# United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

## Interview with Shimon Schwarzschild
## July 14, 2015
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# PREFACE

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# ROBERT MAX
# July 14, 2015

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Robert Max**, on July 14th, 2015, in **Summit**, **New Jersey**. I'm very grateful to you, Mr. **Max**, for agreeing to speak with us today, and I want to make a note at the beginning of this interview, that you are doing so barely a week after you have buried your wife and partner of 67 years, and I – if – I would like to begin the interview with your thoughts of why you decided to do this at this particular moment, when such – when you've suffered such a loss, and then we'll continue with our usual interview.

Answer: Mm-hm. The loss of my wife was severe. It was a shock to me, but it was immediate. My wife was my partner in everything that I did, my entire life, for 67 years. She would have wanted – she would have wanted to be here, she would have wanted to see the interview going on, because she knew all of the experiences that I will talk about. And – and that bolstered me, and I – I decided that yes, she would definitely want me to do this, and thus – I did not make the call, but I might have made, to you, **Ina**.

Q: Yeah.

A: And in the mem – in memory of her, and – and I'll be thinking of her while I'm talking with you –

Q: And her name is **Shirley**.

A: – I'd want to do it. Her name is **Shirley**.

Q: **Shirley Max**.

A: **Shirley Max**, yes, yes.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you, I am grateful, and I am honored that you have decided to go forth, even at such a moment, so –

A: Thank you.

Q: So we're going to start our interview, like we do, at the very beginning. I want to find out about your life growing up, before you joined the army, and then we'll go into all of these experiences, that are the core of the story.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So the first questions are very simple. Could you tell me your name at birth, and your date of birth?

A: Mm-hm. My name was **Robert Roger Max**, and I was born on July 10th, 1923.

Q: Where?

A: In – in **Newark**.

Q: In **Newark**, **New Jersey**?

A: **Newark**, **New Jersey**, **Newark**, **New Jersey**.

Q: Okay. And was your family name always **Max**, or was it shortened from something else?

A: There's a lot of question – questioning and doubt about it. Some tell me that it wasn't **Max**, some tell me it was **Marx**, and I learned just a few years ago, that it was really **Manczyk**, **m-a-n-c-z-y-k**, and we had relatives in **Brazil**, the **Manczyk** family.

Q: Wow.

A: So, it was a revelation to me, but all the years I've lived with **Max**, so I couldn't see changing it, so it remains.

Q: You stayed that way, yeah. When did your family come over from **Europe**?

A: My – I don't really remember wa – I don't know. I don't know when they came over. But I know my grand – on my – on my father's side, my grandparents came from **Poland** – I'm just **[indecipherable]** my mother's family came from **France**, and my in-laws came from **Poland**. **Ptczuk**(ph), **Poland**.

Q: **Ptczuk**(ph).

A: **Ptczuk**(ph), **p-t-c-z-u-k**, something like that.

Q: Okay.

A: Tough to pronounce, even tougher to spell.

Q: Yeah. Well, you know, so many of these places, particularly in eastern **Europe**, have five iterations of – of the same name – I mean, the same village, or the same town, the same place, in different languages.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Whether it would have been Polish, or Yiddish, or Russian, or – or German, or – or something else. They all, you know, me – very small places often had five names. So, **Ptczuk**(ph) –

A: **Ptczuk**(ph).

Q: – who knows how else it's called, and where it would be.

A: Yes. Well, my wife **Shirley** sp-spent years, years, trying to trace where it is. She never had found it yet, so conceivably, it doesn't even exist any more. But she remembers her mother telling her –

Q: Yeah?

A: – that's where they were – that's where they were from.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your own family that you were born into. Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I had an older brother, who was eight years older, and a sister who was two years younger.

Q: Okay, so he was born in 1915, your brother?

A: 1915, mm-hm.

Q: And what was his name?

A: **Lester**.

Q: **Lester**. Did he also fight in the war?

A: He did.

Q: He did.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And your sister, what was her name?

A: **Ruth**.

Q: She was born in 1925?

A: Twenty-five, right.

Q: Okay. What were your parents' names?

A: **Jenny** and **Herman**.

