

Robert R. Max

July 14, 2015

RG-50.030*0819

Abstract

Robert Roger Max, born July 10, 1923 in Newark, NJ, describes his wife, Shirley Max; growing up in New Jersey; learning that his family's name was original Manczyk; his Jewish family's background; moving to the suburbs; the Jewish community; never encountering antisemitism as a child; his education and awareness of the war; starting college in 1942 at New York University and transferring to Ohio University, where he studied journalism; participating in ROTC; signing up for the US Army; being sent to Fort Dix; being recruited into the army band by Jack Leonard and playing clarinet and saxophone; going to basic training in Alabama at Fort McClellan and details about the training; doing the Charles Atlas workout; attending the Army Specialized Training Program at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University); applying to Officer Candidate School and the Air Academy, but being sent to Indiana for combat training at Camp Atterbury; being assigned to the motor pool unit; sailing on the RMS Mauretania to Liverpool, England and the false reporting that it had sunk during the voyage; the treachery of crossing the English Channel; landing on Omaha Beach, Normandy in 1944; being in the 6th Armored Division, Company B and riding in half-tracks; his experiences with combat and finally realizing the seriousness of war; digging a foxhole and nearly being killed by an incoming shell; abandoning the half-tracks and proceeding on foot; witnessing the deaths of two men next to him; the battle at Han-sur-Nied, France; his participation in the Battle of the Bulge in late 1944; being captured by the German Wehrmacht and narrowly escaping being shot; being a slave laborer; dealing with starvation; passing through two German labor camps in Prum and Gerolstein; being forced to march from place to place; working on repairing rail lines that were bombed the Allies throughout the winter of 1945; sabotaging the railroads; contracting frostbite in his foot; escaping with a few others to Reichenbach, Germany, where they found a Nazi staging area; receiving help from a German civilian couple; hiding in a barn; being liberated by American troops; going to a field hospital then hospitals in Liège, Belgium and Paris, France; writing in the hospital during his recovery; returning to the US and finishing school; founding an organization with his wife at Ohio University to help prevent antisemitism and inviting Elie Wiesel to speak at the university; deciding to share his experiences with others; his strong Jewish identity and wanting to help others because of his experiences during the war; having a second bar mitzvah at age 83; and his involvement with Jewish organizations and charities.

Summary

00:00 Robert R. Max was willing to give this interview though his wife of 67 years passed away a week ago. The loss was a shock as she was a partner in all they did. She would have

wanted to be present at the interview as she knew of his experiences and that bolstered him to keep the interview. He is doing it in her memory, Shirley Max. He was born Robert Roger Max on July 10, 1923 in Newark, New Jersey. Recently he learned that his name was originally Manczyk and that he has relatives in Brazil. He does not feel like changing his name back to Manczyk. His father's parents came from Poland and his mother's from France. His in-laws are from Ptczuk, Poland. His wife tried to trace where Ptczuk is located. Robert has an older brother, Lester, who is eight years older and born in 1915 and fought in the war. Robert has a sister, Ruth, who was born in 1923 and is two years younger. His parents are Jennie Kahn and Herman Max.

05:00 His father was the president of a retail milk company which delivered milk to homes and stores. His father had five brothers. His grandfather founded the business and turned it over to his sons and bought a Cadillac and hired a chauffeur to travel around America. Robert only knew his grandfather briefly as he died young, before he was 50. His grandfather smoked, drank and lived well. Robert lived at 329 South Orange Street in Newark. It was a two-family tenement. His family occupied the first floor. His uncle lived in the next apartment house. They were wooden shingle houses on the major thoroughfare with trolley lines, across from the reservoir. Years later, Robert's house remained but not the reservoir which was replaced with homes. It was a county reservoir which provided water for the citizens. The homes were made of brick and mortar. They had two bedrooms, a living room, a dining room and a bathroom. Acquaintances thought they were wealthier than they were. They moved to the western part of Newark bordering on South Orange. The family gave them a going-away party when they moved as they considered it distant. His uncle also moved to the suburbs. Families, particularly Jews, moved to the suburbs.

10:00 Robert's street was mixed with Jews and non-Jews. They never lived in a Jewish neighborhood. There were Italian and Poles living there. Robert moved when he was about six or seven after kindergarten, around Christmas. They were observant and belonged to the Reform Congregation. His father dressed as Santa Claus and walked in the alley next to the house and said, "Ho, ho, ho," carrying gifts. It took Robert awhile to realize that it was his father and then his father stopped doing it. It seemed natural at the time as the entire neighborhood celebrated Christmas though the family still practiced Judaism. They belonged to B'nai Jesuran (?), a liberal reform congregation in Newark. When Robert got older and lived on Hyde Street, he attended services Friday nights and Saturday mornings. His mother made sure that he attended Temple on Friday night.

