

RG-50.030.0760

Summary

Edward Slotkin was born on October 30, 1924 in the Bronx, NY. His parents, Morris and Miriam, immigrated from Russia. His father ran an auto-wrecking business. He had one younger sister, Arline. Mostly English was spoken at home. His family was observant and he had a Bar Mitzvah, but he ceased being religious as an older adult. His neighborhood on Casanova Street had an Italian-Jewish mix where he experienced no antisemitism.

He could read the Yiddish newspapers as a child but was only vaguely aware of problems in Europe. His father died of a brain tumor in 1939; Ed describes his relationship with him. The family moved to New Jersey to be closer to his mother's family while she worked in the textile remnants trade. He finished high school in 1944 and was drafted that year, taking basic at Fort Eustis, Virginia. He joined the air cadets training at George Field, IL, but were ultimately assigned to the 106th Infantry Division handling howitzers. Ed was first deployed to Scotland, then to Camp Lucky Strike in France (Le Havre).

His unit was stationed in the woods at the time and location when the Battle of the Bulge started. On the third day, they evacuated their position in trucks, while also transporting 15-20 German prisoners. But, his unit was captured and sent to Stalag IX B. He was not only able to notify his family in writing of his capture, but also to notify two families that their sons were with him and not MIA as they had thought. Camp guards began to isolate Jewish soldiers, but when Ed was initially passed over, he insisted that he also be separated. They were sent Camp Berga, which he called a death camp where conditions were especially harsh. It held Jewish civilians and soldiers from many countries. Though conditions were harsh, physical abuse was rare.

He was assigned to making dynamite, which while dangerous, put him in warmer quarters. He tells a story about stepping out of the jailhouse for a haircut, and two escape attempts.

He was liberated on April 23 and describes the circumstances, including his debrief in Lyons before he redeployed to Ford Ord, Cal, where he was discharged, hitchhiking back to New Jersey.