Q: Okay.

A: And **Jenny**'**s** maiden name was **Jenny Kahn**(ph).

Q: And what did your father do – and maybe it was also your mother – to support the family?

A: He – he was president of a retail milk company.

Q: Okay.

A: Essentially, they delivered milk to homes, and to stores, in the days when people got home – milk at home.

Q: How cool. I remember hearing about those, yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah, yes. And he was president of the co – of the company.

Q: Okay, so it was his.

A: Pardon?

Q: It was his company.

A: It wa – it was not – it was – there were five brothers. His grandfath – my grandfather, his father, founded the company, and then turned it over to the boys, and bought himself a fancy **Cadillac**, hired a chauffeur, and spent the rest of his life traveling **America**. And the boys worked hard.

Q: Knew how to live.

A: He did know how to live.

Q: Did you have – did you know him?

A: Yes, I – I di-did, briefly, and just sparingly. I just b-b-barely got to – to – to – to know him. He died at a very early age; he never reached 50.

Q: Oh wow.

A: Well, he lived so well, you know, he smoked, drank, and – and rode in his **Cadillac**.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell u – tell me a little bit about – about the home you were born into. Describe it somewhat, you know, was it a house, what kind of a place was it? What are some of your earliest memories? Tell me about those.

A: I'll tell you the address, it was 329 **South Orange Avenue** in **Newark**, **New Jersey**.

Q: Okay.

A: And it was a – a – a tenement house. There were two may – two families. We occupied the first floor, and – and when I say tenement, there was a house adjoi – immediately adjoining it. One of my father's brothers, my uncle, was in the next apartment.

Q: Was it a brownstone looking kind of place?

A: No, they weren't brownstones, just wooden shingled homes.

Q: Okay.

A: Not particularly fancy, but that was it, and we were on a major thoroughfare, with trolley lines, so forth. And the house was directly across the street from a reservoir, which year – years later, when I went back to see if the home was still there, the home was, but the reservoir was gone.

Q: Wow.

A: They had built homes on the other side of the street.

Q: But while it was a reservoir, was it accessible to people?

A: Not really, because it was a – a county reservoir, providing water for the citizens. We just knew it was there, but all we saw were brick and stones and mortar, and we knew inside was water. That was about it.

Q: What about your parents' own home? How many rooms did it have?

A: It's hard for me to remember, I was very young when we moved from there. But, in fact, I don't really rem – I think there were two bedrooms, there was a living room, there was a dining room, and that was – and the bathroom, a bathroom, and that was about it.

Q: Okay. It sounds very modest for the owe – well, the part owner, partial owner of a company.

A: Well, the – it was not really a big business, and we have five brothers all working together, they all drain off the business. So we – let's say friends, acquaintances, always thought they were wealthier than they really were. So we lived in a – yes, in a modest home.

Q: And you say you moved from there at some point?

A: We moved from there to another section in **Newark**, the – the westernmost – most section, in the **Vailsburg** section of **Newark**, which is bordering on the town of **South Orange**. And I will tell you, when we moved, it – well, the family got together, had a going away party. We were still in **Newark**, but they considered that so distant, that they had to have a party for us.

Q: So the rest of the uncles stayed on – there?

A: They remained in – no, they moved to the suburbs, too.

Q: Okay.

A: It was very common in **Newark** during those years, for je – for Jewish families in particular, to move, when they're able to, to move to the suburban areas. And each of the – as I recall, each of the brothers did move to a different suburban town in **New Jersey**.

Q: Did – was the strai – did you live – in the original place, was the street that you lived on almost exclusively Jewish? Were you in a Jewish neighborhood, or was it mixed?

A: It was totally mixed.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I never lived in the Jewish neighborhood. I was going to say I never had the privilege of living in a Jewish neighborhood. I suppose I would have liked it. But

no, we – we were in mixed neighborhoods, where our neighbors were – I know a number of them were Italians, and Poles. I don't recall if there were any Jews even, in the area where we were. **[indecipherable]**

Q: So you could have been the only family.

A: Hm?

Q: You could have been the only Jewish family.

A: Just the – the next door – the house next door, as I mentioned before, was wa – one of my uncles. And we were the – I think the only Jewish people in the area, yeah.

Q: How old were you when you an – when you moved?

A: I try to remember, but it was probably kindergarten age, because I remember I entered another school. No, I do – no, I did, before we moved, I did have kindergarten in a local school there. So I would – would have been what, six or seven when we moved.

Q: And in that – in those first six or seven years, are there any incidents from your childhood that you still remember today, that kind of stand out?

A: Yeah, one that I keep – keep thinking about, certainly around Christmastime. Now, we were observant, we belonged to a Reform congregation, but my father always insisted as dressing up as **Santa Claus**.

Q: Did he really?

A: Yes. And he – and I – and I re – remember. There was an alleyway along – alongside of the house, and I remember his going up that alleyway, going, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, imitating **Santa**. And – and gifts and all that. So, really in a – and – and it was a very strange thing, because we were very closely related to the – to a synagogue, and yet, we observed Christmas.

Q: Did you know it was him, or did you think it was **Santa**?

A: Oh, it took me a while to get to know it, but after a while I knew it, and, you know, he was exposed, and he stopped doing it after that, but –

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, when I was – when – in the very, very beginning, I – I wasn't quite sure, but after a while, it was – became obvious. Were –

Q: Well, did it – did it feel strange to be observing Christmas when you were little, or this is something you just think about now, as an adult?

A: It was just a natural thing.

Q: Okay.

A: Because we were in that kind of a neighborhood, and everybody else observed it, and so we did, too. Even though we, again, continued to practice our Judaism, we still observed, to be part of the neighborhood.

Q: What's your first memory, or maybe amongst your first memories, of going to a synagogue, of becoming part of the community, the Jewish community?

A: Mm-hm. Well, going to synagogue, we belonged to a congregation in **Newark**, **New Jersey**, **B'Nai Jeshurun**, was extreme Reform. A very, very, very li-liberal congregation. And I remember my parents going there, and then when I was old enough, I started to go there, too. But we moved before I – there was anything significant, but we maintained our membership in that congregation. It was on **High** Street in **Newark**. And I don't remember anything particular about – about it, just that my mother was very particular about Friday nights, and Saturday mornings. And people don't always think that, well, you were a Reform Jew, so you're not that ritualistic, I mean, you're not that tied to it. But m-m-my mother was.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that carried on through my youth. Friday nights were always – always sacrosanct. You went to temple Friday night, and that's what I did.

Q: And that's some – that's something that – that just stayed constant from your very earliest years?

A: From my earliest years. As a matter of fact, when we moved to the **Vailsburg** section, I was athletic, and I was part of an athletic group. Just a group that eventually just – was just below semi-professional. There were oth – there was only

one other Jew in the group, the others were all Christians. There were Poles and Italians. This is in the **Vailsburg** section of **Newark**. They knew, though, and they respected the fact that Friday nights I would not hang out with them at the local soda shop. And they respected that very, very highly, as I respected their Christian faith, too. And I – well, some – some – some – sometime later, when it came time for my first Bar Mitzvah – this is something that I – I – I remember so vividly because it was so unusual. I invited all of the – the athletic group to my Bar Mitzvah service. And when I say the temple **B**'**Nai Jeshurun** was ultra, ultra liberal, the Bar Mitzvah boy did not read from the Torah. All I did was prayer, the prayer before and after the reading of the Torah, and a speech. Now it's Saturday morning, and I'm at my Bar Mitzvah, and I – I get up to make a speech. And I do, the typical boys' Bar Mitzvah, so today I am a man, etcetera. And when I finish – these guys, there must have been 10 or 11 of them, they got up, and they started to clap. Yo, **Bobby**. They cheered, they whistled. The decorum, mostly on a Saturday morning, elderly women, very reserved, and so forth, they looked, and I saw the heads – I could see from the – from the **bema**, the heads of the people just dropped, oh my God. They're just wa – wa-waving their heads from side to side. They had never seen a demonstration like that before. However, as I say, my – my friends, Christians, were very ver – very, very well aware that Friday night I would not hang

out. But I – as – in recip – reciprocating for their coming to my Bar Mitzvah, I attended Catholic midnight mass –

Q: Oh, did you really?

A: – that year, yes, I went to the **Sacred Heart** church in **Vailsburg** section in **Newark**, to be, because they were all Christians, and they were there at the church, so I said, I will come to your church now. And I did.

Q: That's a very unusual story.

A: It's a –

Q: You know, it's a very unusual sort of ex – set of experiences for the early 1930s, or the mid-1930s.

A: It – it would – I – I think it was probably unique, because most everybody I knew, as – over the years, as I've grown up, most everybody I knew, certainly in the Jewish world, that ber – that grew up in **Newark**, grew up in the **Weequahic** section of **Newark**, which was – I – I – I think of it as a rich man's ghetto, because it was all Jewish, but there were nice homes, and well-to-do people. Others that were not well-to-do, too, but it was preserved very, very well, as long as they were there. So I always felt that I missed out on something that was significant. I never had – I – I – I did not live in wa – in a Jewish section, did not live near Jewish people, but I never had any acts of anti-Semitism, despite the fact that I – I evolved,

circu – circulated in a Christian world. Just never ran into it. And somehow I – I felt even deprived, because of the experience. You have to know what anti-Semitism is, you have to feel it yourself, I've – I've always believed, and I fe – I didn't feel it. It wasn't until later on in life that I really got to understand it. Well, I studied it more, and became active in community life things. But no, I was deprived of one of the – I shouldn't call it a joy, but one of the experiences that many young Jewish boys went through.

Q: Well, it's a – it's a nice – it's – as deprivations go, this is probably one that one would want to have, you know?

A: As nice a one as I could have wanted, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about family dynamics. Your – you had an older brother, eight years older. Wha – what was your relationship with him like?

A: Like father and son. My father worked very often in the eve – evenings. And **Lester –** eight years older, it was a pretty big spread. He took over as – as my father. At the age of three – I have pictures of that remarkable – he bought me a **New York Yankee** baseball uniform; cleats, a glove, bat and ball.

Q: Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.

A: And he wa – he wou – the house that we lived on, that I mentioned, on **South Orange** Avenue in **Newark**, had a backyard, and there was a fence separating it

from the house behind. He pitched to me. Now, I shouldn't say – and – and I swung the bat, but really, he was a good pitcher, and he would hit the bat. He kept my batting average – and the best that I can remember, one season he had me batting .575. Now that was even bigger – much, much bigger than **Ted Williams** .400 batting average, you know? And he kept record of homeruns, the fence was about maybe a hundred feet away, li – and so, every now and then he would hit the bat perfectly, and I would swing a little bit, and we go over the fence. So we kept my homerun record, and all of that. He taught me baseball, took me to **Rupert** Stadium in **Newark**, the trolley was right across the street from our house, took us down to **Newark**, and followed the **New York Yankee**, the farm team, the **Newark Bears**. But – so he – he re-really – I – I – I guessed, introduced me to sports, all sports, and I think acted very much like a – a – a father. When he –

Q: He sounds like a wonderful older brother.

A: It wa – it was – it was a – just a marvelous rel-relationship. And during the war – you know, World War II was partially – par-partially financed by the American people. There were signs all over, buy war bonds. And so he bought war bonds for me. I was just – just a young kid yet. So I already had war bonds going for me. He was that –

Q: When did he buy them? What year would have this been?

A: Oh, that would have been – well, surely after war was de-declared, so the early –

Q: It – after ’41.

A: Huh?

Q: After ’41.

A: After ’41, right.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and the bonds were av-available, so he bought some. And when he went into the service too, he bought bonds, even he had allocation taken out of his pay, which was very moderate, and he was married at the time, and he had an allocation taken out in war – in bonds bought for me. Very, very strong relationship.

Q: What els – what did he teach you? What do you – what are some of the – you know, clearly, he showed an absolute adoration of a little boy –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – to buy him a baseball suit –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and – and make sure that he bats, and – and builds his confidence, and – and has a great homerun score, and a batting average score. What kind of a personality was he, and what are the things that he bequeathed to you from that?

A: Well, try – he was a – he was basically a – a good person, so what he was doing for me, I don't know that he did a great deal in philanthropy, or charity, and all that, but he was just basically very good. Had strong, strong ties to family. And he remembered my birth, which was in a – it was a private home, they called it **Essex General Hospital**, but it was somebody's home, and I was born in a bedroom in that home. And he reminded me time and time again, that he saw me at birth, lying – just – just after birth, lying out in the hallway of that house, in a leather covered – lea-leather seat, a chair, a little – he said, you were about this big. He used to describe it to me often. So, I – I guess in a se – in – in a sense, he – he – he was there at the very, very beginning, and just – I was the first child after him, and he took a responsibility. He was eight years old at the time, and was mature enough to say, this is my little brother. And somewhere within him, he must have said, and I'm going to see that he – I'm going to care for him, cause Papa's not around enough, and Mama has her things to do. But I'm going to see that he gets well cared for, and he did, the rest of his life.

Q: Wow. I would usually save this for another part of our interview, but I'd like to talk to you about your brother a little bit more. You say he all – I'd like to find out what his destiny was. So, let's start with the war.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Let's say, by that point he was an adult, and he was married.

A: Right.

Q: Did he volunteer, or was he drafted? Wha – how did that – what happened?

A: Okay, he volunteered.

Q: Okay. And where did he serve?

A: He served the European theater, and I – I – I – I possibly should be telling you this later on, because in sequence – it's out of sequence.

Q: Okay.

A: But I think it's – it's more important that it relates to the kind of person he was **[indecipherable]**. If I get into th – in – in – I'm – I'm jumping ahead very far, I –

Q: Would you – would you prefer that we wait a little bit? Because I do want to find out what happened to him, but we can do it now, we can do it later.

A: Ah, yeah. Ah, yeah, I think ma – maybe we – sequentially – al-although – sequentially, I think we'll hold it until later on.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: And –

Q: And we'll come back to that, then.

A: We'll co-come back to that, because he had a role to play in my –

Q: Ah.

A: – wartime experience, yes.

Q: Okay, then in that case we'll hold on to it.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Can we break, just for a second? **[break]** So here we are, we were talking about – we were talking about your brother **Lester**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And we'll postpone some of the discussion on what his experiences were, for a little bit. Let's go back to talk about some of your other family members. You had a little sister.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Her name was **Ruth**.

A: Right.

Q: And, tell me a little bit about **Ruth**, and about the relationship that you guys had.

A: We grew up as typical brother sister. She had her group, I had my group.

Q: Did she tag along behind you?

A: No, she didn't. She was independent. She had, as I say, her own group of young ladies, and I had my athletic group. They didn't – they didn't mix, really. We were two different – different types of – of groups. So I really didn't have much interaction with her. We were, in a sense, a close-knit family, but not that we played

together. We went together. We would make many trips to **Atlantic City**, Mother, Father, Sister and me, but not my older brother. Again, eight years older, he was like in another world, and as I mentioned, he was like my – like a father to me. So he had his activities going. He went to college long before I was eligible for that, and so we – we were not that close, other than the fact that, as I mentioned, he was so, so close to me. So, we had our relationship, and my sister was pretty much out of – out of it.

Q: What about your parents now? Tell me a little bit about their personalities. What kind of people were they?

A: I said before that my father was president of the company. He was appointed so by his father, because he was the oldest. He was not a leader type to the younger brothers. Plus, a bookkeeper really ran that business. My father was content to fix milk boxes with hammers and nails. So it was in – it was in a – an uncomfortable role for him, and he signed checks as president of the company, and people outside in the – at our Jewish world, knew that he was president of the company, and there was prestige that went with it, and all, but act – in actuality he did not play that active a role. When I say that my brother took over because my father was often away at night, he was running trucks. He was delivering milk.

Q: Your father?

A: My father, yes, he's president of the company, but he da – so, he was just a different kind – different kind of per – of a person, and –

Q: Was he a quiet person?

A: Yeah, he was pretty quiet. I wouldn't say substantially so, but you know, not a boisterous kind of person, not a happy-go-lucky, jovial type person. Pretty sedate. But, I always thought, a good father. He – he always did things for me. We had special trips we – in those days, going – take – going out and – in the evening, getting in the car, because we didn't have air conditioning, you want to cool off during the summer, you take a ride in the car. We used to go down route 20 – it was route 22 then, it's route 29, national, now. And route tw – 222, I'm sorry, national now, we used to call it route – local, **New Jersey**, route 29. And it was called – I called it the hamburger route, because my father used to put us in the car on a summer evening, and go down the road, and there was a hamburger stand down there, and I liked the hamburgers. To get me to go to Friday night services, after services, there were two places we went on Friday nights. One was **Eddis**'**s**(ph), a malted shop in **Newark**, and the other was a pizza – I can't remember the name of it, star. **Star Pizzeria**. There is one today, it's in **Orange**, but it's not the same family. **Star Pizzeria**. And because my father helped them with a connection, that they got their liquor license, they used to have – Friday nights, after service, we'd

go into the kitchen, these big, huge ovens, and they were cooking, making these pizzas there. And they were pizzas not quite the way they're made today. They were made oh, olive oil, and spices and tomato – tomato – just – just –

Q: Sounds delicious.

A: And very, very thin, very thin crust. But anyway, that's – that's the kind of relationship we – we had, in taking – so he was good to the family. Took us fairly frequently to **Atlantic City** for a weekend. I loved staying in hotels. Sunday morning breakfast was just great. So he was – he was good to us.

Q: And – and your mom? Tell me a little bit about her, what was she like?

A: Again, a – a – a very good mother. Wonderful cook. Really cared for her – her children. She used to take me and my sister to **Newark**, downtown **Newark** frequently, when **Newark** was one of the great cities in **America**. She would take us there for lunch, to a movie. There were more movie houses then, than there are today, and all that. But I would say both, they were both really, really good parents to us. One thing that I've always regretted. If they wanted to talk so that we didn't understand, they'd talk Yiddish. And –

Q: That was going to be one of my questions.

A: Yeah, they talked Yiddish, but never enough in our presence, for us to acquire. And I always – always felt that in a – in a sense, they let us down, because they

used to talk between themselves, but I didn't learn very much from my parents. And I had to learn it mostly in my own way, starting to read newspapers –

Q: And did you?

A: – listening to radio. Pardon?

Q: And did you?

A: I did. Oh, I – I – at a pri – fairly early age, I st – I did read newspapers, more than just the comics, and I did listen to – I listened to radio – radio news broadcasts. But there were a lot of – a lot of things that I always begrudged the fact that they didn't admit – they weren't conscious – conscious of it. They could have instructed us on a lot of things. I usually go to the polls during elections and all that, and we were never taught politics. I always wished that, you know, they – they knew no – something about – we had a Jewish mayor at one point, Mayor ma – **Meyersee**(ph) – whose name – well, slips me for the moment.

Q: Mm-hm, in the 30s.

A: But anyway, the only – the only Jewish mayor in newar – in **Newark's** history, and all the – so my father knew some of these people, but there were never any introductions, never any background with these people, never what the political scene was like, and so forth.

Q: So, does the conversation then – it was it – the conversation at home didn't revolve around the wild – wider world.

A: No, it didn't. **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay. And what – was that because your parents didn't have that kind of interest, even though they might have had the connection?

A: I don't think it was the interest, I th – I think it was just not the awareness.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I think, maybe at that time some – probably a lot of parents were that way. Very, very different, as the decades went on, parents, you know, dinner table, you discuss issues of importance, and where you're going to college, and what you field of studies are going to be. And here's some of my experience as – as a doctor, or wha – whatever. World affairs, politics on occasion. We didn't do any of that. And – and – and I – I missed it.

Q: Did you know your grandparents, aside from the grandpa who had the **Cadillac**?

A: Yeah, my grandfather I did it – didn't know for very long, because he died before he was 50.

Q: Yeah.

A: My grandmother though, was always considered a great, great old lady. Well, I shouldn't say that. A great person. She lived – well, it must have been probably somewhere around 90, which was extremely high in those day –

Q: Yeah.