15:00 When Robert moved to the Vailsburg (?) section, he was a semi-professional athlete. The others were Christian. He did not hang out with them Friday nights at the soda shop and they respected him for it. He invited his athletic group to his first Bar Mitzvah. It was an ultra-liberal temple so he did not read from the Torah. He made a speech and when he finished, his friends stood up and clapped, cheered and whistled. It was Saturday

morning when mostly elderly women attend and he saw them wagging their head side to side because they never saw such a demonstration. His friends were Christian. Robert reciprocated by attending Catholic Midnight Mass at Sacred Heart. It was unique as most everyone grew up in Winkwell (?), the rich man's Jewish ghetto and he felt that he missed out on something significant. Robert never experienced anti-Semitism though he lived in a Christian world. Later in life, he understood anti-Semitism. His relationship with his older brother was like father and son. His father worked in the evening so his brother took over his father's position. When Robert was three, he was given a New York Yankee uniform with cleats, bat and ball. His house had a backyard and a fence where he pitched and hit the bat with average of 575 and kept a record of his home runs.

20:00 The fence was 100 feet away so sometimes the ball went over the fence. His brother took him by trolley to baseball games and other sports. It was a marvelous relationship. During World War II which was partially financed by the American people, his brother bought extra war bonds for him after '41. When his brother was in service, he had allocation from his pay for bonds even though he was married. His brother was a good person with strong ties to the family. His brother remembered his birth in his parent's home in Essex. His brother saw him right after birth. Robert was the first child after his brother and, at eight, Lester was mature and took responsibility for him. His brother took care of him for the rest of his life. His brother volunteered and served in the European Theatre. With his sister, Ruth, it was a typical brother/sister relationship as he had his group and she had her group.

25:00 They did not mix as were two different types. He was athletic. Robert did not have much interaction with Ruth. They did not play together but the family went out together. They often went to Atlantic City but the older brother did not join them. He was at college. His father had been appointed President of his company by his father as he was the oldest brother though he was not a leader. Robert's father was content to fix milk boxes with hammer and nails so his role was uncomfortable. His father signed checks for the company so people knew he had prestige. Robert's brother would take over when the father was away at night delivering milk. His father was quiet, not boisterous, was sedate, a good father. They would go out in the evening in the car as there was no air conditioning. They would drive on route 22, the hamburger route, as his father took them to a hamburger stand and to Friday night services. After services they went to two places. As time went by, he discussed college, and world affairs and politics but the family did not discuss it and he missed it.

30:00 His grandmother was considered a great person. She lived to around 90 which was old in those days. She did not learn to read or write English but spoke it, though not a good English. He remembers that Shirley got a letter from her in Yiddish so had to get an interpreter for it. His grandmother ran the household and kitchen for 10 to 20 people. His grandfather had a farm so the milk business evolved from the farm. They owned

what became the Irvington Retail Center and begrudged his traveling. He sold off parcels that could have enriched his family. His grandmother carried the burden as had to cook for the workers and for the brothers and sisters.

- 35:00 She also did the cleaning and the laundry. She was physically active. They had another home in Bradley Beach, New Jersey. People visited and his grandmother did all the cooking and cleaning and the daughter-in-law did not help. His grandmother was up on the roof nailing things when she was in her 80s and her son told her to come down. He prohibited her to do anything like that and she deteriorated after that. She kept the staff and the workers going. Her name was Minnie Max and her husband was Abe and the company was the Bloomingdale Dairy. Robert did not know his mother's parents as well. On Sunday they traveled to Carney (?) where they lived on Chestnut Street. His grandmother made French-style chicken fricassee and his mother made it, too. He told Shirley to get the recipe and make it but hers was not as good. They were in the cattle business on the farm. Only Aaron was in the milk business in competition with his father. All the other sons were in the cattle business. Robert saw horse-drawn wagons with a bottle of milk painted on it. Uncle Aaron stopped by on his route and had coffee with them. After he retired, he painted flowers. The milk his father sold came from upper New York State from someone related to the uncle. Huge trailers came daily from upper New York State and unloaded the milk as there was none in Irvington. The milk was already bottled and packaged.
- 40:00 His uncles did not get along so were not progressive. Robert's brother worked summers in the dairy. His uncle was not kind or congenial toward him. If his uncles had permitted his brother and him into the business, it might have been successful. The uncles argued as to who was taking more vacation. Hitler came to power in '33 but there was no talk of world affairs so was not introduced into it until he read the newspaper himself. He started becoming interested in world affairs in high school. He started reading the paper when he 14 to 16. He knew what was happening in Europe. Robert listened to the radio. He heard Joe Lewis' bouts and it was amazing. There was no TV or computer so he listened to the radio. He felt Joe Louis' fight as the announcer was amazing. The same was when he heard the Louis-Braddock bouts and Max Beer with Jesse Star. Beer was a small town boxer from New Jersey.
- 45:00 It felt real as if you could see it. Listening now is different as we are exposed to TV. In one incident of baseball on the radio where New Yorker Earl Harper of the Bears explained what was going on in the fields. There was a booming drive in the center field to Roy Shark, second base, who stepped back into the grass. It was some description, colored and not real. His mother had her favorite morning drama while cooking lunch and for each meal. Robert listened to music and became a musician. He got fascinated with big band, "Swing." He remembers the President speaking on the radio that December 7, 1941 will be a day in infamy. Two Japanese ambassadors were in the White

House and knew an attack was coming. They were negotiating with the President so it was a dastardly act. The Japanese planes were on their way to the US while talking to the President. Robert learned that afterwards. The enclaves they lived in got sufficient newscasts at the time.

50:00 It was a different world today. His parents came from Europe but he had no knowledge of the area of Europe. Paris, London and Spain was Europe for him. Europe seemed distant, another world. It is different today as you can easily travel. Europe did not play a role in his life. Robert was aware that Japan struck and was at war and four days later, December 11, 1941, Adolf Hitler declared war on the US. That was different from Japan. Hitler stood for Nazi, Germany and the Jews as Robert read the newspapers. He graduated high school in '41. In September '42 he went to college. He went to NYU as it was convenient. He took the bus to the train to get into Manhattan. He read the newspaper on his trip and knew about concentration camps and "Mein Kampf," Hitler's plan. Robert had sinusitis and doctors told him to leave the area as he had trouble breathing. He majored in journalism and classmates told him to go to Ohio University in Athens as it was in the top three in journalism. It was a different life there. His sinus problem improved though the manufacturing industry affected his sinuses.

55:00 At age 20 Robert was a sophomore, in ROTC and in a fraternity. They had bull sessions at night. Everyone was eligible to be in the war and discussing why are they at university and others in the service. Robert signed up and went to Ft. Dix, New Jersey the summer of '42 or '43. He had basic training in Ft. McClellan in Alabama which was rugged and put him in good physical and emotional conditioning. They had a swing band at Ft. Dix with Jack Leonard as leader who preceded Frank Sinatra as vocalist for the Dorsey orchestra. Glen Miller had a popular swing band and Jack volunteered and went from captain to major. He played concerts at overseas bases and they never discovered what happened when his plane disappear in the English Channel.

60:00 Some members of the swing band might have been in his band. At home Robert played saxophone and clarinet. It was on his Army record so Jack Leonard knew that he played those instruments. Robert got a weekend pass to go home for his instruments so he could play in the band. He no longer was assigned to KP or to make his bed as he practiced in the morning, played in the afternoon and had a live broadcast at night. Robert was intimidated by the other musicians as they were trained at Juilliard so they could orchestrate, play and compose. At first it was no fun being in the orchestra as he had to play a piece with six flats which was tough. After a few weeks, his name came up to be shipped out. Jack intervened and removed his name but Robert could not imagine spending the entire war in the band as he wanted to go into combat. His instruments were shipped back home and he went to Alabama. They took a circuitous route to Ft. McClellan where it was very hot, over 100 degrees.

- 65:00 It was staffed by cadre, old Army men who had been through the wars. He received three months training with forced marches where he had to march fully loaded with backpacks and equipment for war. They marched twice over a hilly mountain, Bane Gap, which was difficult to build endurance and ability to survive in combat. An obstacle course was set up and they jumped over ponds and went up ropes. He was a physical enthusiast and took the Charles Atlas Body Building course as he was short and tried to be on a par with others. Later he was in a German POW camp and saw our treatment of prisoners was different from theirs. There were Germans in a POW camp at Ft. McClellan who were behind a fence and laughed at the Americans training hard as the Germans were bronzed with no shirts to absorb the sun ,and could go to the PX for candy and cigarettes.
- 70:00 Robert feels they were trained well for what was ahead. On Sunday morning, they were free to go to the mess hall and order what they wished. It was not uncommon for the soldiers to pass out while parading due to the heat. One day Robert felt weak from the hot sun and reached the steps of his barracks and made it to his bed without passing out. The Army had a specialized training program (ATP) for college-educated to attend school in engineering or foreign languages. Foreign languages would have been more appropriate as he knew nothing about engineering. Robert was sent to the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (later called Auburn). They ate lunch on the campus, had marching drills, classroom studies and lectures on military topics. The instructor in Engineering was an English professor so knew little more than the students. Some of the students had majored in engineering and knew more. They were free on weekends. He had records of concerts in his room so invited fellow students to listen. They had a kickoff concert with the finest Black musicians including Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald.
- 75:00 That was their release from pressures they were under. The students came from all over the US and became friends (or enemies). One guy was six feet tall, well-built with precise military standards. He got on their nerves and got into arguments. Robert was shorter and lighter but beat him wrestling. The guys cheered which helped build relationships. The British and American Forces moved rapidly but bombed out at St. Malmo. The losses were heavy so the Army abandoned its college program as they needed ground troops. It was possible for them to apply for OCS, Officers Candidate School and become a Lieutenant.
- 80:00 They would be exposed in battle. He was small and 21 and felt that people who led should be bigger and older. Another possibility was to apply to the Air Cadet Academy in Georgia. Robert applied to both. It was an austere setting at the interview with a long table of men in brass with no smiling faces. It was grueling but he did well. Then he had a written exam but results were not given out. He was ill at the time. He applied to the Air Academy to become a flier. He learned to recognize the silhouettes of American and German airplanes. There was a huge need for servicemen to go overseas so both programs were canceled. He went to Camp Attenbury near Indianapolis, Indiana, for

combat training. There he learned to strip down his rifle in the dark and put it back together. He was assigned to the motor pool but did not know what is under the hood. He received mechanics training for a short period and got shipped out in fall '44.

- 85:00 From Ft. Meade, Md., he sailed on the RMS Mauretania, a British luxury liner, which had been converted into a troop carrier. They landed in Liverpool and he stood on deck reading a newspaper that indicated the ship had sunk! It was a false story. Many supply carriers were destroyed in the Atlantic Ocean. He had some training in Liverpool and went on a Liberty ship across the English Channel which was a small version of an ocean liner. To get to shore, he had to descend on a LST (Landing Ship Tank). It was difficult as realizing the reality of soon facing the enemy. They put on gas masks. Exchange to the LST was treacherous as climbed down on a net with 30 pounds of equipment on your back so had to watch each step. Many on D-Day slipped and fell between ships and got crushed.
- 90:00 He made it successfully. Herb from their music group, who was later in advertising, brought a camera to take a picture of them landing in Omaha Beach which he did. They landed September '44. Robert never saw the photo as they went to different units but he saw Herb in New York later. Taking the photo showed immaturity. This was early days in combat. Robert was assigned to the 6th Army Armored Infantry Division where he had to climb up a mountain. They rode in half-tracks which are vehicles with a driver and an officer with an open area with benches for four to eight men on each side and the back. It had tracks like a tank with wheels in the front to give traction and could make quicker turns than a tank. He was assigned to A Company. They drove across France. They were shelled on the first day. It was a frightening feeling. If you can hear it, it's OK but if you can't hear it, you get hit. A few soldiers in his half-track had fought in the North African campaign. They fell to the floor as knew the seriousness. Germans came out of the woods with their hands up to surrender.
- 95:00 They were approaching enemy territory so pulled off the road as were still being shelled. Robert jumped out of the half-track and laid down on the ground at one end and waved to those under the front axle. Robert saw stretchers for some of their men the next morning as they pulled into the field for half-tracks and tanks and had to build a bunker. It was difficult for him, a 21-year old, and he did not build a bunker. There was incoming shell fire ("incoming mail") at dawn. His rifle was blown out of his hand which stung and made a hole in the rifle. Suddenly it hit him how serious it is. His life was in danger. Someone gave him a rifle and he never disobeyed a command again. A foxhole could save your life. It was the first time that he saw people get killed. After awhile, they abandoned the half-track and went on foot. There was a man in front and one behind who were killed. Robert paused and realized they were not going to experience the good things in life and their families would never be the same again. He took warfare seriously from then on. You must protect yourself and go after the enemy. He knew in a

casual way the two that got killed. The half-tracks were sitting targets so they abandoned them. The tanks had some protection as have thick armor on all sides.

100:00 They were just vehicles to move them faster. Their first big battle was across the Han-sur-Nied River so it was called the battle of Han-sur-Nied. He thought they were not in France. The Germans had retreated over the river and sat above it. Robert's unit was going into a dangerous battle. They crossed the structured bridge on foot, facing enemy fire. Then the Germans retreated. It was a victory for General Patton's 6th Army Division of the 3rd Army. It was November so it was not as cold as the Battle of the Bulge. They were firing on the enemy who had retreated. Tanks were able to cross the bridge. The battle continued until December 1, 1944.

105:00 The Germans were driven back. The Americans were arranged north to South. It was the German's major force facing heavy artillery. They were in South Belgium near Bastogne outside Marvie (?). Heavy shell fire was pouring down on them. A third battle was held in the forest, the Ardennes Campaign, in southeast Belgium and northwest Germany. The magnitude of the attack was overpowering. The 106th Division that Robert had trained with in the US lost 75% of its troops either killed, captured or missing. They were green, not ready for combat, poorly prepared, scattered and ran in all directions. They were in disarray as firing upon their own men. The Germans were well-equipped and prepared and drove into them. Later, Robert read the report that he was missing in action as his unit was subject to heavy fire. They did not know what happened to him. He was with his unit, face-to-face with the enemy and ordered behind the lines as fighting for days. He was told to get rest and food.

110:00 They lost radio contact and asked for volunteers to establish lines. He was 21, adventurous and moved so he volunteered. He saw a jeep and thought he would get it. Robert signaled to five others to join him in the jeep. Vision was unclear as the sky was overcast and the road was covered with snow and ice. They went 15 yards around a curve and saw German 88 millimeter cannons pointed at them mounted in a German tank. It was a miracle that he did not get killed. He jammed on the brakes and skidded off the road with rifles aimed at them. He saw a shack across the road and moved toward it. One man thought they needed a machine gun so detached one from the jeep and raced to the shack. Another man got killed. They set up the machine gun in a big bay window in the shack and started firing and then another man got killed. Robert took over the gun and started firing from early in the morning to late in the afternoon when he got out of fire. There were 100 to 200 German dug in foxholes whereas Robert's group were down to five fighters. They were low on ammunition and two were wounded who were at the other window. They saw a trapdoor so thought there must be a cellar below so decided to make the Germans think they got killed.

- 115:00 They climbed down into the cellar, taking the wounded with them. They had three able-bodied left. After one-half hour, Robert pushed open the trapdoor and saw an automatic gun pointed at his face by a camouflaged German soldier ready to fire at him. The view is still vivid today. The German motioned him to come up. The German sergeant took him aside and had the others go with the other Germans and he never saw them again. The sergeant put his rifle in Robert's back and pushed him. Nightfall was coming and shells were landing. The sergeant went into a foxhole and Robert asked if he could get down as he was exposed and could get shell blast as hot metal was coming down.
- 120:00 It was a miracle that he did not get hurt. He asked the German, "What are you going to do with me?" The German said, "I have to kill you." It was good fortune that the German spoke English as they could converse. There was an order issued from high command not to take more allied prisoners alive as the Germans could not cope with it so Robert presumed the German will fire his gun. Robert does not know why he was with the sergeant and the other four were taken away separately. He does not know if they were shot. Robert assumed the German was turning his rifle on him. He saw a burning tank nearby and the road was lit up. He saw bunkers with two silhouettes in each. The Germans wore helmets and there were machine guns in each bunker. Robert was a sprinter in school and thought he could use his running experience but would be shot with all the guns trained on him. With the guards behind him and the many foxholes made him feel that he had no place to go so realized that conversation was his only option. He thought that since the German spoke English, they could converse. The German asked him why the Americans are here as it is not their war and Robert responds, "The Germans made it our war."
- 125:00 A relationship developed between the German soldier and Robert. The German wore a helmet and he did not look up so it was hard to see his face and only saw his chin. The German reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet and showed him a picture of his wife and two children. He said that next year they will be in New York City. That was his plan. He was a good Nazi and thought they would win the war and go on vacation. Robert felt a change in attitude. The German no longer seemed the enemy. He had good English so they conversed and were not antagonists. The shelling stopped. Robert was standing all the time so was vulnerable to shelling. The German looked up and said, "For you, the war is over. I will send you to a POW camp according to Geneva Convention. " Robert knew if he went to a POW camp, he would not have to fight anymore. The German recognized gallantry. The German said they had more men but Robert fought well. He ordered two guards to take him away and they are stopped along the way. Robert sees marks on his shoulder that the German is an officer.
- 130:00 Robert realizes that he is going to be a slave laborer as they no longer have POWs. Later he realized that some other guards pushed him with a rifle barrel and was confronted with

soldiers whose uniforms he did not recognize. A historian friend said they were likely Russian troops. Robert fell to the ground and had no idea what was happening. He sat on the snow and was pushed into forced marching after getting stripped of his winter coat and gloves. It was zero to five degrees. Robert wore dog tags with a "J," a Magen David (Jewish symbol, Star of David), and a miniature mezuzah which he wore with his dog tags. Robert was defiant and would not remove it. No one spoke English so he did not know where he was going. Their job was not to eradicate Jews but to get work done. They needed to rebuild the railroads that were bombed by allied planes.

135:00 Robert did not know that at the time. Later he learned about slave labor. Whether he lived or died did not matter to the Germans. When it got dark, Robert presumed he would go to a barracks for shelter. He was pushed to the ground on the side of the road and had to sleep on the snow. The roads were either covered with snow, ice or mud. There were guards patrolling. He slept that way for 80 or 90 nights. Though he kept moving his fingers and toes, later he got frostbite. It was freezing. He thought of food which helped sustain him as he had physical and emotional pain and he needed to have hope for the future. He was fed crusts of dark brown bread most days. Robert passed through two labor camps which would have been better as he experienced maximum exposure. He spent a day going through Prum, Germany where he got six dry crackers in the labor camp. In Gerolstein, he was given an old tin can filled with hot water and a piece of potato. That shows his nutritional needs were not made. He felt it and thought he could not go on as knew something would happen to his body. He felt weak and marching was difficult. The pain in his stomach went through his body and he knew his body would deteriorate.

140:00 It could take weeks before you saw it. His shoulders were bony and his arms lost flesh. His weakness was the greatest recognition that something was happening to his body. He was marched from location to location as he was working on railroads. People were dropping out. They were no longer useful as slave laborers. In some cases, they were left to die and in other cases, they were shot. He saw this happen. The thought of food sustained him as felt that someday this would end and he would have wonderful foods. He would have his mother's cooking or food from the pizza parlor. Months later when he was hospitalized, he asked the nurse to get him a notebook and he recorded 84 foods in his little brown book. He had dog tags with Jewish emblems. He believes that his completing basic training in heat strengthened his body to endure the freezing temperature when he was a slave laborer. He stopped along the way to work on the railroads.

145:00 First he moved long heavy railroad tracks from one abandoned railroad to another that was in service. They did the forced marching at night to carry the railroad tracks on his shoulders from town to town. It hurt as his shoulders were bony. Conversation was not permitted between prisoners or they would be shot. He never saw anyone shot. When

there were no guards around, they exchanged the sabotage work they did on the railroads. They decided the Germans would not be able to use anything they worked on. They would not line up the tracks correctly and did not place the pins in correctly. Most declined in health. He contracted frostbite in his right foot and it became painful. His foot became larger than the shoe. He wanted to yell but did not dare as he would be pushed aside and left to die or shot. Robert shows a shoe which reminds him of the struggle he had but was able to survive.

150::00 He felt like dropping out but that would mean death. He had to remove his shoe. He stopped along the way and sat on the road and thought whether he should continue to take the pain or stop. He threw the shoe over a bush and took the scarf from his neck and wrapped it around his foot. He walked on the scarf on snow and ice. When the snow melted, the scarf got wet. The Germans did not find out that he was Jewish as they never questioned him. Slave laborers just work until they die. The Germans were not interested in his dog tags. Berger was the slave labor camp where Jewish soldiers were sent. Treatment there was harsh but they had no exposure. He was a slave laborer for 90 days with no name or number. He was anonymous as the Germans just shouted “Raus, raus” (out, out) and present their rifle. You got to know their expressions – “Gebe, gebe (?)”.

155:00 He thought there might have been other Americans with him. You learned to survive by yourself as there was no buddy system. The battle turned as the Allies moved the Germans back so the slave laborers had to be moved. They were moved in boxcars. Travel during the marches was difficult as it was at night. For marches during the day, you were fired upon by Allied aircraft as they could not distinguish who is marching so some of them were hit. When Robert saw planes finish their run (make U-turn and head back to their base in England), he knew they were officers and would get a comfortable couch, a warm room, a cocktail and a cigar. This frustrated him as he did not know his future, whether he would be alive or dead. It tore at him more than the physical aspects. He continued to work and sabotaged railroads. They were forced into cattle cars with a sliding door, no window, no light. About ninety humans instead of forty were pushed in. Bodies were stacked upon bodies like sardines.

160:00 Once a day, they would slide open the door and throw in bread crusts. They were all too weak to attack each other but crawled to get a scrap of bread. Immediately, you would put it in your mouth. There was no bathroom so they used their helmets. Some died and some became deranged. They were in the boxcar for six days and six nights when the door opened and they were pulled out to go on a march. He only had one shoe so could not endure and thought of escaping. They were put in lines and he saw positioning of the guards. He thought if they came to a curve in the road, he would have 5 to 10 seconds where they would not be visible. He told the three prisoners closest to him and they threw themselves over growth. The prisoners behind them used discretion and closed

ranks so the soldiers were not looking for them. They had gone through a town on the train recently so decided to go back into town.

- 165: He could not move fast enough so sometimes went on all four. They reached the town. He has a picture of the town (Reichenbach) as he received two photos in the mail. He hears familiar sounds of tanks and vehicles moving. He sees German tanks and soldiers. He had escaped into a Nazi staging area. They had to crawl through back alleys. He sees a house painted white and says to the other two that it is a safe house. They wait until no longer see soldiers nearby and knock on the door and a young teenager answers. Robert had lice all over his body, a dirty face and torn clothes. He stuck his left foot in the door just as the boy is closing the door. He hears voices of elderly people talking. A couple come and see the US emblem on his jacket and smile. The husband looks up and down the street and sees no soldiers and motions for them to enter.
- 170:00 The wife sees their condition and comes with three ladles and cups of hot soup with meat. Seeing their living quarters was startling as there were curtains, lamps and furniture which he had not seen in a long time. The food was delectable. He savored the food. They talked with the couple who spoke English. The couple wanted to save them as they spent time in Pittsburgh where they had a good experience. It was risky to bring them into their home. The couple made a map. They knew they were close to the allies and thought they would be rescued in a few days. The two with him were Americans. They followed the map and crawled through alleys to a barn and went up into the hayloft. They remained two or three days. They heard scurrying and separated the hay and saw a stool, a cow and a German soldier on the stool. He had the top of his uniform off and was in his underwear with black suspenders and wore big black boots. Robert stirred and some hay fell through the cracks and luckily dropped behind the German. A day or two later, they see someone go by in the alleyway wearing a helmet which looks American.
- 175:00 He feels the Americans must have arrived. Soon a vehicle passes which looks like a jeep with a white star on the hood. They rolled out of the hayloft and rolled down the alleyway. They saw the Third Army was there who treated them with kindness. They tried to feed them; gave them chocolate but it was bad for them. Robert was mildly delirious and could not carry on a conversation. The sweetness of the chocolate reacted on their stomach and made the other two sick. He could not talk. They saw the right foot had wrapping so took him to a field hospital like MASH. His mind was blank and they sent him to the First General Hospital in Liege, Belgium and then to the First General Hospital in Paris. He was delirious and does not remember anything from that time. He had surgery as they had to cut away the black part of his foot. He does not know when they did it. He spent a month or six weeks in hospitals in Europe. He lost the flesh on his foot but he did not lose any toes.

180:00 Gangrene did not set in. Robert had frostbite and trench foot. He was in Paris for a month with a fever. He was twice in a forced march instead of sleeping. Two nights he slept in a barn where there was a cow. His friend from Indiana, Myron Barringer (?), told him to lie down under the cow's udder and Myron milked it directly into Robert's mouth. Robert had 20 other disease including undulant fever which was caused by the cow. No military doctor could figure it out. He was flown in a hospital plane to the US when the fever was forced down. After he finished college and he was working, he broke out in a sweat and had tiny dots all over as a result of that fever. A young doctor thought he had a contagious disease and took him to Bellevue, New Jersey to a hospital where children with polio were treated. Robert was placed a month in isolation. His wife, Shirley, could only view him through the glass.

185:00 The doctor said his raging fever would continue with attacks and was traced to taking milk from the cow. It was a Mediterranean disease caused by unpasteurized milk. He was treated and cured. His brother, Lester, was in the European Theatre. When Robert was captured in the Battle of the Bulge and reported as MIA, his parents received a telegram from the War Department so his mother had a nervous breakdown. They assumed that after two months of being missing in action, he was dead. The soldier in charge of communications of another division, learned of his MIA and communicated to other areas to look for him but there was no response. When Robert returned to Allied lines, they saw his dog tag and reported that he was alive and made radio contact to the communications person and wrote to his parents. His brother had followed his route as a slave laborer and was among the first to get the information that he was alive and wrote their parents. Robert has the letter.

190:00 The odds that his brother would be the first to learn that he was alive was high because he was a sergeant in charge of communications. (Robert will read the letter after the interview.) His brother was serving in the Army and could not visit him but his parents did. He was in a private room and his father did not recognize his sunken face and shaved head but his mother recognized him. He remained hospitalized for nine months in Staten Island, New York at Howard General Hospital. While hospitalized, military officers from DC interviewed him about war crimes as he witnessed the killing of an American soldier who was too weak to stand and was shot.

195:00 The German soldier was Ansel Hauser (?). Robert gave testimony about him. He did not discuss his own circumstances and was awarded the Purple Heart and an Oak Leaf Clover and promoted to Corporal. He never talked about his slave labor experiences. The war ended in Europe and he was assigned to go to Japan. While on the boat, they learned the war ended with Japan and Robert was free to return home. When he returned to college, there was a meeting of older former servicemen. They asked him to speak on the radio. People on the campus knew what he went through. Some of these elderly servicemen used ear trumpets and could not hear him. He gave a few highlights but did not go

through details. Robert decided that it was not pleasant to talk about it and for 53 years did not. Two grandsons, ages 7 and 9, asked him if he was in the war and asked him questions. Where did he sleep? What did he eat? Did he have a gun? Did he fire it? Did he kill anyone? In 1988 Robert and Shirley set up a foundation at Ohio University to bring a religious element on the campus to prevent anti-Semitism. They invited Elie Wiesel to speak at the campus one weekend.

200:00 A graduate student had written a book on his life and she died soon after from something she ate. Wiesel knew of it and his Rabbi was the same one at the university so he agreed to come if her name was memorialized. Robert, Shirley and Wiesel were guests of the University President. Wiesel had one bedroom, the Rabbi had a bedroom and Robert and his wife had a bedroom. Wiesel insisted that Robert exchange rooms to get the master bedroom. The next morning they had a kosher breakfast that was ordered from Columbus, Ohio but Wiesel only ate grapes. He reports that he stayed at a motel down the road in a small room where he could stay up typing in the middle of the night and not keep the others awake. On Saturday afternoon they sat in the living room of the President's guest house and were mesmerized by Wiesel. Robert did not want to talk as he was intimidated by Wiesel and felt his story was not as important compared to Wiesel's.

205:00 It was a thrill to be in the same room with him. He decided that since Wiesel told his experiences, he would share his with his grandsons. He had not told Shirley much but she learned through Robert's writings and lectures. There was a Holocaust Council in the New Jersey Federation. Robert thought his story should be preserved. Heidi became his editor and the Mayor of Newark researched and felt his story was unique. The head of the Holocaust Council had Robert talk to the school children as Holocaust education was required in New Jersey. He started speaking ten years ago. He felt like an unsophisticated kid when he went to war although he read newspapers and learned a little of the camps and politics. He did not know what he wanted to be as he was still a student. From his mother he had learned about Jewish life and knew he should attend synagogue. While he was lying in the hospital for ten months, he had sleepless nights due to pain and emotions. He would think of incidents from the war.

210:00 He remembered an elderly couple and the helmet of the sergeant who was a humanitarian. He could see the image of tanks with cannons and thought of the future – whether he should go to school or work. Life felt different as he was not the same person but was more mature. Robert felt lucky that he did not get killed. He devoted the rest of his life to Jewish causes and interests. He had his second Bar Mitzvah at age 83 which is rare for a Jewish man to have. In King David's time longevity was 70 years old. If you live beyond 70, you start life over again so at 83 you would be eligible to have a second Bar Mitzvah. At thirteen, your brain is too young to go through the ritual but at 83, you have a different perspective of life. He had an unusual experience during the war and an

unusual Jewish life as he got a strong Jewish identity from his mother. He decided he would do something spiritual and help others who have a difficult time. The Bar Mitzvah was symbolic to restate his Judaism.

215:00 When he was Bar Mitzvah the first time at age 13, it was in a Reform Temple where he did not learn Hebrew. For his second Bar Mitzvah, his wife suggested he learn to read Hebrew with the vowels so he learned for her. Robert spent hours with the Rabbi preparing for the Bar Mitzvah and felt it was the second most exciting experience as getting married was the most exciting. Robert became president of two synagogues and he and Shirley were very involved. They were both on boards and committees. He was president of the State Association of Jewish Federations in New Jersey. Robert believes this happened because of his experiences. He learned about Jewish life and philanthropy after the war. He became president of Hillel which helped him understand that Jewish life was important, saving Jews was important and Congregational life was important. The UJA raises money to help Jews in need and also helps non-Jewish social services.

220:00 He became involved in the Geriatric Center as he had aging parents. He served for 15 years as Vice President and set up a partnership with a department store owner for those who automatically retire at 65. Robert is 92 and has never found out the "Golder Years." Others travel and go to see their children. He saw people in senior housing in New Jersey who gave up on life and he developed a program for them to reengage. They had had diverse occupations including cooks and musicians but were over 65 so stopped everything. His partner had access to funding and Robert wrote the program. There were no charges for services. Robert went all over New Jersey visiting senior housing and placed charts on walls with questions about the people's lives. The participants adopted new careers from the program. It was the Holocaust Services in Cranford, New Jersey. He talked about his experiences and a lady who was a Holocaust survivor spoke to YMCA and other places.

225:00 Robert was able to raise a lot of money for Jewish philanthropy. He believes he is a mortal and has no interaction with G-d but Jewish Reconstructionism taught him there is a spark of G-d in each of us. He feels there is some kind of force beyond mankind. In the hospital, he felt a moving force inside himself. Perhaps it is an essence of guilt as he came through so he was blessed to help others. He has a different personality than Shirley as she is social and he is not. He must have a purpose in life and must fulfill that purpose. He cannot fulfill that purpose by drinking beers with men but functioning with organizations felt right. Robert feels that your time should be used in a good way. The children he spoke to told him that his story was real and they will tell it to their parents. That type of social appealed to him. He believes that Judaism stands for the good things of life and will devote his life to mankind. Robert read David Frankel's (?) book.

230:00 It concerns man's search for freedom which gave Robert rational for his philosophy. Frankel is his disciple though he does not know him. He spoke to him and decided to help others find meaning in their life. Frankel was a concentration camp survivor. He saw some Jews giving up while others pulled through in the camp. (Robert reads the letter his brother wrote their parents upon learning of his survival.) It was written April 26, 1945 from Germany. "Dear Ma and Pop, Happy he could cry as he received a letter that Bob is OK. He was liberated by advancing forces on April 4, 1945 from German POW camp.

235:00 The letter was from the 6th Armored Division where he was with his company when they attacked German positions. Mortar and small arms fired and squads became separated and could not find him and until now no information was received until today. All POW over 30 days are returned to the US so expect him to go to the US soon. I'm overjoyed and know that G-d heard your prayers. Call Diana when you receive this letter. Will send these letters to you for safekeeping.

240:00