, military area district horse draft board. We forget today that in **Europe**, until World War, and into World War II, governments drafted not just people, but also horses. The question then arose, what's to be done with these

records? The Austrians said, well, these were Austrian horses, and the records were in **Austria**, and the records should go to **Vienna**, and if the Germans want to look at them, they're welcome. And the Germans said, oh, but these are German records, they were created by our agency, the horses are all dead. The records should go to the military archive in **Freiburg**, and if the Austrians want to use them, they're welcome. When there are legal questions in the American military, they go to the Judge Advocate General's office in the Pentagon. And the lawyers there decided uh-uh, these are American records, they go to **Alexandria**. Which is what happened. But because they were American records, they naturally fall under American archive law. And that meant, among other th – two things. Number one, that American privacy rules would apply to them, and we applied them in our microfilming. But it also means that there would be the system of records disposal. The the National Archives would present to a joint committee of House and Senate, disposal schedules from time to time. These records go to the National Archives, these records go to the regional archive in **Atlanta**, or wherever. These records get destroyed, nobody needs them. These records are sent to **Germany**, the federal republic. And if the congressional joint committee agreed, as I'm informed it generally did, that's how they got there. And I have therefore been long of the opinion, both orally and in print, that the Germans should put up at least a plaque in

honor of the Austrian horses who got them their records back. Seems to me only reasonable. The Brits need to put up a plaque, or a monument of some sort, to the Duchess of **Windsor**, because if she had not, as **Wallace Simpson**, put her sites on the man, the Prince of **Wales** who became **Edward** the eighth, and who abdicated in order to marry her, the British would have been stuck with him, whether he married someone else, or remained unmarried, for the rest of his life. And sparing the British from having him as king during World War II, is something that I've long argued that people in **Great Britain** ought to acknowledge by some kind of plaque, or other dedicated thing. In my own work in the British records, it is very clear that in 1940, thi – by this time, the Duke of **Windsor**, because of course, he had abdicated before, and **George** the sixth was king, and his wife, the Duchess of **Windsor** were, if not very strongly pro-German, inclined in that direction. They had no sense of what really was going on in the world. And at a time when **Britain** was being assaulted from the air, their main concern was the fate of their furniture in the **Paris** apartment, and whether one of his junior aids could get an exemption from the British draft. They shipped him off to the **Bahamas**, but this was not the kind of person that the country needed in its great hour of need, and people tend to forget that **George** the sixth, who became king and was king through the whole war, into the beginning of the 50s, when he died, was a man who had then, on a British

warship, in 1916, at the Battle of **Jutland**, the great naval engagement of that war. This was somebody who had a connection to the country, it was thought that **Edward** the eighth never did have. And so, since she was the one who took the initiative to arrange – or have it arranged, let me put it that way, that **George** the sixth became king, I think the Brits owe him one – owe her one.

Q: Dr. **Weinberg**, thank you very much for your time, and for this wonderful interview.

A: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview