Rolling. OK. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Ed Slotkin on July 14, 2014 in Boca Raton, Florida. Thank you very much, Mr. Slotkin, for agreeing to speak with us today and to share with us your experiences.

You're welcome.

I'd like to start the interview at the very beginning. Could you tell me when you were born, where you were born, and your name at birth?

I was born in the Bronx, New York. My name is Edward Slotkin. And what was the other question?

Your date of birth.

October 30, 1924.

OK. Can you tell me a little bit about your family-- your father's name, mother's name, who they were, and how your father supported your family?

My father's name was Morris. My mother's name was Miriam. They both came from Russia. And my father, he had a auto wrecking business in the Bronx, near where we lived. And what else did you want to know?

OK. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

I'm sorry.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

I have one sister.

Younger or older?

Younger, younger. She's four years younger than I am. I just spoke to her last night.

OK. What's her name?

Arlene.

Arlene. Was it your parents who had come from Russia or their parents?

No, they both came from Russia.

OK. What language did you speak at home?

A little bit of Yiddish, because we're Jewish, and mostly English. Because they wanted to learn English, and they spoke English. When I was 10 years old, they both spoke perfect English.

So they didn't have accents or anything like that?

No.

Oh, a lot of people did still.

I know. No, they were fine.
OK. Did they ever tell you about where they were from in Russia?

Not really. They never gave me any details about what-- they came from different sections of Russia.

Do you know where, which ones?

No, no. My sister knows the whole works.

Does she really?

Yeah, but I don't.

And did they ever talk about any part of their childhoods?

No.

So would you say they weren't really storytellers?

They weren't storytellers. Is that what the--

That's the question is, yeah. So did you know anything about your grandparents on either side?

Well, no. Let's see, my mother's parents had died before I-- well, yeah. But my father's parents, I knew.

Did they come over together, your father and his parents?

No, they didn't know each other.

No, no, no. I meant your father. Did he come with his own parents?

No, he came with a brother. And my mother came with a niece and an aunt of mine. But outside of that, I had no idea. I don't know where they-- they left from Amsterdam to come here.

Did they come through Ellis Island?

Yes, yeah. Yes, they did, both of them. but? I don't know anything about any of their history.

OK, but you say you did know your father's parents.

Yes. And they didn't speak English. They spoke Yiddish-- a few English words but mostly Jewish.

Did they speak Russian, too, or just Yiddish?

I don't remember that it was Russian. I could have thought it was Yiddish. But they didn't speak to me in Russian at all.

OK. OK. Did they ever tell you anything about their lives over there?

No, no. My father told me that his father was a farmer. But outside of that, I don't know. And I remember my father bringing, from the Bronx in one of his trucks, he brought him a horse. Because I went along with the driver. And that's as close as I know to what he did.

So your father brought your grandfather a horse?
A horse.

Where did your grandparents live?

In Paterson, New Jersey.

Did they have a farm or something.

No, he had a house. I don't know where he took that horse.

Well, that's what my question is. What would he have done with the horse?

(LAUGHING) I have no idea. I didn't ask any questions about that. I know they delivered it to him.

OK. Was your family religious?

Yes.

Religious-- I guess, in what way? Was it very, very observant, sort of observant?

Well, Friday nights was dinner night for the family, which is Jewish. And I don't know if you heard this that the women always have newspaper on the floor after they wash it to clean it. So they put newspaper down. But then they pick it up when the company comes. But the house is full of newspaper. Anyway, but they went to synagogue. And they were religious.

And what about you?

I'm not.

Did you go?

I'm not. I go, but I'm not religious. And I stopped going.

OK. We'll come to that. I'll talk about it. When you were a child, did you have religious instruction?

Oh, yeah. I had a bar mitzvah. That happens when we're 13 years old. But I'm not religious now. I had to go to synagogue with my father on Saturdays. We walked there. But that's as far as-- after, well, maybe 15, 20 years ago, I stopped being religious.

Tell me why.

I don't know. I don't think it's necessary. I'm as good a Jew going or not going. I believe in what they're doing and all that, but I don't want to go to the synagogue.

Doesn't speak to you?

Pardon?

It doesn't speak to you?

No, no. And my wife wasn't that religious, either. But we used to go to the synagogue on holidays and stuff like that. But that's as far as we went.

When you were growing up in the Bronx, do you remember your address where you lived?
I lived on Casanova Street. And I think it five Casanova Street-- I think. It's funny you should ask. When my two
grandsons were here last week, I don't know a thing about computers. My wife ran a computer. But I know nothing
about electronics. But we start talking. We were sitting at the kitchen table, and we were talking. And he asked me
where I was from, so I said in the Bronx. So he said, what street? I says Casanova street. So he bup, bada-bup bup bup,
and he gets Casanova Street and shows me my building that I lived in.

Really?

I swear to you. He showed me the street. He showed me the public school I went to. The street, it was on a hill, and we
used to sleigh-ride in the snow there. It's amazing what you people have and what you're gonna have.

It is truly amazing, the buildings that you can see all over the world that you would never have thought.

I got a better one for you. I said to him, can you get me Berga?

Really? He says, yes. And he got it for me, and he showed me Berga. Did you know that?

I would never have thought. I didn't know that.

It's on there.

Wow. Did you recognize it?

Oh, yeah. I recognized the mountain that was in. I mean, there's no houses that I can see where we were in. But the
town-- I don't know too much about the town. But he showed me to the prison that we were-- well, not the prison but
where we worked.

OK. That must have been something.

Oh, sure was. I couldn't believe it. I could not believe that he could get that on this little thing that he had in his hand.

It truly is so revolutionary, this technology.

--when you are.

OK. So tell me a little bit about your neighborhood when you were growing up. Were all the other families Jewish, as
well, or was it a mixed--

It was an Italian-Jewish neighborhood, mostly Jewish people. But I had a lot of Italian friends. And it was a typical
Bronx-- there was an apartment house that I lived in. Well, first, we lived in a two-story building. Then we moved to an
apartment in a five-story building. And I remember being on the first floor. And it was called Casanova Street.

Did people make jokes about that?

No.

No?

Nobody knew who Casanova was.

[LAUGHING]

I found out when I was in high school.
I see. Did your parents talk about Europe? Or did they have a circle of friends where they’d talk about European issues at all, what was going on there?

I never heard them talk. They had plenty of friends. They used to play cards together. But they never talked about Europe in front of me.

OK. Did they get any newspapers, like The Forward.

Oh, yeah. They taught me how to read. I was able to read the Jewish newspaper.

So you were able to read-- what newspaper was it? Because there were a couple of--

The Forward.

The Forwards, OK.

I don't know how-- I can't remember what happened yesterday.

[LAUGHING]

Never mind. We'll pull it out. We'll pull it all out.

(LAUGHING) I'm sorry.

So you were taught to read Yiddish?

Yes.

OK, now, that newspaper--

Well, it-- go ahead. Go ahead. Yes, it was.

And did you read it regularly?

Yeah, when my father brought the newspaper home, you know, I'd read the headlines. And I'd read. I didn't understand too much about it, but I read it. I remember he was concerned about the kids in Europe starving.

Well, that was one of the questions that I had is how much this sort of information was coming through, how much people knew about what was going on.

Well, he knew everything that was going on because he read the paper every day. But I didn't read it every day. And he was always saying I should eat my food at the table because kids are starving someplace else.

Yeah. When Hitler came to power in 1933--

When what? Hitler took power, yeah.

When Hitler came in 1933, you would have been nine years old, something like that?

I was in 1924. So 193-- nine years old, yeah.

Nine years old. Do you remember that? Was that something people noticed?
I remembered there was problems in Europe, and I didn't know what they were. They were talking about problems. As a matter of fact, they had a little box where they used to put dimes and nickels and pennies. And that was, it was for the people in Europe.

OK. So they probably gave it to some agency?

Yeah. Well, when it was filled up. They couldn't take the money out. It was a little blue thing. And they'd give it to them and get us an empty one.

OK. And do you remember who they gave it to?

No, no, no.

When you were a kid in this neighborhood, Italian-Jewish neighborhood, did anybody ever pick on you from your friends because you were Jewish?

No, no. I didn't know anything about that. One of my best friends was-- oh, I forgot his-- I knew his Italian name. I forgot it. But we were buddies. We used to go sleigh-riding together, and I used to go to his house. He'd come to my house. He had brothers. But I never knew what anti-Semitism was.

OK. When the war broke out, the war broke out in 1939, and you would have been 15 years old.

Yeah, that's when my father died.

Oh, really? Tell me what happened.

He had a brain tumor. And they took him to Mount Sinai, operated on him. And he lasted two days, and he died.

Huge. Your life changed.

It certainly did.

[BREATHING SHARPLY]

Yeah, I'm sorry.

It's OK. Were you close to him?

Was I what?

Were you close to him?

Very close. Very close. I used to go and work in the auto wrecking. He had, like, a warehouse. And I had a job there. I'd take all the windows out. Because they used to sell the glass. And I had to be careful not to break the windows. Because it was all Rolls-Royces and Pierce-Arrows and all very expensive cars. Most of the ones he got were chauffeur-driven.

Oh, really?

Yeah. And I guess the times were bad. Nobody could afford them anymore. And he used to wreck them.

What do you do with a wrecked car?

You take the parts, and you sell them to somebody who needs them. And my father used to handle a blowtorch. And they used to cut it in half. He got hurt that way. A car tipped over on his head. That's what I say-- that's why he died. He
had a brain tumor. And he got knocked out when the car fell on him. Somebody was supposed to hold it, his worker named, Sparky. And he let go, and it fell.

Oh, my. Oh, my. And did the brain tumor develop over time?

I'm sorry?

Did this tumor develop--

Yeah, we didn't know about it. We didn't know about it. He died in 19-- when I was 15, he died. He passed away.

I want to ask one more question about the cars, just out of curiosity. What do you do with the stuff you don't sell?

Oh, the people who handle the metal that they're going to-- whatever they do, they melt it into-- he used to put it in a truck and deliver it to them. It was useless to him.

So it would then be reused.

No, they don't reuse them.

They don't reuse it?

They only took the parts that could be reused, like maybe the front fenders and stuff like that-- the doors. But the interior, they took the blowtorch, and they cut it into pieces. And then they--

They got rid of it.

I don't know where they trucked it to. I never went with them.

I see. I see. Well, when he died, how did your life change?

Well, it was lonely. I just missed him because I used to be with them almost every day, when I wasn't in school. And we were very close.

What are some of the things that he taught you? What are some of the values that he transmitted?

Well, the thing I remember most is that he always was worried about the children in Europe getting food. But that's all. I don't remember anything else that he taught me that would have affected me, except that he was a good man. I'll give you an example. There's a certain holiday the Jews have once a year. I forgot what the name of it is. And it happened on a Friday. And we were all having dinner. And there was a knock on the door. And my father goes to the door and opens a door.

[MUMBLES]

They're talking. And all of a sudden, he brings this guy in. He was a bum. He smelled like-- you had no idea. And he sat him down at the table and fed him. And then he left, the guy left. (VOICE BREAKING) To me, that was a wonderful thing. I'm sorry.

That's OK. That's OK. He lived by example.

I guess so. I guess so.

What are some of the things you used to talk about?
I'm sorry?

What are some of the things you used to talk about with him?

How many cars he got that day and stuff that had to do with his business.

Was he a quiet guy?

Yeah, much more quiet than I am. I never saw him really get mad at anybody. And he was a good-looking man, too-- tall, a little taller than I am.

How did your mother handle things afterwards? Did she then have to go out to work or something?

Well, what happened was her whole family lived in New Jersey. So we closed up our apartment, and we went to New Jersey.

So you moved.

Yeah, to New Jersey. And that's where I went to high school, in New Jersey. And she opened up a piece goods store-- you know, Paterson, at one time, was the silk city-- silk country, they say-- piece goods.

Tell me, what is piece goods?

And all my uncles, my father's brothers, most of them-- it was a big family-- were in that business. So they used to get her good stuff to sell. And we used to go to Paterson and pick it up.

What is piece goods? What are piece goods?

Well, you know, the fabric comes on a bolt. They call it a bolt of fabric. So now, there's pieces 10 feet long, five feet long that the factories didn't use.

So these were remnants?

Right. Well, that's what it's called. OK. So she opened up a little store and started that. And then, eventually, she opened up a dress shop.

I see, I see. Were you close to your mom, too?

Yeah, very close, and my sister.

Yeah? Did she talk much about her life?

No, no. No. I didn't know anything that happened in Russia with her.

OK. So you guys had a pretty hard time afterwards.

I didn't think it was tough. I was going to high school. And I'd help in the store when I had to. And then, when I got older, sometimes I used to go into New York to pick up-- when she was in the dress business-- and I used to pick up the specials that she ordered, the dresses that she had for certain people. So I'd go and pick it up.

When did you finish high school?

Say that?
When did you finish high school?

In 1943-- or '44. Because I quit school one year.

Did you? And what was that?

In 1943.

No, no, no. Why did you quit school?

Because I got mad at a teacher.

(LAUGHING) Really?

That's true-- a history teacher.

Why? What was she teaching?

We had a big argument about-- it had something to do with France. And something to do with that we should help France as much as we can. And I used to read not The New York Times. What was the other paper?

Well, there was the Herald--

The Herald Tribune.

That's right.

We used to get it in school. You could have it every day in school. So I used to get the-- a matter of fact, I had a copy of it about Kennedy, and somebody threw it out. Anyway, we argued. We had an argument in class that we should help them. And I didn't think that was necessary. Because at that time, they had the French-- I forgot the name of the guy who ran it. He was a Nazi.

Ah, PÃ©tain

Who?

PÃ©tain-- P-E-T-A-E-I--

PÃ©tain, OK.

PÃ©tain, mm-hmm.

Well, wait a minute. No, there was another one.

Another one?

Oh, PÃ©tain was one of them. Anyway, I said my thoughts are if the people would watch who they vote for, they wouldn't have had guys like that. And she said that, well, she would argue with me. And I just got up, and I walked out, and I never came back. And the next year, I came back.

So tell me, when you were in high school, the war was already on.

Yeah.
Did people talk about that in class, where you were talking--

Oh, sure. Well, we had it in the newspaper. When we were in history class, we had the newspaper as part of the assignment. Some of us had The Times, and some of us had the other one.

Do you remember how these things were discussed, what the teachers would say, what the kids would say?

No, I don't remember that. I don't even remember whether she would first make a speech about what was happening and then asks questions. I don't remember. But we discussed the war.

OK. Were there people in class who sympathized with Germany in any way?

No, not in that class. I would say 90%, 95% were Jewish.

I see. I see.

There was one black guy there. His last name was Tyrell-- T-Y-R-E-L-L.

Tyrell, uh-huh.

I remember that, and I don't remember my own name.

The brain is funny like that, you know? How much did you know when the war started and the events started to develop, how much news was there and information was there about Hitler's policies to the Jews?

There was, but it meant nothing to me. It just didn't register with me. They would-- how bad he was. But so, he could've been a bad politician. I never really knew how bad he was. I did later.

Yeah. When Pearl Harbor happened, do you remember that?

Absolutely.

Where were you?

I was on my way--

[CYNICAL CHUCKLE]

You don't forget that. My mother and my sister and myself, and I think I had a girlfriend with me, we went to Paterson for the day that day. It was a Sunday. And on the way home, in Passaic, on the radio, they talked about the bombing. That's where I learned it, on the way home from Paterson to Woodbridge, where I lived.

But everybody said, oh, it'll be over in a week. It'll be over in two days. They can handle the United States. It ain't so.

Yeah. Did people want to sign up? Did young guys want to sign up after Pearl Harbor?

Did they want to what?

Sign up.

Sign up?

Yeah.
Some did. Some didn't.

OK, so it wasn't like this huge outrage that we're going to go fight now.

I didn't see it. I didn't see it.

When did you finish high school? What year did you finish?

1944.

You finished in 1944?

Yeah.

I see.

I was supposed to graduate in 1943, but I skipped a year.

Because of that year?

Yeah.

OK. And when you graduated in 1944, that would have been, like, May or June?

I really don't remember. I don't remember when we-- I guess it was one of those months. I got my graduation certificate in my room.

OK. Well, the reason why I'm asking these things is I kind of want to establish were you drafted, or did you volunteer?

No, I was drafted, yes. I didn't volunteer.

OK. And when were you drafted?

In 1944, I guess.

So I mean, right after high school?

Right after high school.

Right after high school.

Right after high school.

OK. Tell me about that. Do you remember when you got your draft notice?

I don't remember the exact date, but I remember getting it. And my mother was very upset. But I said, I gotta go. I had to go to New York for an examination. They didn't do it in Woodbridge. And I passed. I was an able person. And that's it. There was no such thing as not going.

Right, right. So where was basic training?

It's Fort Eustis, Virginia.

All right. Can you tell me a little bit about the sequence. Once you got drafted, what happened? Tell me the sequence of
things.

Oh, we were sent to Fort Dix. And then you got a sign-- I don't know. we were there, maybe, a week or two. And then, we got assigned to Fort Eustis-- some of us, not all. There were thousands of people there. And that's where we took our basic training, in Fort Eustis.

It was an anti-aircraft regiment, whatever you want to call it. And that's what we did. But I was on search lights, these big search-- that they used to see the planes. That was what we took basic training on.

How long did that basic training last?

How long is it?

Did the basic training last?

13 weeks, I believe. I believe it.

And all of it was down in Virginia?

Yeah, in Fort Eustis, Virginia-- Newport News, right next. I don't know if it's part of Newport News, but it's right next to it.

Yeah. Well, there's a lot of military presence there.

Oh, yeah, I know that.

Yeah, it's near Norfolk.

The whole state.

Yeah. And then, after that, what happened?

[SIGHS]

Well, a group of my friends decided-- they told us, somebody told us, we could take an exam for ASTP. You know what ASTP is?

No, tell me.

The government had a program that would send you to four years of college that they would pick the college, but you would go to four years of college. And then, I don't know what they wanted us to do. But it was supposed to be the cadre for when the war was over.

It was supposed to be the what?

The cadre-- the people that--

Oh, the cadre. Yes, got it.

An educated group of guys. I don't know if I even fit into that category. But we were we were sent to-- and we took exams, five of us. And we all passed. And we went to City College.

New York?
Yeah. But City College wasn't our destination. That was the place we went, and then we'd be there. We were only actually there, maybe, a month. And they would pick a school for us. I don't know if they interviewed us as to what we would like to do or what we would like to study. I don't remember that.

And it was great because we had bunks in the gymnasium that they had. I think it was three decks. And they head of the-- that we were in, the head sergeant, he was Italian, and we became very friendly. And he was from Brooklyn. But every time we got a pass, every time, he would come to my house with me.

Really? In New Jersey?

He was like a brother. And he took a liking to the five of us. But I was the only one who brought him to the house. And he really made it easy for us. We had nothing to do there-- nothing.

So what was the purpose of being at City College?

Because from there, we would be sent to a college. It was a drop-off point. I guess they asked questions. I don't remember the-- I don't remember a class. But all I remember is that, from there, we were supposed to go to another school, another college.

Well, your mother must have been pretty happy that you were back in New York.

Oh, I had a car.

Really?

Yeah. I used to go home at night. It was like not being in the army. And then, the five of us decided that's not enough action. So we decided, let's try the Air Cadets. So we took our exams, and we all passed, all of us. And we were sent to George Field, Illinois from City College. In other words, ASTP, we forgot about.

So this group of you first met in Virginia.

Yeah.

First met in Virginia and then tried one thing and then decided--

Yeah. We had a meeting where, should we go to the paratroopers or [MUMBLES]. We didn't want the Navy. So we decided we'd take an exam for the air cadets.

Tell me. Why didn't you--

And we passed. Huh?

Why didn't you want the Navy?

I wouldn't go in the Navy. If they put me, I'd be AWOL. I didn't like--

Why not?

I didn't like the Navy.

Oh. Any reason?

No. And I'm a good swimmer. I used to be. Because I tried to swim the other day, and I almost drowned. But I just didn't like the water. So I didn't want to. And I told them, if you put me in the Navy, we're going to have problems. So
that's it. So we went to George Field, Illinois.

And from there, we were supposed then be sent to a school that they'd had for the air cadets. We weren't going to stay there. It was a drop-off point. And we were there about two or three weeks. And I got a pass to go home. And I went.

And about two days after I was home, I got a telegram-- report back immediately. They didn't tell me why. But I assumed, well, they're going to ship us out to a school or whatever. And they told me I was in the infantry.

[LAUGHING]

Really?

Yeah, all of us. And that's how I wound up in the Fort Hood-- no, not Fort Hood. What the hell's the name of that? I forgot the name of the-- in Indiana, in Indianapolis. Fort Hood? It wasn't Fort Hood because Fort Hood's in California, and I was sent there after I got liberated. But anyway, then we went for training at the Camp Atterbury. That was the name of the camp. And we went there, took basic again on infantry.

How does that change from the basic training you get in the beginning? What was the difference?

Well, now this was-- I was part of the Air Force, anti-aircraft. But now, I was in the infantry and a different color cap, a different colored ribbon, and everything. And anyway, well, let's see. I was in the 106th Division of the infantry. We were assigned to that 106th Infantry Division. And we were almost all together. I don't know if there were all five of us. It might have been four or three of us.

Were you all from New York, your group of five?

No, at that time, I was from New Jersey.

That's right. I mean, but from the general area?

No, no. One of my best friends was from just above California on--

Oregon?

--on the West Coast. Ore-- yeah.

Yeah, Oregon, OK.

I can tell you a little story about that if you want.

Yes, please. Well, when I told you that I used to invite guys to my house. Well, if he got a five-day pass, he wasn't going to go to California. We didn't have planes. You either hitchhiked or you're on a train. And he was another Italian guy, Romano. We were like brothers. He's much bigger than I.

And when we got captured, he was in my outfit. And when we got captured, he also got captured. And we were sent to a regular prisoner of war camp, not the one that I finally wound up in. And my sister-- and I think I got a copy of the letter-- I wrote a letter from prison on stationery from the German government that I was a prisoner of war and [MUMBLES].

And Jimmy-- that's Jimmy Romano-- and Eddie-- forgot his last name-- who lived near me in New Jersey was also a prisoner of war. And I wrote on the thing, they're both fine. And my sister got in touch with the one from near us, Eddie van Nuys, his parents. And they hadn't heard. All they heard that he was missing in action. They hadn't heard that he was alive.
Oh, my gosh.

And now, they know he was alive. And the same thing happened with Jimmy Romano. She called the police in Oregon to find-- she didn't know where he lived. She called the police and gave them his story to find the family. And the police found the family. And my sister got very friendly with his sister and told them that he was with me, and he was alive.

What a huge thing.

(VOICE BREAKING) Both of them.

What a huge thing.

Yeah. It was.

How parents and how families worry when they don't know. They go out of their minds. I got a copy that I showed him. I got a copy of the telegram saying I was a prisoner of war.

We'll film that. We'll film that later.

You wanna? And then I got a pris-- that I was missing, missing in ac-- no. I got that I'm missing in action, OK? That's it. So now, they don't know whether I'm alive or dead. Then I got a telegram there that says they found me, and I'm a prisoner of war. So she knew I was alive.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You can't imagine it. You can't imagine what they go through.

Not with my mother. She was just--

She must have gone out of her mind.

My sister said she used to go to bed and go in the fetal position. And she--

[EXHALES]

Anyway. Were we talking about something else before?

Yes, we were.

I interrupted.

That's OK. I wanted to know about this. We were still in Indiana, where you were having basic infantry training. And I was asking, what was the difference between the first basic training that you had and this one, besides the ribbon in the cap?

Not much, except that in Atterbury, Camp Atterbury, it was marching a lot. And we didn't do that much in Virginia. We did some, but the other one was really--

A lot of marching.

--a lot of marching and working with the rifles and all this. And I wound up in what they call a cannon company. It's an infantry company that's part of another company. We weren't exactly fighters, but we had a 105 how-- you know what a howitzer is?

I've heard of it.
OK, it's a cannon. And 105 is the size of the--

Diameter?

Well, it's the diameter of the ammunition that you shoot. Now, the regular infantry, the artillery part of the Infantry Division has 105 howitzers with long barrels. So they could shoot miles, I think. Ours had a short barrel, and we were there to protect our troops if they were lined up, to give them--

Cover.

Yeah, right. So it was the same 105 howitzer, but one had a shorter distance that it could be used. And that was the difference. We were just a company. And there are four companies to a div-- not division. Four companies had cannon companies. And we were one of them.

How long did you stay there?

I don't remember the exact time. I would guess a couple of months. And then, from there, we went overseas.

Yeah. Do you remember when you went overseas, the date you went overseas?

I know it was in October because I landed in-- I can't remember the country-- on my birthday, on October 30.

You landed--

In Europe.

It would have been England?

Well, I was in Europe before that. No, I wasn't. Excuse me. I'm trying to remember the name of the country.

It wasn't Belgium?

Huh?

Was it Belgium?

No, it wasn't Belgium.

It was--

And it wasn't France?

--on the water. The boat landed in a bay actually. It was beautiful.

Netherlands?

No.

France? No?

No.

Small country, large?
Yeah, small country.
Iceland?
No. It's in Europe.
Not an island?
What?
Not the UK?
No, no.
Not England? Not Scotland?
No, no. We were in England after that.
Ireland?
Not Ireland. I was in London. We were in France. But we landed from America. What's the next one to Scotland? Do you know the country next to Scotland? That's where we were.
I think it was Iceland.
Huh?
I think it's Iceland that is an island.
No,
No?
No. Iceland isn't in Europe.
Wales?
No.
Ireland, Scotland, and the United Kingdom are all right there.
No.
Norway?
You know what? It might have been Scotland.
It might have been Scotland?
We weren't there that long. We were only there a couple of days. And then we went to London.
OK. OK. But it was a beautiful bay is what you remembered.
Oh, well-- not a beautiful--
Where you landed.

It happened to be a beautiful day, but that's not what-- I never told you that.

I thought you said that the bay that you landed was beau--

Oh, the scenery was absolutely-- you couldn't believe it. It looked like a picture-- beautiful green grass, oh. Because in the bay, it was all water here, and then the land. It was just gorgeous. And we were taken to, I guess, it was a schoolhouse. It was something that had a gate around it. And that's where we bivouacked for-- we never got out of there to look over--

Right.

But it was in the-- what's the-- the main drag in Scotland. Do you know what it is, the main town?

Oh, well there's Glasgow and Edinburgh. Edinburgh?

I think we were in Glasgow.

Glasgow?

Yeah.

OK. Your life really changed a lot in four or five months. If you landed October 30 and we presume you graduated high school in May or June, that's a lot to happen in a really short amount of time.

It sure did. And it all happened.

Did you feel like a soldier by the time you landed there? Because it's a real short time to make a--

I felt like a soldier when I was taking basic training, both places. But I didn't feel like a soldier when I went to George Field, Illinois. I didn't feel like a soldier there. I felt I was going to just going to a job. But that's it.

And then, from Scotland, we went to England-- London. And we stayed there for about two or three weeks. We stayed at a woman-- I think she owned it-- a home with thousands of acres of land. A young girl used to come out on a horse and ride past us when we were marching or when we were kidding around on a road there, and a beautiful woman. So she couldn't be 22, 24.

So was this like an estate?

Huh? Yeah, that's what it was. That's the word I was looking for. It was a big estate. And they put huts for us, metal huts, that went-- what would you call them? I don't remember the name of them. And that's where we had to sleep in.

It was sort of like your barracks?

But it was made out of metal, and it was just for-- it was a single story.

It was temporary.

Yeah.

Yeah, temporary.
They put it on that land. They could have put 10,000 of them there, they had so much land. Anyway, we were there for--
I almost blew the whole place up. We were there for a couple of weeks.

How'd you do that?

Somebody told me one day to a fire in an oven, a steel oven, you know, where they cooked? It was a big one. And I
went, and I said, how the hell do I get this-- I got matches-- but how do I get it lit? So I grab some paper, and I put it
under some logs, and I poured some kerosene on it--

Oh, good god. --or gasoline. I don't know which one I got. And I put it in. And all of a sudden, the cover blew up.

[SMACKS]

And if I was standing there, it would've killed me. In other words, I was on the side. That's how I knew about making
fires.

Well, you certainly got the fire going.

I sure did. Well, it pulverized the oven.

[LAUGHING]

Ah, I'll never forget that one. That was lucky. Because I could have got hit by that metal. Boy, that, it would have killed
me. And that happened on that estate.

And if you landed October 30, about how long were you there in the UK?

Couple days. Couple days. We weren't there long.

No? And then what happened?

And then we went to London.

And then, after London?

We went to France.

OK. Where did you land in France?

It was camp Lucky Strike. And I know the name of this-- it's a big city-- I know the name of this city like I know my
name, and I can't remember it. We crossed the English Channel. You know the boats at that they had that the soldiers,
when the invasion-- they were small boats. They must have had 50 guys in there.

So the big thing was that they said, be very careful because it's going to be rough water, and you can fall overboard.
You've got to be very careful about this ride. And we went over that thing like it was a lake. There wasn't a wave in the
thing. We went across to camp Lucky Strike, which was in--

Was it near Omaha Beach?

What?

Was camp Lucky Strike near Omaha Beach?

No, no. It's on the water. Well, so was the invasion. It's a big, big city.
We can find out. We can find out because in the internet, if you put in Camp Lucky Strike, we'll find out.

OK. It said Camp Lucky Strike. That's where I came home, too. After we got liberated, I was in Camp Lucky Strike to come home. And that's where I found out the Japanese had given up.

Yeah, that's two years later.

No.

Well, the Japanese didn't--

Oh, no. I'm sorry. That's when Hitler gave up.

Oh, when Hitler gave up.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You're right. That's when the war officially ended, when I was in the Camp Lucky Strike.

So there you are in France. And that's the first time that you're on soil that now was occupied by the Allies but had been occupied by the Nazis.

Yeah, I don't know if this part of it was ever occupied by them. I don't know. But it's a big camp. It's a tremendous camp. And then, from there, first, we stayed in France a little while. It's a big field. After we got to Lucky Strike, we were sent to a field, and we had to pitch tents. That's the first time I ever did that. And it started to rain. And we didn't even get wet-- just two of us. Two guys to each tent. And it was fine. The water, we would put funnels there. Anyway.

But that's important. I mean, that's an important thing. Because if you're in battle or you're in a field, you need to not get wet.

No, there was no battle there. There was no Germans there, either.

No, what I meant to say is that it's an important skill to have, to be able to pitch the tent so that you don't get wet when you're further out.

I'll tell you, it's the first time we ever did it. And it worked out perfectly-- perfectly. And one guy-- this is just a little thing-- we heard a gun go off one day. And one guy shot his toe off. Because he didn't want to go.

[CHUCKLES]

I don't know if he didn't go, but he shot his toe off. And I guess they took him to the hospital. I didn't know the guy.

Were there a lot of such incidents or really, very rare that somebody would say, I'll do something so that I don't have to go?

I never heard that. And when I heard the why, I thought it was an accident. When they said, maybe it was an accident. But somebody said to me, he hit deliberately blew his toe off. I don't know. I shouldn't say that it was an accident, or he deliberately did it. But the word came out that he did it.

Right, right. Between the time you landed in Scotland, and now, you're in France, was there any training going on?

No.

It was just being moved from one place to another?
That's right. No, no training. We were already trained.

OK. Did you feel fully trained? Did you feel like you could do what you would need to do?

I felt I was invulnerable. I never thought anything could happen to me. It was a stupid thought because a lot of things could have happened to me. But I didn't think anything would ever happen to me. I remember when we were in Germany, we were sent-- after, after all the other things, now we were sent to the front.

OK. From France?

Yeah. And now, the cannon company had huts that held six guys that used to be a camp for kids. So they had little huts. And we used them. I don't know how many there were, but a lot of guys used them. When we were in there, the Battle of the Bulge started. We were in that.

And these huts, were they in France or Belgium?

It could have been Belgium. I thought it was France, but it could have been Belgium. Because we were right near. It's right near each other. I know after we got caught, we went past the Maginot Line, going to the railroad station. And we went pass the Siegfried Line. But anyway.

There you are, yeah.

Where was I at?

There you are, in the huts. You're telling me about those huts.

Oh, yeah, we were sleeping. It was like 6:00 in the morning, right-- very early in the morning. All of a sudden, we hear [HISsing NOISE]. We hear artillery. And we were in the forest. There's a whole forest. You couldn't even-- wherever you walked, there were trees. And we hear the [HISSES] incoming artillery. We were told it was a quiet sector, that nothing's going to happen. You might find a patrol, but nothing could happen.

And that was the morning of December 19-- December 16 when the Battle of the Bulge started. That's how it started, early in the morning. It was, really, a little dark then. And we all got up and went out. But then, we went back. Because the trees were getting hit above us.

Were they on fire?

No. No. There was all snow all over. It was all damp. They wouldn't go on fire, I don't think.

So already, as early as that in the wintertime, there was snow on the ground.

Oh! That's the coldest winter they ever had in Germany or-- anyway, then, for three days, we went out on patrol. Of course, we used up all the ammunition for the cannon. And we didn't even have any food, anymore. We didn't have food or water. Water, we could eat the snow. Then we went out on patrol.

How many of you?

Huh?

How large a group went out on patrol?

I would say 25, 30 guys. And the only incident, there was, at one point, we came out of the forest, and it was like a farmhouse with barbed wire fence this high, maybe this high. There's a lot of them. And we see a German in a machine gun thing on the left, maybe 200 yards away.
So we were going-- this was open land, except the only thing there was the fences, the barbed wire fences-- and down that way were trees. So we decided that-- well, the lieutenant decided that we gotta get over there for protection and then worry about these guys.

And I can remember running down the snow, jumping over the barbed wire. That's how-- I was going-- I don't know how I did it. And before I did, I said-- I said to my father, take care of me. And we all got down there. And we stayed there until it got dark. And they firing at us, and we were firing at them. But nobody got hit.

And then, we didn't know how to get out of there. And along comes one of the guys from our outfit. He's from the South. I think he was from South Carolina. I knew his name, too. Anyway, he comes, and he says, I've got a way for you guys to get out. And we all followed him. You went up a pass and we went up a little pass. And I had-- do you know what a difference between a rifle and a carbine is?

No.

A carbine is a small rifle, not long. It can't go as far. And the reason we had carbines is that we were on a cannon company. We weren't real infantry. So we had light guns. But they could shoot maybe 10, 12 rounds at a time.

And they told to cock our ammunition. Don't let the gun fire. Because it was getting night, and the other guys, we knew, were down there. And they didn't want anybody to know we were taking off. And we get to a place, it wasn't steps, but it was stone. It looked like steps, and I had my hand-- I'm laughing. And I didn't put my, what do you-- the--

A catch or a lock or something?

A what?

Was it a catch on the gun?

Safety.

The safety thing?

Yeah, you can put it so it won't fire. And that's what the lieutenant tells you. There's a term for it, and I don't remember the term. And I let mine on. Because if the Germans found us, and they want to, I'm firing first. And my gun went off as we were coming. I almost hit a guy in the back of his shoe.

I didn't hit anybody, but the gun went off. And it was my fault. But it happened. And that was just a little incident. And we were on patrol. I remember seeing trucks and cars, like you see in the movies, all beat up from getting shot by a cannon.

And I remember seeing a horse upside down like this-- a dead horse-- and split open. He got hit good. In the snow, that's how he was. But the only live Germans we saw were the first ones. We saw them when we went over the barbed wire.

So did you get out of that place? Did you get out of that [CROSS TALK]?

Yeah, we went back to the huts that we were in. And then, we fought for three days. We didn't fight. We were on patrol for three days. Of course, it happened on the 16th, in the morning. And on the 19th, we got captured. Because we had the artillery, we had trucks. See, most of the guys had to walk. We had trucks because the trucks used to pull the cannons. So we had trucks, and we had carabines.

So now what happened was, when there was a prisoner, a German prisoner, they used to give the prisoner to us because we could put him in the truck and deliver him to where we had to go. So we had, on this third day, well, first of all, we were digging in. We were digging trenches.
Of course, we were here. Then, there was a slight valley. And then there was a-- what do you call-- up. And there was a whole German division there. So there was going to be a shootout there. And all of a sudden, a guy comes and says to the lieutenant, I know a way to get out of here. So get the guys on as many trucks as you can, and let's get out of here.

Meanwhile, everybody's digging the trench hole-- a trench. But anyway, we got out. We dropped the shovels and [MUMBLES]. And we get on our trucks, and we had prisoners on there. It must have been about 15, 20 prisoners. And they were in the back of the truck, where we sat. But they were, actually, in the front part of it, near the cab.

And we go down this road, which is a dirt road. And we're like a convoy. Because we had four trucks, and there were others that were on. And we're going down, and all of a sudden, the lead Jeep blows up. And then they find out what happened was when the guys came to tell them that he found a way to get out, those were Germans in American uniforms.

Really?

Yeah. Well, that's what we were told. I mean, I didn't see-- all we know is that the lead Jeep got blasted, blown up. And so the convoy stopped. So we stopped. We were in the back. And then, out from all the sides comes the German army with their guns. And that's when the lieutenant says, give up. We're giving up. And we did.

So I get out of the truck. I was in the cab. I get out of the truck. And now we had the German prisoners. Now we have to give them our guns. They were guarding us. But before that happened, one of the guys-- because I spoke a little bit of German, Yiddish is a little bit like German-- and about half hour-- no, when we were ready to go, one of the guys says to me, tell him Hitler's dead.

So I said, all right. So I says, Hitler's tot to them. And that's all. That's how it happened. They heard me. Nobody did anything. But after we got out of the trucks and gave them our guns, I didn't know whether they're going to shoot me and not, whether they'd remember what I said. But they didn't.

I see. So they didn't let on that they had even heard it.

Oh, they heard it.

Oh, they heard it.

They heard me say it. They heard it. But they didn't recognize me.

Ah, OK. What was their manner like while they were prisoners, and how did it change?

It was almost a joke. And you know, they weren't shooting at us. Nobody was shooting at us. We were prisoners. You know, put your hands up. And that was it. That's how we got captured.

Was there any kind of communication between you and those prisoners when they were your prisoners?

No.

No. They just sat there and were quiet, and that was it.

Yeah. You know, everything was happening. First of all, we were digging a trench. And somebody was guarding them. I don't know. They came on the truck when we were ready to leave. So we had nothing to do with them, really.

OK. And did they become aggressive?

No, no, no. I thought if they recognized me, they might have done something, but they didn't. They didn't.
Man, it does sound like an ambush.

It was an ambush, really. Those Germans appeared. We don't know where the heck they came from. It was a small road. It was an elevated road, a dirt road. And they were all on the side. We never saw them. And then, boom, when we stopped, they all come up. They appeared. They must've been hiding in the grass. We don't know.

What happened then?

What happened then?

Yeah.

We got taken prisoner. And we were marched to a spot. It was getting dark already after all this thing happened. And it was all snow on the ground. And we were marched to the railroad. And we slept on the snow.

They had a circle, big circle. And they told the guys, don't go out of this circle. But lie down, and do whatever you want. But lie down. And that's where you're going to sleep tonight. And the next day, we got on what they call a cattle car. And we were sent to the first prison camp.

What was the name of that camp?

It was Stalag IX-B That's the official name. And it was-- it had a name, and I don't remember the name right now.

What was the cattle car like? Do you remember?

[CHUCKLES]

Go to the Holocaust Museum. You'll see a cattle car. That's what they put the cattle in when they were moving them. And usually, there was straw on the floor, on a-- what do you call it? Well, when we were put on there, nobody could sit down. That's how close we were.

You were tightly packed.

Matter of fact, I was right next to a priest.

Yeah. You were next to a priest?

Yeah, a priest got caught. I'll tell you another thing. When we were marching to the railroad station, guy's next to me, and he's marching with me, and he's wearing a Air Corps uniform-- leather jacket and all that stuff. So I said, what the hell are you doing here? He says, I came to visit my brother. And he got caught. Things happened.

Things happen. So tell me about the priest. How did the priest--

Well, we had priests.

Oh, it was a military chaplain?

Yeah, yeah.

Oh, I see, I see. OK.

I call him a priest. I don't know. I know he wasn't a rabbi. And we were on that cattle car for five days-- no food, no place--
And you hadn't had any food the previous three days, either?

Well, we had part of the three days but not all, not all. We had rations. But no food. And on Christmas day-- Christmas day-- we landed in the first camp. What did I call it?

Stalag. You said stalag.

It was Stalag IX-B. But it had another name.

Bad Orb.

Huh?

Bad Orb.

Yeah, Bad Orb, yeah. And at one time, it was a camp for young children-- not babies, young children. It was a camp. And my whole division got taken-- the 106th, the whole division-- three regiments.

So that would have been about how many people?

Oh, there's 15,000.

15,000?

Yeah.

So 15,000 captured.

Well, some were killed. But the 15,000 people were involved in our division. And the whole division got captured or killed. And Christmas day, which was the most gorgeous day you ever saw in your life-- the sun was shining, the women were out there in their fur coats, walking with their children-- beautiful. And we were so cramped. I had to jump off the train to the ground. And I just made it because I didn't think I had the strength to jump. Because it was inactive.

Yeah, because you hadn't been able to move your legs for such a long time.

Well, no. You couldn't do anything. Anyway, then we marched up, like, a mountain, where the camp was.

Ed, I'm sorry. I want to interrupt here and ask a rather indelicate question. But the purpose of it is to understand just what conditions can be like when you're captured in a cattle car.

Go ahead.

If you guys were all squished together like sardines, and you're there five days--

Where do you defecate and where do you-- right were you were. Right where-- it didn't even-- you want to know something? I don't know whether I even did any. I don't know. I don't remember it. But we couldn't move, couldn't move around. There was an incident-- well, there's one incident. After we got out of the train, and we're marching up the hill, there's a big sign on that side of a house. And I got a big kick out of it. It said-- in German, the word "drink" is "trink"-- T-R-I-N-K. You know that?

Right.

"Trink Coca-Cola."
No, really?

[LAUGHING]

I said, oh, god. Like, it shouldn't be there. Right on the side of the building. Anyway, what was the other thing I wanted to tell you?

No, I was asking my indelicate question, and you answered it. And then, you were describing for me that it was Christmas day and that the women were dressed in furs, and it was a gorgeous day.

Oh, it was beautiful.

And then, what happened to you guys?

And then we went. We marched up the hill, slowly. And we got to the camp.

And were you, at some point, fed?

Yeah. I don't know what we were fed. But food wasn't a subject then. I mean, the steaks weren't there. But the basic food was there. And then it was a little rough in that-- this is not delicate. When you had to go to the latrine-- and I had never seen this before, I don't know if you ever-- they pointed. Go in the back, there. And I had to go. And what it was is they had pits dug for what you had to do. But in the middle of a pits was a big, from a tree, a--

A trunk or a pole?

A pole, OK, all in different spots. And the way you did it was you'd hold onto that angle and go over the--

Over the pit.

So you don't fall in. It's tough to describe. And it's indelicate.

But we get a bit of a picture. We get a bit of a picture.

Huh?

We get a bit of a picture.

OK. Well, that's how it-- and I can remember, when I got out of there, I must have had dysentery. I walked back, and I walked over a table that the guys were sitting in. Instead of walking in an aisle, I walked over the table, and I thought I was going to faint. And I caught myself, and I got off. And I went back to my guys. But there was a little incident that happened.

It sounds like you were in a very weakened state.

At that point, yes, yeah. Only because I think I had dysentery. But I was never in that state again in a prison-- never. I was in pretty good shape.

So in the Stalag IX-B, did they speak to you? Did they tell you anything? Were there any formal announcements that were made by your captors?

Nothing, no. We were in an auditorium, and they had bunks, three to a. And you were assigned to a bunk, and that was it. All the guys with that were in my outfit, in the cannon company, were together. And that's where we slept. But there was no--
Did they delouse you or shower you or anything like that?

No, jeez. They never-- well, it really happened once before. But we were full of-- not then, after we were captured, I was all full of lice. And when it got warmer, the lice go to work and walk all over you. See, when it's cold, they're pretty steady. They didn't bother you as much. But when they got warm, they were all over.

And I learned how to kill them. You put them on your nail and crack them in half. And that kills them. You hear [POPS]. But we had lice all over us. I have incidents that talk about lice you wouldn't believe.

Anyway, we were in this prison camp. And one day, the Germans were at a table on a bottom-- we were in an auditorium. We were higher up. And we looked down there. And they started calling names. So all the guys, what the hell is that all about? So one of the guys says, I think they're calling all the Jewish guys. Because those are Jewish names they're calling.

So we're listening. And my name's not called. So I said to them-- these are guys that I was in the cannon company with-- I'm going down there. I'm going to find out. If they're calling all the Jewish names, I should be there. So there was a guy there from Connecticut. And I know his name almost like I know yours, but I don't.

[CHUCKLING]

Oh, I wish I knew his name. Anyway, I know he's a big, tall, good-looking guy. He and I never really got along. Maybe we'd say hello to each other, but we never had a real conversation. And he walks over to me.

[BREATHING UNEVENLY]

And he says, don't go down there. We'll take care of you. Stay here. So I said, no, I'm going down. But there's a guy I didn't like, and he was looking out for me. So I go down there, and I tell them I'm Jewish. Are you calling Jewish names? Yes. Go stand over there. And they put us in separate barracks, the Jewish guys.

Really? OK.

And the reason for it is Berga. You heard of Berga?

Tell me what's Berga.

Well, wait. First, I'll tell you we were put there so that-- they had to get 350 soldiers to ship to Berga. So they started off with getting all the Jewish guys. And there were only about 80 or 90. So now, they had to get the rest of the guys, and they got what they-- well, what was told to me was undesirables, guys who were giving the Germans trouble in the prison camp or guys who had names similar to being Jewish.

Anyway, they got the 350 guys. And that's the guys that-- they call us out of our barrack. That's the group that went to Berga. OK. I'll tell you about an incident that happened in the first camp.

That's Stalag IX-B.

Yeah. One day, when we were in our barracks-- in the new barracks. It was a different barracks from the big one that everybody was in.

Right, after you were separated?

Yes. It's in the morning. It must have been about 6:30, 7 o'clock. The guards come in to our barracks. Raus! Raus! It means get up and get out. And they chase us out of the barracks. Now, some guys, got in such a rush, they didn't even put their shoes on. And it was snow out there. I was fine.
But anyway, what they were doing was they were getting us out, and they were getting the guys out of the barracks that we originally were in. Hundreds, and maybe thousands, of guys formed this circle in the snow around, all the soldiers that they had.

And what happened was the night before that, a German working in the kitchen was attacked by an American and knifed. He wasn't killed, but he was slashed with a knife. And they wanted to know who it was. So they put us all in a circle, and they wanted the guy who was guilty to own up.

So we're standing there. And it's cold, and it's shivering, and guys are falling down because it was too cold. And this happened, too-- I don't know, you ever see a movie where a German truck backs up and they put the thing up, and there's a machine gun? Well, I should drop right now. That's what they did. They pull the truck up and put the machine gun.

And everybody saw the machine gun-- at least, I did, anyway. Anyway, but nothing happened. They never fired it. It was like a warning. They want to know who did it, and nobody's leaving until they find out. And somebody, after about 3/4 of an hour or so, owned up that he was the guy that did it.

And they didn't-- we thought they'd kill him, but they didn't. He lived. He didn't killed the guy in the kitchen. He knifed him. He wounded him. And they didn't really do anything to him. But that's that incident.

How bizarre.

Huh?

How bizarre.

The whole thing. I can't describe the way we were standing around. It sounds like it can't happen. But it happened, and I was there. Now--

[BANGING] Oh, that's one of the--

Let's break a little bit.

That's one of the cats.

Oh, it's the kitty.

We're OK.

All right.

That was an incident that happened in the second camp. Now, after that, we were put to work.

Before reaching Berga?

This happened in the first camp. After that, we were sent through a railroad, and we went through the same thing when we was here. We were put in cattle cars. But there weren't as many men in the cattle cars. And we went. Now, there was an incident that I was involved in. Do you want to hear it?

Yes, absolutely. There was straw on the bottom. And we had plenty of room in there. I don't know how many guys to each cattle car. And I was lying down this way. And there were two guys talking, and they were in back of me.

And one of the guys there puts his shoe on my shoulder, right on the right-hand, right shoulder, you know, like this. So I
said, hey, fella, take your shoe off. It hurts my shoulder. Don't hear a sound. I said, hey, get your shoe off. Anyway, he didn't. And I take his shoe, and I push it off like that.

Now, I hear a scuffle. I don't know whether he had a knife or anything, but I was told he did. But somebody stopped him-- the guy he was talking to. And nothing happened. And I'm not going to tell you the guy's name because he was very well known and is very well known to Kira and the whole group.

And the only reason I think that he was the guy is I know he was a Mexican. And there weren't too many Mexicans in the prison camp. And that guy, who's famous today, but I don't know if it was him. I accuse it of being him, but I could be wrong. Anyway, that's the story there.

How would somebody have a knife on him in the--

Because I pushed his foot over.

Yeah, you pushed his foot off. But how would a prisoner have a knife?

I don't know. But that's the thought that came to my mind. And he had something.

He had something.

Yeah. I don't know. Well, you could carry it.

Of course.

I had a ring, a ruby ring that my mother gave me. They never took it from me. They never asked for it.

Really?

I had my dog tags on. A lot of guys threw their dog tags away. I took them home, and my mother threw them out. That's the one who has diabetes.

The cat?

Yeah.

OK. And so you still had a ruby ring on you and your dog tags?

Yeah, and a big ruby ring, a big one. And I came home with it. And then I lost it.

Gosh, life is ironic like that.

See, now, everybody I talk to, they would look at their dog tags or what. Because it tells you whether you're Jewish or not. It has an H for Hebrew. Nobody ever asked me for my dog tags or anything.

You know, when you mention this incident about the guy with the foot on your shoulder, that leads me to another question, which is, how did the guys interact with each other? Once your pack captured, is it like everybody is-- hang on just a second.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

Can you cut? OK, so my question is, once you guys were prisoners, what were relations like with you, between the prisoners?
Let me explain something to you. I don't know. I don't remember any guy that was there by name. I escaped twice, once with two guys, once with three of us. And I don't remember their names. I don't remember what they looked like. I don't remember any names in the place.

One of my best friends is in Boynton Beach. And he was with me. And I don't remember him. I have no idea. We didn't even have time to talk, as far as I was concerned. Well, you know, you couldn't stop working and just having a meeting with a guy. I didn't have anything to do with anybody.

Well, you see, you mentioned earlier, when they're calling all the Jewish guys down, and this guy from Connecticut that you didn't like very much--

Oh, he wasn't Jewish.

I know. But what I'm saying is that he comes up to you and says, don't go.

Purcell was his last name.

Purcell?

Yeah, go ahead.

All right. He comes up to you and says, don't go, we'll take care of you, which kind of makes you think that the prisoners, you guys, would have one another's backs.

Yeah. But it meant almost nothing to me. I said, I'm going. And I went. But I'm telling you this because it happened. And it's something you wouldn't expect, or at least I didn't expect it. So I told you the story. But that's the way it happened.

But then, my larger question is, did you have the feeling when you were in the prison camps and then in Berga-- and you'll have to tell us for the film what is Berga so that people will understand-- but when you were there, did the other guys who were also prisoners, did you have a feeling that you had one another's backs?

No, no.

You were each to his--

I didn't. They might have felt that way. Other people might have, definitely. I didn't.

OK. So you were on your own. Basically, everybody's on his own.

That's the way I felt. But I just mentioned about this Purcell because that was a gesture that I didn't expect.

Of course not.

I expected some of the other guys might have said it because I was more friendly with other people there. But he said it, and I couldn't believe it.

Yeah. It is very unusual, and it's a wonderful gesture. It's a great gesture.

That's why I'm telling you this story. Because it's something that usually wouldn't happen-- shouldn't happen. It wouldn't have happened with me if it were reversed.

Yeah. So tell us, what is Berga? Did you know what Berga was before you got there?
No, no. And for a long time, I didn't even know I was in Berga. I thought I was in Bergen-Belsen.

I see. I knew it had Berga in it, but I thought Bergen-Belsen was the camp until somebody corrected me.

So tell me, how was that different than Stalag IX-B when you got there?

Because Stalag IX-B is an official prisoner of war camp. It sort of takes care of the Geneva Convention. It's living under rules, and so are the prisoners. Berga was a death camp. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you know about it, there was another-- oh, what's the name of that magazine?

National Geographic.

OK, there was a National Geographic film about us. Did you know that?

Yes.

OK. Now, what was I gonna tell you?

You were going to tell me what Berga was so that we'd understand. People looking at your interview would get a sense of what is Berga. They'd understand what it was that you faced.

All right. They called it Hitler's GI death camp. That's what they called it. And that's what it was.

Well, what did the Germans call it?

They called it Berga, as far as I know.

Just Berga.

It was Stalag IX-C, that's all.

And what was different in Berga than in Stalag IX-B.

Well, we didn't get fed. Our rations-- you see, I got fed at the other place, IX-B. I didn't get dinner and supper and breakfast. We got where we could live on it. In Berga, once a day, we got one-eighth of a loaf of bread.

You know what a loaf of bread, is like this? You got that, one-eighth of a loaf because you divided it amongst eight guys, and soup. And that was it, nothing else. They never gave you anything else. That's what we lived on. The other camp, they got fed. We didn't get fed.

How long were you in Stalag IX-B?

A couple of weeks, maybe two or three weeks.

So sometime in January is when you got transferred to Berga.

Yeah. I don't have the exact dates. And we got liberated on the 23rd of March-- April.

So we're talking about three months.

Yeah.

About three months, maybe a little more than three months, in Berga.
Well, excuse me. We were also on what was termed a death march for two to three weeks. I don't have the dates.

OK, but early April, late March, something like that.

In other words, one day, they came to us and said, we're moving. As a matter of fact, it's the first time they ever told us to take a shower. And we didn't know why. They'd told us they were taking us to a new camp.

And what it was is, we found out later, they were taking us to shoot us. But they didn't want us to be shot in the camp because if the Americans ever found out that it happened, that their soldiers were slaughtered, there would be hell to do with Germany and the Geneva Convention, which they're a part of, and so forth.

So they were getting us out. And we were on our march for-- they said it was about 200 miles. I don't know. That's what I was told. I got a picture of the march. It shows the-- not a picture.

A map?

A map. Anyway, that's the big difference between the two. One was officially a prisoner of war camp. This was a death camp.

OK. You mentioned the rations, that you hardly got any food. What else made it a death camp?

There were guys who were mistreated. But we were burying guys every day. I had a guy next to me-- we had bunks that were three high. I was on the top. And one morning, I get up, and the guy next to me is dead. It was too-- well, it was April. But the ground was still very hard.

So a lot of times, what we'd do is, if it too bad, of course, they couldn't send a detail out to bury them, they'd stack them up in the back, back of the barracks. And that happened to a lot of them. And there were guys who were beaten.

I got-- once, I was in the tunnel. You know, the work in the tunnel, all solid rock. And we'd have to blast it up. We'd drill the holes in the rock and then put dynamite in it. And then we'd all have to get out.

And we'd go on the side, and they'd push the thing, and the rocks would fly all over inside. And then, our job was to pick up the rocks, put them in wagon, which is on a rail, and take them out and dump them in a river.

When you got into that Berga concentration camp, did you have any contact with the captors? Did they come by? Did they talk to you? Did they shout at you? How was their personal manner towards you guys?

Well, I was beaten once. I was working in a tunnel. And all of a sudden-- I don't know if it was the engineer or one of the guards, I don't even know who he was-- he starts hollering, sabotage, sabotage sabotage. And we don't know what the hell he's talking about. And all of a sudden, he grabs a hold of me. And he starts hitting the back of my head with a shovel or--

[PHONE RINGS]

Uh-oh. Excuse me.

Stop. Yep.

Which one is that?

He starts going after me. And the guys form a circle around me, like this. And they holler out-- and the guy's swinging at me-- don't hit him back. Don't hit him back. Just let him do whatever he wants, and don't hit him back. And they were smarter than me because I was, you know, like in the movies.
And I didn't. And all of a sudden, I get hit, and I go down. He hits-- somebody hit the shoulder or something-- and then I got up. And then he calls a guard over, speaks with him in German. I didn't understand that part because it was too fast. And he's taking me out, the guard.

Most of the guys, said, oh, they're gonna shoot him. I mean, why would they take me out of the tunnel? What he was doing is he was taking me out, and there was, about 10, 15 yards away from the entrance to the tunnel-- as a matter of fact, I got a picture of it-- there's a little hut, and there's smoke coming out of it. And the guard takes me in.

And there's a Russian-- that's all you can fit in there-- a Russian in there with a potbelly stove. And he's making-- do you know how the dynamite things? OK. They put the dynamite in. And after that, they put a clay, or a putty, in after it, so when the thing goes off, it doesn't fire back. It fires this way, and breaks up the rocks. You understand that?

Got it.

OK. What the guard was doing was rolling the things-- they're about this big, like a cigar-- and he was putting them in boxes, little boxes, trays, for the guards. When they were going to dynamite, they'd use that. You know, they wouldn't have to roll their own. He was giving them the already made. That was his job.

But they gave me the only spot in the whole place that had heat. Because I was sitting down there. And it was a delight. I don't know what it was to have heat. He had a potbelly stove. And just the two of us were in there. And he talked a little German. I talked a little. We were, you know, throwing the bull. And they did nothing to me. They didn't shoot me. Well, how do you figure that?

They did nothing. And then, when it was time to go home, about 6:00, 7:00 o'clock, whenever we went home, get in line and went back, right back to where we slept. Nothing happened to me.

But that's so weird.

Weird? I think he realized that I wasn't the guy who was sabotaging whatever it was and that he was, in his own way, he was sorry that he did it. And he took me. I didn't have to work that afternoon. But he took me out of there and into that hut.

I see. I see.

I say, huh? Those things don't happen. But I got better stories for you.

Please tell me. Please tell me.

Well, when we were on a march-- I told you about the march?

Yes.

I'll tell you something about it. Every morning, about 6, 7 o'clock, we'd get up. We would usually go into a barn. They would requisition a barn from a farmer. Because the march we were on was in the forest. And you only had trails.

And the first night wasn't in a barn. It was in what used to be a factory that made dishes. And they had hay, I guess where they used to dry the dishes or something. It was on wood, and the hay was all straight across, which must have been 50 feet long.

And that night, this is the first night we were we were out from the camp, I put my hand in the hay. The hay was about this thick. And I put my hand, and I feel something. And I go down further. And it felt like an apple. And I pick it up, and it's a turnip. And I ate that turnip like it was steak. And there was carrots down there.
And what I later realized was, in all probability, other slaves were in that same position and put their food that they were hiding down in there. But they didn't get it back. They probably-- but anyway, that was an incident that is unbelievable. Anyway, I thought the whole march was a joke from that point on. I wanted to tell you a story about the march.

This one day, we're marching, and we don't go to a barn. We go in a main street of a small town-- and I don't know the name of that town-- with all cobblestones, not paved. But it was a little town. And it had a jailhouse. And we that's where some of us went, were in, the jailhouse.

And I was in the jailhouse. And this was in April. And the next morning, you could see the sun coming in the thing. It was gorgeous. And I don't know what I did. I don't know what I told them. But I got a hold of the guy who ran the jail and asked him if I could go outside and look at the sun or whatever. And he says, OK. You won't believe this story because I told it a million people, and I said I wouldn't believe it.

So I go out. It's on the Main Street. And there's a cobblestone sidewalk. And I walk to the right, and I get to the end of the street, and it's uphill from there. And there's houses there-- wooden houses, two-story houses like you see here, in America, two-story wooden houses.

And I look up, and I see a barber's pole.

A what?

A barber's pole.

Oh, yeah.

On the side of the house. So this guy's gotta have a barber shop there. I should drop this second if this is a lie. What I'm going to tell you is the god's honest truth. So I say, eh, I'm going to go up and get a haircut. Now, I didn't have any money. I didn't have anything else.

So I go in the back, and the entrance is in the back, and you walk up wooden steps to the second floor, where he was, where the pole is. I open the door. There's two German soldiers waiting, three waiting on. There's one barber, two soldiers, and one is in the chair, also a soldier. And there's a big table with books and newspapers and all German. So I take a seat by there.

[LAUGHING]

I know this is not believable. And I take some newspapers because they were all full of newspapers and books and magazines. And I sit there, and I make believe I'm in reading the news there. And they're sitting there, the soldiers, and not saying a word. That barber doesn't say a word. The guy in the chair doesn't say a word. And that's it.

Now, he finishes with that guy, and he does the other two. There's nobody else there but me. And he calls me over. And I get in the chair. And he takes the comb, and he starts going like this. And my hair was all full of lice. And when he did that, he broke his comb because the lice were there. And the comb cracked in half.

Well, I thought he was going to put the razor blade to me. Nothing, didn't think about it, went on, gave me a terrific haircut. And then he says to me-- and he doesn't ask for money, he doesn't ask for anything, but he knew I wasn't a German, he knew I was American-- he asked me to go into the kitchen since he had an apartment. So this room was his barber shop. Then he had the kitchen, then the bedrooms, I guess. I never went that far.

He opens the door for me, and there's his wife and a daughter. And I walk in. He tells me to go in. I walk in, and she sees me. And she brings out some bread on the table and a piece of fruit. I don't even remember what the hell that was. And she starts talking. And all of a sudden-- and very nice-- we hear machine gun fire.

Now, there's a difference between American machine gun fire and German. The Germans are much faster. They go
IMITATES MACHINE GUN FIRE. An American goes duh-duh-duh-duh. So I know the Americans were there, were around. And she knew it.

So we finish. I must have been there, maybe, 15, 20 minutes. And she brings in a pad with lines and a pencil. And she asked me to write a note to the Americans that she took care of me. So I write. I put my name, my name and serial number. And I write a note that these people were nice to me, they gave me food, and they gave me a haircut. And I signed my name. And that was it. I say goodbye.

I walk back through the barber shop, down the steps. And as I was walking down, there were two planes-- god's honest truth-- where they're dogfighting. One plane, and it was a jet [WHOOSHES], and the other was an American regular plane. And they were fighting.

Now, the jet used to take longer because it was going so fast. Anyway, they were 50 caliber, and they were flying all over the cobblestone road. So I went, and I went under a wagon. And of course, one of those bullets could have hit me just as it not hit me. And within maybe a minute, two or three minutes, it stopped. They both went their ways. Nobody got hurt. Nobody got hit. The planes were gone. And I went back to the jailhouse.

Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh.

God's honest truth, so help me God. And the next morning-- you know, they'd line us up in the street, and it was dark-- the next morning, I took off with another guy. And we would go in the back. And it was also a two-story house. We go in the back, and we wait until it gets light.

And we waited about 8:00, 8:30. I don't really remember the time. And we go upstairs to the second floor and knock on the door. And a woman answers the door. And I said, I want some bread-- Brot. So she asked me in. And I see she's afraid, but she asked me in. And there's another woman there, and they both got scared. Because there were two of us.

And they sit us down, and they put bread to the table. And I don't know if they brought us something else. I can't even remember that. And we finished. And we went to the door. We said goodbye. We walk down the steps. And about 100 yards, maybe 150 yards, from where the back of their house was a forest, all trees.

So I says to the-- I don't even know the guy who was with me-- so I said to him, let's get to the trees, and we'll hide there and then decide what we want to do. And I said, don't run. Because if you run, you're going to attract attention. So we walked nonchalantly, like we're having a-- right.

And all of a sudden, we hear halt! We turn around, and there's the guy who was the prisoner, from the prison, with a pistol-- not a shotgun, a pistol. And what happened was, I think-- and I didn't have anything dawn on my mind that they could do it-- they must have had a telephone and told him that we were there and that we were leaving.

And he brings us back to the jailhouse, gets a wagon-- well, actually, we were there all afternoon-- and by night, they took us back to where the guys were on the march. Nothing was said.

And they didn't shoot you?

Nothing.

They didn't shoot you?

Like a big joke.

It was a game.

Well, I wonder whether or not because it was already that they're losing, and the Americans are coming that they didn't want to shoot you.
No. We were told by the Defense-- not the Defense Department, one of the agencies-- that they would bring-- oh, I'll tell you another story. You got time?

Absolutely.

OK. One day, we're marching. And we cross a little bridge, maybe 10 feet long, a little bridge over a stream. And we get over this stream, and there, on both sides of the road, with bullets in their head were dead Jews for as long as we marched that day.

Now, all with bullets in their head. And none of them had shoes on. None of them had shoes on. But they had the striped shirts. Not all of them had striped shirts. And they were all dead. That happened. Now, that's probably what was going to happen to us at one point. But I didn't know it. But the government told us that they were marching us to execute us.

I see. But that's then, if that was the truth, they could have done it earlier.

They wanted to be as far away from the original camp as they could get. And that was their plan, to get us to a certain spot-- now, I don't know where-- and do it. I don't know how far we were from that spot. I don't know. But that was the plan. They didn't want to get-- if they found a grave with a hundred American soldiers there, there's be a lot of hell about that one. But they were marching us away from that.

When you mentioned that time when you were going to go to the woods, is that one of the two times you tried to escape? You said you tried to escape two times.

Yeah, I escaped that time.

Yeah. What was the second time, when you tried to escape.

Let's see. I'm trying to-- you know what? They're coming together with me. OK. I'm trying to figure out how we got caught on that one. Because the next one, I know how we got caught. Let me go to the next one.

Yeah, tell me the next one.

We were in a pretty big town one night. And we came out of a big barn, tremendous. It must have been twice the size of all the other barns that we were in. And we were all in there. And it was the day we found out that Roosevelt died. It was a rainy day there.

So now, we get ready to march. We stayed there for more than a night. We stayed there, I think, two nights. But anyway, we were getting ready for the march. And we take us out to a road, a dirt road, out of town. And the planes are bombing the hell out of that city that we were in.

So we get there. And the people started leaving the town, too, in droves, you know, down this same road. So it was a raised road like this, like that. And we stayed there like this.

Sort of like on the side, yeah.

Yeah, looking up, and watching everybody go by. They weren't paying attention to us. And we decided to wait it out. And as a matter of fact, one of the people who passed by, a woman passed by, very well dressed in a, I think it was a tweed suit. You know, you can tell you it was-- I could tell because I had that little bit to do with women's clothing.

And she's on a bicycle. And she sees us, and she continues on. And she was so attractive, we were still watching her. And she stops, I don't know, 20, 50 feet, whatever it is. She stops on the bicycle and gets off the bicycle and puts something on the ground and takes off.
So not me but one of the guys says, I want to see what she left there. Because it looks like she left it for us. And sure enough, he gets it, and it's a package of sandwiches.

[COUGHS]

[BREATHING SHAKILY]

She left them for us. And we ate them. Wasn't that a nice gesture?

Yeah.

OK. I've told that to other people, and they won't use that as part of their whatever they-- because it makes Germans look good.

But if it's true?

It is.

If it's true, it happened.

Yeah, but some people don't want the truth.

Yeah. Life is very complicated.

Well, I mean, wasn't a nice gesture?

Yeah.

It happened, just the way I'm telling it. And then, when everybody, the crowds, start coming, we got out. We walked down. And it was grassy, and then, all of a sudden, the trees. We go into the trees, and we figured we'd hide out there. And we even got lost there. We didn't know where the hell we were, whether it was east, west, in the middle.

So we kept walking because it was still daylight. And we finally take a look through the trees, and there's a farmhouse, two or three farmhouses. So we decide, let's go in to the farm. And I said, let's get one guy and make believe he's wounded or that he's in bad shape.

And I hold him on one shoulder, and he holds him another. And we walk out of the trees, up the hill. And we walk to the farmhouse. And there's kids there-- they saw us coming-- and women and farmers. They were all, what is this all about?

And there was one woman who was-- another one-- well dressed, in a suit. And she sees us, and she walks away, goes down a trail, and disappears. Nothing to worry about. Anyway, the farmer says he's got a Russian slave that works for him. And he's going to get him to hide us in the woods.

So he calls the guy because he wanted to help us, the farmer. And he takes us out into the middle of the-- the Russian guy-- takes us out to the middle of the woods. And he said, stay here. I can't bring you food tonight, but I'll bring you food tomorrow morning. But stay here, and I'll know where you are. Fine. Everything's fine.

How did that Russian slave look, by the way?

What?

How did that Russian slave look? Did he look well-fed? Or did he look--
I didn't notice.

You didn't notice.

I don't even know whether he had a beard. I have no idea. In my memory, that wasn't important. I don't know.

OK.

He was a person. And he took us. And we're there about-- actually, we put leaves there and stuff, like like down, make like a bed for ourselves. And we lie down. And about maybe a half hour, 3/4 of an hour, maybe a longer, the guy, the Russian, comes running back.

And he says-- in German, he's speaking, and I pick up the words-- the woman who went then went to the police and told them that there was a soldier that needed help. He was wounded or whatever they thought what was wrong with him, you know, the guy we were carrying. And she thought she was doing-- she didn't even know we were American, I don't think.

Anyway, they come out, and they realize it was Americans, and they tell the Russian, where are they? Either you get them, or we're going to get them. And if we have to get them, we're going to kill you. That's the way he told it to me.

And he comes to us, and he asks us to give up. So we did. And nothing happened. Nothing happened. They got a horse and wagon and took us back to where the guys were. They did that two or three times.

So tell me. Here's a curious thing when you were telling the story about going to the barber.

Yeah.

What kind of clothes did you have on?

My uniform.

The uniform you were captured in?

Yes. See, my uniform had a black triangle on the front and on the back-- not big, but about this size. And that's all. That tells them I'm a prisoner of war. But they didn't-- I never knew it, what it meant. Maybe they didn't know. Because some prisoners of war had the word Kriegsgefangene on the back.

Yeah, prisoner of war. Yeah, that's what it means.

Yeah, a prisoner of war. Or we had a guy here who was a prisoner with me who was in that same camp, but he was a medic. And he was one of the guys who would go to get the food out of Buchenwald. He was a member here. I used to play golf with him. He was a doctor in New York, and he passed away about four or five years ago.

[COUGH]

And I'm telling you that for a reason. I don't know what the hell the reason is.

Well, I was asking about uniforms, what kind of clothes you had on when you went to the barber.

The same, exact clothes that I was captured with. Because I only took them off once, was to get that shower.

And that was my other question. Is that shower that they gave you before you left the first shower that you got since being captured?
It's the only shower.

It was the only shower.

The only water we ever got. I never saw a faucet until then.

Wow. So for three or four months--

I had lice on me that would-- I mean, there were hundreds, all over. Wherever there was hair, there was lice. All of us had that. We got that-- we found out later-- that the hay, when we got both prison camps, we had to take a-- what the hell are these called?-- a big bag that they used-- that was the mattress --and fill it with straw. In other words, they sent us into a barn where the hay was, and we'd fill it as good as-- and that's what we slept on. And we were told that's where the lice came from.

I see. I see.

It was in the hay. And they were all over us. When I used to come, I'd put on a nail and-- [CRACKS] you'd crack the back. That's how you kill them.

Except it's one at a time.

Yeah. That's the only way you could do it. We didn't have any FLIT. You don't know what FLIT is. Do you know what it is? You don't?

Tell me.

FLIT was the first ones with the-- to kill insects. They were the first company that made the stuff to kill-- FLIT.

Was it a aerosol kind of spray?

Yeah. Oh, I don't know if it was aerosol at the time. It might have been a pump thing. But they're the first ones, if you wanted to kill mosquitoes, you went to the store and asked for FLIT. OK.

OK. So that was one of my questions was, was that the first shower that you took? Do you think those German soldiers knew that you were a prisoner?

No. I don't think so. I think they would have done something.

Yeah, because that's very odd.

And I was trying to think, now, why would the barber know? He knew not to ask me for any-- what do you call it?

Money.

Money. And he knew. I never said to him I was an American when I was sitting in the chair. I think he sort of knew from the guy who ran the prison. It was a jailhouse. And maybe they both had coffee before they went to work or what. And he would say that we have the American soldiers here.

I don't know. That's the only thing that enters my mind at how he knew. Because he made no bones about it. He sent me to the room where his wife was to get that piece of paper. And his little girl was there, too. I never asked a dime.

Well, that piece of paper probably was very valuable for them.

Yeah, sure. I put my serial number down, legitimately, you know-- 32929112. How's that?
[CHUCKLES]

You remember it, yeah.

And like he knew me, but he didn't. And I guarantee you he knew I was-- well, he knew I was American because he sent me in to write that note.

Right. Going back to Berga, can you tell me what the camp looked like? What kind of buildings were there? What kind of a--

I got a picture of it.

I know, but in words. Try--

It was wooden houses. You walked in. The door was in the middle of the building. And the building was this way. And wooden with glass windows. You walked up steps to get there.

These were the barracks, the places you slept?

Yeah, that was the barracks, yeah.

OK. How many people were in it, do you think?

I really don't know. I would guess about 50. I don't know.

In a barracks?

Yeah.

In the camp?

No. In the camp, there were hundreds-- hundreds, there were. As a matter of fact, at one time, there were English there. And I bumped into, one day-- I don't know how I bumped into them-- but Hungarians who were prisoners. They're not soldiers. They were Amer-- and they said, Amer-- when they found out I was American. How can an American be in prison, in this camp?

So these were Hungarians. Were they Hungarian Jews?

Yeah, yeah.

Hungarian Jews were there. And you said you saw English soldiers.

Well, at one time, I think there were Russians there, too. But I never bumped into them. And there weren't any where we were working. We were working in an entrance that was quite large, bigger than that opening there for that door--bigger than that. And it was all solid rock.

And so your life was going from the barracks to the tunnel.

Yeah, right. You got it. You got it perfect.

And you got fed in the morning?

No, when we got back from work.
Really? So all day without any food.

Nothing. Nothing. And you got no time off from work, either. You worked as long as you were there. It was 12 hours, at least.

You must have dropped a lot of weight.

Well, they told me when-- I don't know, I didn't get on a scale and look-- but they told me I weighed 125. And I weigh 200 now. And when I was-- I guess I weighed 160, maybe 165.

Did you feel weak every day?

No.

No?

Nope. As a matter of fact, I was one-- there might have been a few-- of the only people who didn't require a stretcher when we were liberated.

Wow.

Let me tell you about that. That's another story, how I got liberated. We were in a barn that day, a pretty big barn. And let's say it went this way, OK? Now, the front was here, and the rear was here. It was a big barn. And I didn't know it, but the street was down an incline.

OK, so now, they hear machine gun fire. We all hear machine gun fire. And it's American machine gun fire. And the guards start running out the back, away. And I'm in the front. I didn't even know they were running out in the back. I was told later.

And it's a big door, I guess where they bring the cattle through. And then there's a little door, a regular door you walk in. And I was right by that door, that small door, peeking out. And I take a look.

[EXHALES]

(VOICE BREAKING) And I see a vehicle with a white star. You know what that is?

Tell us.

Huh?

Tell us. What is that vehicle with the white star.

It's American. I thought it was an American tank. But I found out after I got down there it was a half-track. You know what a half-track is? It's half truck and half tank. It's got the back has it this, whatever you call it. And the front is a regular steering wheel. It's a half-track, they call it. And that was with the star.

So I see that. And I'm alone. Everybody's looking out the back, and I'm alone at that door. And I run out of there. And I run down the hill. It was all grassy and fairly high-- not green grass, straw grass. And I put my hands up, and I run down the hill. I says, if they think I'm a German, I'm putting my hands up.

I swear to God. I swear by everything that's sacred to me this is the truth. And I will run down and it's a half-track And who are you, where you coming from, all that. Well, we're-- oh. The guy says to me, are you hungry? I said, hungry? You can't give me enough food. So he takes out a roll. What do you use on a-- ah, shit. It's a small roll of beef-- meat.
You mean roast beef?

Huh? No, no. It's made in-- oh, Jesus. They use it in-- oh, god. I'm going out of my mind. I'll think of it. But anyway, and he says, here. Eat this. And I ate the whole thing. And it's all spicy, Italian food.

You mean, like salami?

No. It's like salami. What is it?

It's like salami.

Sausage?

Huh?

Sausage?

Pepperoni?

Pepperoni, that's it. OK. So I ate the whole thing. So he says, come on. We'll take you to the hospital. I was the only one there. The rest of them, all the guys were in the back. And I go into the half-track. And they take me to a church that was just made into a hospital. And I get there. And I thank them all. And then they took off. And I went in. And they put me in bed. That was it. I was liberated.

Unbelievable. The guys back at the barn, did they then know to go and to release them, too?

They all eventually saw the tanks and everything. They all went to the--

They all went.

Yeah. The tanks came up the hill. But everybody knew by that time that it was-- but I got sick that night because of that pepperoni. You ever eat pepperoni?

A little, not a lot. Because it's spicy.

Yeah. And I got sick that night. I was upstairs. They had a second floor that used to be where the women sat upstairs, in the church. And they had a bed there-- two beds. And I let go in that bed. It was like a pool.

[CHUCKLES]

And then, I woke up. I woke up, and I see smoke. The guy in the next bed was smoking, and his bed was on fire. And I hollered to the guys. They came, and they stopped it. But he was smoking in bed. But I got sick as a dog. But the next morning, I was fine.

And do you know, at that point, how far from Berga you had come?

No. They said it's about 200 miles.

So you had walked literally 200 miles.

Yeah. But that's what it said in a book that I read. I don't know. Every night was a different barn. And most of them were barns. Occasionally, like I said, once was where they made dishes.
Right, the factory.

That was the first night.

And were there a lot of guards who were guarding you?

No, no. They didn't have any men to spare. That's why I could escape so fast. Everybody could take off anytime they wanted.

Were there other guys, you think, who probably tried?

Oh, other guys took off. Other guys took off. The guy in Boynton Beach who was with me in the tunnel that I was in, and I never knew him, he took off with another guy, and they were hiding in a haystack or something. He did it after he saw the people shot in the head. He said, this is going to happen to us. I'm getting out of here. That's what he told me. And I wasn't smart enough to think that.

Excuse me. Can you lower your hand a little?

Oh, I'm sorry.

Because he can't see you, you know, in the monitor.

Oh, I'm sorry.

It's OK.

I'm sorry.

It's OK. But he left before-- he ran away before you did.

They ran away, and they hid in a haystack. And they got caught. The farmer saw them and called the police.

So it depended on who you landed on. It depended on which farmer you went up to. You never knew.

Yeah, some were friendly. Listen, whenever we would stop to rest-- you know, on the march, you don't just keep walking because the guys were falling like flies, they were falling out. I'll tell you another little story. Anyway, whenever we would stop-- we'd sit down on the grass or something like that-- invariably if we were near any houses, the women would come out, and then the kids would come out.

And then, they would all disappear. And then, they would bring food-- carrots, potatoes. There were good people, too. And that happened many times. Now, the guy I'm going to tell you about, who lives in Boynton Beach, he doesn't remember that. And I think he must've been with us. He doesn't remember that.

Well, you know, when you're in that situation, you don't know on the other side what's the motivation. Sometimes, if there are fewer guards, they're not as scared to do it.

There weren't-- I had a guard originally in the IX-C, the bad camp in Berga, who liked me. He used to call me his Schwartze. You know what that means?

Tell me.

It's his black guy. Because I had all curly hair. I had a bush of hair, boy. And he used to call me his Schwartze because I looked dirty and dark, I guess. And one time, he called me in to help him with-- you know, when they drill, they have a long thing and then the thing that does the drilling, the head. And that has to be-- if it's used because it goes into rock,
and it gets--

Wears down.

Yeah, and he used to put it on the-- he had a fire. Well, I don't know what you would call it. Not the regular fire but to heat up so that it would melt and soften. And he hammered the things so that they were sharp.

And he was showing me how to do it, too. He asked me to help him one day. He told me to come with him. And that's what-- so that was heat there, too. That's where I-- but then, it was April. And it was-- but he tried to help me.

How?

I forgot his name.

How did he try to help you?

Well, he helped me there.

To get you into the heat?

Yeah. And he was nice to me. He was nice to me. Like, jokingly, he called me his little Schwartze.

So in other words, he wasn't brutal towards you.

No, not at all. Not at all. He couldn't be nicer. And he was an older man.

Yeah. Aside from the guy who hit you when he said sabotage, how did the other guards behave?

They were no-- there were no-- in the tunnel?

In general, in Berga.

No, they were fine. I never had any run-in with them. Other guys did. The only time I had a problem was that one time when the guy hit me. But I never had anything with any of them. We had one guy who was, I think his hand was shot off or something like that-- a young guy.

He was from a town that got-- the Americans bombed the heck out of it. And he had little children there. But I don't know if anything happened. He was a guard because-- a young guy-- he was a guard because he'd lost a hand. Now, they couldn't use him in battle.

[COUGHs]

When you say Berga was a death camp, does that mean it was death by starvation? Because you're not talking--

Yeah, that's what they think.

OK. Because from what you're telling me, it doesn't sound like there was torture--

No.

--or general mistreatment, overall mistreatment.

That's right. Listen, out of 350, at least half of us died from malnutrition. But it was a excruciating experience.
Oh, I don't mean to diminish that at all. It's simply I was trying to get a sense of, when we have interviews with people who are in Auschwitz, there's one kind of behavior that is exhibited, and different types of things that happen to them.

Well, they got beaten pretty good.

Yeah, they got beaten a lot.

Yeah, I know.

And there's a difference in the Geneva Convention rules.

See, they didn't have Geneva Convention rules, the regular prisoners. But we were supposed to have them. At one time, we got a package from the Red Cross. And it's all full of chocolates and raisins and different things. It was a little thing, like this. And we had to divide that amongst the guys. It was supposed to be one for each guy. But that's not the way it worked out.

Really?

Yeah. Well, they sent enough for that. But the guards must have taken the rest.

I see. And like, I got raisins or something else. And that was a good food. I traded it for chocolate.

[LAUGHING]

And do you think there was trade going on between you guys and the people who weren't military prisoners, like the Hungarians?

No, they had nothing to do with us.

So you never had an opportunity to--

They were never in our barracks, so how were we gonna? One guy I remember in particular were slaves doing some other work for them. I don't know what they were doing. But there was a bridge there, I know. And I know we were walking over water to get out the-- what do you call it? And he was there. And when he takes a look and he sees my uniform, and I tell him American, I can't be. No. But that's the only way I met him.

So it's very chance.

Yeah.

It was very chance. OK. OK. Did you call yourselves slaves at that point?

No, no, no. But we were. No.

Was there conversation in the barracks?

Let me tell you something. When we got back from work, nobody had the strength to talk or sit and talk. We went up. I was in the third bunk, the third tier. We came back. I went up, and I went to try to go to sleep. That's what everybody did. They got off.

Now, the guys who were medics in the army and then became the guys who were supposed to get food for us, they didn't know what we were going through. They might have heard us talk about it, but they never saw it. And the guy I'm telling you that I didn't like, he was one of those guys, and he wrote about the and said that he'd been there.
And he'd never been there to where we worked. He stayed. He didn't have time to do it. You can't write-- he wrote a manuscript. Nobody had that kind of time, nobody. You can't go on a march and go to work every day and have the time to sit down and write a book. Doesn't happen.

Was he in Berga?

Yeah. But he was one of the guys who would go get the food for us.

I see. I see.

And I don't think he did that too often, either. But he wrote the thing. And he's a big hero. The guy, he was being interviewed in Washington from the-- what do you call it?

National Geographic.

Yeah. And there was a guy with him-- forgot his name-- who was with him, who went to Berga with him to do that program. And he just died, the other guy. Kira told me that. Felman, his name was. He was there with his wife-- nice guy. But I didn't know him from the camp.

OK. How did being in Berga change you?

Change me?

Yeah, or did it?

Well, what was I before? Change me from what?

Well, you know, you told me earlier that you-- I asked, did you feel well prepared as a soldier.

Well prepared?

Yeah, and you said you were invulnerable. You were young.

That's right. I felt it then, too. I never thought that I would die. Never in all the years and the condit-- I didn't know I was in as bad a condition as I was. I didn't know what I weighed. I was able-- I ran down that thing from that barn, and I don't think there'll be two or three guys who could run the way I ran down that barn. So I must have been in fairly good shape. I know there aren't too many of them that could do that.

So even through all that, you still felt strong and, in some ways, invulnerable.

Yeah.

Well, I'm 89 years old. That's pretty good, isn't it?

It is very good. It's very good. When you were in from being captured to being liberated, did you ever learn, besides seeing what must have been an indescribable vision of all the Jews along the road with the bullet in the head, did you know of the concentration camps? Did you know of what was going on elsewhere?

No, no. I have never seen anything like that. And it was unbelievable. And I didn't think that could happen to me. That's being pretty stupid. Because the other guy in Boynton Beach, the minute he saw that, that day, he said to one of his friends, he says, I'm getting out of here 'cause that's gonna happen to us. Now, that thought never entered my mind, which makes him smarter than me. I never thought it.

And in another way, I go back to my question. Did this experience change you at all?
Well, I don't know what way.
I don't mean by changing your--

Did it make me different toward the Germans, or did it-- no.

Did it, in some way, influence your belief in people? Did it influence--

No, I don't think so.

--how you viewed-- no?

I don't think so. I don't think so. I think everything that happens, you've got to answer it any way you think is right or wrong and usually right. That wouldn't have done anything to me. I don't think so.

When you were finally liberated--

When I was what?

Finally liberated. Actually, in some ways, it sounds like you liberated yourself, running down to the Americans.

Oh, right. Oh, Jesus that was-- what a day that was.

How soon before you could get word to your family, to your mom, that you were alive, and you were safe?

Well, she knew I was alive because I was-- she got a note that I was a prisoner of war. So she got-- I got them here. She got the original letter, or telegram, that I was missing in action. And I don't know. There's dates on those things when one came and when the other. And I don't know, it might have been a month later-- I don't know-- that I was a prisoner of war. So she knew I was alive.

I know. But when you're liberated, were you able to communicate, send her a telegram, I'm OK?

No, no. I don't even remember how they know. Hey, there was another thing. Every night-- and my friend says he never went through this-- every night, they would wake us up two or three times, usually twice, and have a roll call outside. So we'd walk down the steps, you know, and I got my German on the [SPEAKING GERMAN].

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

It's 23207. Every night, we'd do that. And every night, I'd look up, and I'd see the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper. And I'd say to myself, I wonder if my mother's looking at that.

Yeah, yeah. You were in this hospital, this makeshift hospital, in the church for how long?

I don't think we were there three or four days. I don't know if it was that long. Then, we were flown to-- I don't know if it was then-- to in France to Lyon. You ever hear of that?

Yeah.

Yeah. To a beautiful hospital. But you know, half the guys-- more than half-- most of them were carried in on a stretcher. And maybe two or three of us walked in, in the plane, when they took us.

Were you debriefed?
Huh?

Were you debriefed? That is, did someone come by and say--

Yeah, you mean, did they interview us?

Yes.

Yes. Where did that happen?

I'll tell you a little-- you want me to tell you a little story?

Yeah, yeah, please, please.

I didn't know anybody that I know of who was there by name or by anything. Now, the guy who wrote the book about us-- I got it here someplace-- we had a reunion in Tampa, Florida. And the guy who wrote the book came to the reunion. I'm sorry.

It's OK.

He came to the reunion. And he come-- we're sitting-- my friend and I, he was the doctor who was the one who died who lived here.

Right, you told me.

Lived here. We played golf together.

Really?

Yeah. We became very friendly. And he passed away. And I used to take his wife out for dinner with my wife. On my birthday, on her birthday, on our anniversary, she used to come with us. Anyway, she was a delightful woman. He didn't know me, but he was a medic. And he was one of the guys who got the food, OK, in Berga.

So now, fast forward and go back to Tampa. The guy walks in, and he sees we're sitting on the couch with the two women. And he says, hey, I got a story to tell you two guys. What's the story?

He says, before I came down here today, I went to-- well, he lived near Washington, it's almost Washington where he lives-- and he says that he went to the archives about Berga. And he went in there, and he got a little story to tell us. And the story is this.

In there, it says that I was being interviewed after we got liberated. And one of the questions that was given to me was, have you ever seen anybody hung? Now, I said no, I never saw anybody get hung. But I think Bill Shapiro has seen somebody get hung.

Because Bill Shapiro was one of the medics. And he lived here. He was my buddy. He lived here. And I think he did. Because he told me about seeing where they'd hang them, people. They had-- with the neck things. Anyway, so I said, the guy's name's Bill Shapiro.

Now, I never mentioned seeing that man in Berga. I never mentioned it to him. There would be no way I could know his name unless I knew him then. I mentioned him by name in the archives that this guy had seen. And I don't remember it. And Bill Shapiro doesn't remember it, or didn't remember it. Now, that's a story.

It can be one on memory, yes. It's a story on memory and what we remember and what we don't.
I don't remember anybody there. I don't remember anybody's face. I don't remember anybody's name. But he says I said when I was being interviewed, Bill Shapiro saw somebody being hung.

Now, when we're talking now, do you remember some of the questions you were asked during that interview?

No, that's one of the questions. I don't remember any.

No?

I really don't. I don't even remember getting interviewed. I remember being interviewed when we got to not Berga but the other camp, the first camp.

Stalag IX-B.

Yeah. What the hell was that? I can't remember why. I remember being interviewed there.

Oh, that would have been by the Germans.

Yeah. But spoke perfect English.

Oh, really?

Perfect. I thought they were Americans who were told to ask us questions, but they weren't.

Now, after you were in the hospital in Lyon, how long were you there?

Not many days. Actually, I'll tell you another little story.

Lyon was bombed senselessly by the Americans. So I wasn't bed-ridden. So about four or five of us-- I don't know how many-- decided we're going to take a walk and see what the town is like. But we go out of the hospital. And the street coming to the hospital is like you see in the movies.

The buildings are all half building, and the streets are all full of debris. It looks like it just happened. And there was a little store there. It was maybe 10 feet wide, a little store, a long store, all women's hats. So we went in there, and we tried on hats.

[LAUGHING]

Then we walk out a little more, and we come to a warehouse. And it was not locked. It was open. And we go in there, and it's all brand new stuff. And one of the things they had there was a German pilot's jacket, fleece lined, powder blue-- beautiful jacket. So I took one-- brand new-- I took one. I brought it home. My mother threw it out. And there was a knife there that, if I had it, I priced it today, it would be worth $2,500.

Oh, my gosh.

Yeah. It was like automatic. And they called it a pilot's thing, and you pushed something down on it, and you did this, and the blade came out. It was made out of wood and metal. And it was-- I cherished it. I took one of those, brand new, and took that home. I carried that jacket, put it in. Oh, what a-- and then, I got some cameras.

Wow.

Yeah, but they weren't in good condition, but terrific make-- Bausch Lomb and all the best makes--

So you had some souvenirs at the end.
about three or four. Huh?

You had some souvenirs.

Oh, yeah. But my mother, she threw out everything. She didn't want to have anything to do with Germany. I had the red swastika, the band arm, I took one of those out of this place of everything was brand new. And she threw that out.

After that, how long before you were sent back home?

You mean--

After Lyon.

After Lyon. I think I went from there to Camp Lucky Strike and then went home. I don't know how many days or what took when. I don't-- I never checked.

But it sounds to me if you were on that march for a couple of weeks in April, it probably is the lat-- do you remember the date that you were liberated?

Yeah.

April what?

April 23.

April 23.

That's my birthday. No, I call it my second birthday.

Your second birthday.

I used to call my friend, Shapiro, on the 23rd. Happy birthday.

Yeah.

But I'm thinking that's the day you're liberated. And the war ends in early May. And at some point, you're on your way back.

I don't understand that. The war ended-- I heard the war ended when I was in what do you call it. Oh, I was liberated, then in the hospital. So it took that time. Yeah, OK. Yeah. OK.

And that's at least the European theater. And then, in August, it's the Pacific theater. But in Europe, the war ends in early May. And by that point, you must be either an Lyon or soon to be there and then back home. So a year earlier-- just a year earlier-- you were a high school graduate.

Huh.

And in the one year--

Yeah. Is that what-- I don't remember the--

It's just an amazing--
I'm giving you the dates that they all have in them.

Yeah. Yeah, no, no, no. Dates are-- when I ask you for the dates, it's not like I'm looking for specifics. It's just trying to get a sense of how events happened in what period of time.

This happened in a short period of time. Is that what you're trying to say?

A very short period of time.

Yeah. Well, it all happened. It all happened.

When you came back, did you talk much about it?

No. My kids never knew until about 12 years ago, when I started getting interviewed from the first one, the Charles Guggenheim. Did you ever hear of him?

Mm-hmm.

OK, well, he did the first one. It was his project. From that time on.

From that time on.

My wife didn't know.

Why didn't you tell them?

I'll tell you why. You heard of Charles Guggenheim?

Mm-hmm.

Huh?

I've heard of the name Guggenheim, certainly.

Yeah, he was a great writer and everything. He did a lot of things about the war. Anyway, I don't know where, but at one of the reunions that we had, he came. And he sat down, like the other guy. He sat down on the couch, and we were talking. And he was talking-- was also in the 106th division that I was in. But he got sick and never went overseas.

I see.

So I think that's why he did all the things about the Holocaust with us. But he said, well, you guys are heroes, you know, meaning the prisoners. (VOICE BREAKING) And I said, I don't think so. How can you be a hero if you give up? And that was my feeling then. And I didn't want to brag about it. But Charles Guggenheim, with this program, and you with your program, made it look like it was a big deal. So I'm being part of it. But we're no heroes.

Well, to endure and to survive--

Well, that's not being a hero. Anyway, that's why I never talked about it.

I see. Was it something you were ashamed of?

Yeah.

Yeah?
Yeah, yeah.

Well, that's quite a burden to carry.

Well, it never made me do one thing or the other. I never became so involved with that kind of thought that--

I understand.

--it meant anything. Well, it wasn't important. That's the way I felt about it. I didn't make it part of my life, and I didn't say to the kids, oh, what I went through-- never. But when that thing came out, then they knew what happened.

[BREATHING SHAKILY]

I get emotional. I get-- I'm crazy.

No.

Anyway, that's the story. And then we were sent to Fort Ord, California.

What happened there?

Well, we thought we were going overseas again.

Really?

Yeah. They never told us why, but they sent us out there. And then, that's where I got my discharge, in California. We had a great time there.

Yeah?

Oh. The things-- we met movie actors. We were at their homes.

Really?

Yeah.

Ha. That must have been pretty cool.

Did you ever hear of-- you know Alan Alda?

Yeah.

You know him?

Well, I don't know him personally, but I know--

You know his father?

Robert Alda.

Yeah. You know he did Gershwin?

Uh-huh.
Well, we were at their home when Alan Alda wasn't Alan Alda. It was Allie, and he was nine years old.

Oh, my gosh.

That's when I was there. And his mother and sister, and he had a tutor, a woman who lived in Woodbridge, where I lived in New Jersey. She lived there.

Oh, my gosh.

How's that?

My gosh, what a treat. How special.

You ever hear of-- oh. We met a lot-- we had a ball in California.

When you got discharged, you went back to New Jersey?

Yeah. We hitchhiked home.

You could hitchhike in those days.

Huh?

You could hitchhike in those days.

Yeah, because, let me tell you something. There was no traffic because nobody had cars. It was a pleasure. But we got a ride with two guys who we think were in the mafia.

Really.

Yeah, really. I mean, they were real tough guys. And they drove us as far as Ohio-- because that's where they were getting off-- in their car, never asked us for a dime for gasoline or anything. And just a delightful guy, but real rough guys. And from there, we hitchhiked home.

Your mom must have been happy to see you.

Huh?

Your mother must have been happy to see you.

[BREATHING SHARPLY]

(VOICE BREAKING) Yeah. Yeah. I came home. I got sent to, in New Jersey, Camp Kilmer. You know where that is?

No, I don't.

Never heard it? And it's near where I live. So that night, I called the house. I got my uncle. And I told him. So they all wanted to come down to the-- I says, don't come down because I'll be home tomorrow morning. And that morning, I came home about 9 o'clock. And I went to my mother's store. And she was at the beauty parlor, which is next door. She owned the building. And the beauty parlor's there. And I went into the beauty parlor. And all the women.

Oh.
It was nice. So that's my story.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Is there anything you want to add to it? I'll probably think of something when we leave, but I don't remember anything else. I think I told you everything that happened to me.

Well, thank you very, very much.

You're quite welcome.

Thank you. And this concludes-- oh, do you want to say something else before I give the final speech?

No, no, no. I have a very dear friend of mine who says, why don't you write either a book or do something? I said, no, I'll never do that. But this is as close as you're going to get to it.

Well, I hope that-- well, thank you. We really appreciate it because, for us, it's a gift.

Would you like to go have lunch at the club?

Hang on a second. Let me finish the interview.

Go ahead.

And I'll say, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Ed Slotkin on July 14, 2014. Thank you very, very much.

Thank you.

OK. You can cut.

Yeah?

Yeah, she [INAUDIBLE].

She won't let you touch her.

No? Oh, you've got a little bit of hair coming out.

Yeah, see that?

Yeah.

Her whole back was like that. And the doctor said it was a skin condition.

So she's just testing us out, seeing what we are all about.

Yeah.

So you're filming now? OK. So let's, uh-huh. So this is the first one. We're waiting for him to--

Well, it's just the first one I grabbed.
OK. Well, I wanted to do it sequentially.

Oh.

January 13, '45.

--in action.

All right. So this telegram, which is dated January 13, 1945, what is that all about?

It tells my mother that I was missing in action. And the other one tells her that--

We'll bring that one out, too. So you got that?

Is that it? OK. This one's dated February 23, 1945. What's that about? Can you tell us?

Well, yeah, it was-- oh, that's that I was a prisoner of war. I'm alive.

So your mother knows--

Yeah.

--at that point. OK.

OK, now it's on. It's OK. Tell us what this is.

That's a note that I sent to my mother and sister, I guess, about the prison camp.

So was it a letter or a postcard you were allowed to write from the prison camp?

Yeah, right, right, right, yes.

Uh-huh. And what did you say in it?

I don't remember. That I was fine, probably.

Yeah. I'm gonna--

God bless you.

[SNEEZES]

You're going to edit out whatever's--

Well, this means, then, this is the card where you said that you were fine and the other two guys were fine?

Yeah, yeah. And then my sister called-- well, one was Oregon or something. And the other one was right near us. And she got the families. And they found out that their guys were alive.

All right. I'm going to bring that telegram, too. [INAUDIBLE].

OK.
All right. So we're fine here. All right. So what was this telegram, then?

This--

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. OK. What is this, then?

This telegram was sent by them to my sister. They're from Oregon, and they told her that they finally got a letter that he was alive-- a telegram that he was alive.

I see. So she had first let them know through your letter.

Right. And then-- right, that's correct.

And then they let her know that they found out officially.

That they got the official.

That telegram, it tells my mother that I'll be home soon. Is that it?

Got it?

Boy.

What is this piece of paper here?

That's my official discharge from the army from California. And I was on my way home.

Why don't you tell us?

Well, I'm trying to figure that.

Well, tell me, who is this in the photo?

Well, tell me, who is this in the photo?

That's me.

That's you.

That's me when I was a young man and I first got in the army. PFC, after I did my basic.

Before shipping out to--

Before shipping, yeah.

So that would have been in 1944.

Yeah.

OK. That's you as a 19-year-old.

Wow. I had hair then.

[LAUGHING]

Handsome guy.
Yeah.

OK. [INAUDIBLE].