A: – in those days. She – she never learned to read or write English. She – she spoke –

Q: Did she speak it?

A: Huh?

Q: Did she speak it?

A: Did she speak –

Q: English.

A: English? Yes, yeah. She acquired enough. Not a very, very good English, but couldn't – could not write. And I remember **Shirley**, my wife, getting a letter once from her. It was in hebe – it – it was in Yiddish, and she had to get somebody to interpret it for us. So, she could write in Yiddish, read Yiddish, whatever reading she did. Her produ – her dominant responsibility was running a household, and a – and a kitchen for, I think it was 10 to 20 people. The people who wor – my grandfather had a farm – I said the milk business. The milk bus – retail milk

business evolved from the farm. They kept the – they owned – my grandfather owned what – a good – big part of what became **Irvington Center**.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: And we always begrudged his – his act-activities, his – his traveling, and all that. What he did was to sell off parcels of land there, that later would have enriched his family so much, because it grew in value. He kept selling off parcels of land so he could go with his re – maroon **Cadillac**, and the chauffeur, and travel all over the country.

Q: And your grandmother, or not?

A: But – but she, now she – she had to carry the burden, because all the people they had working on the farm, and the – and the – the brothers and sisters, she cooked. She was a marvelous, marvelous cook, but that's what she did, virtually all day, cooking and cleaning and laundry. That was her life.

Q: Oh my God, it's a hard life.

A: Yes, yes, but sh – physically very, very active, until they had a – they had a house at – in **Bradley Beach**, **New Jersey**, in addition to living here, on **[indecipherable]** Street in **Newark**. They had a house, and a small house in the back. Ma – the – my grandmother ha-had the – her house, the families used to come down and occupy the big house for weekends, and so forth. She did all the cooking,

she did all the cleaning, she did everything herself. There were never any help. I don't think any vi – any of the daughters or daughters-in-law even helped. All of that. And her career, her active, physical career, doing things like that, ended when one of her sons, one of my uncles, drove down to **Bradley Beach**, and drives into the driveway, and there is this house in the back. She's up on the roof nailing things. She's almost 90 na – 90 at that time, well into her 80s, and she was nailing. And he said, Mom, Mom, come down from there, you know, don't ever – and they prohibited her from doing anything like that. She deteriorated after that. But she was always regarded as a great, great lady. Without, again, the s – the reading – writing skills, and the reading, any of that –

Q: Well, she kept the whole thing going.

A: She kept it all going. She kept all – she kept staff, as the workers –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and family, all – all going.

Q: That's huge. That's huge.

A: Yeah, she was – she was, in her way, a great woman. Yeah.

Q: What was her name?

A: **Minnie**.

Q: **Minnie**.

A: **Minnie Max**.

Q: **Minnie Max**. And your unc – and your grandfather's name?

A: **Abe**.

Q: And the name of the company. I forgot to ask.

A: **Bloomindale Dairy**.

Q: **Bloomingdale Dairy**, okay.

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: Let's go to your mom's side. What do – what were your grandparents like there? Did you know them too?

A: Not as well, but most often, on Sundays, we traveled to **Kearny**, which is where the **Kahns**, they're **k-a-h-n**, the grandparents, they lived on **C**hestnut Street. I almost – almost remember the number, but **C**hestnut Street in **Kearny**. And that was our Sunday activity, we'd drive over. And – and she would always make French style chicken fricassee. She came from **France**. Chicken fricassee. And my mother could make that, too. And I used to talk to **Shirley** a lot, sh – sh – about, **Shirl**, get the recipe, make chicken fricassee. She made her own version of it. Was – it was good, but not quite she same as **Kearny** gr – gr – **Kearny** grandma made –

Q: Yeah.

A: – you know. So that was them, and I didn't know wha – they were in the cattle business on farms, and all their sons were in the cattle business, except one, **A-Aaron**, who was in the milk business, in competition, in a sense, with my father. But he used to drive up to our house. I mentioned that I – I was born on **South Orange** Avenue in **Newark**. And fairly often wou – I would look out the window and see a horse drawn wagon, big milk – big bottle of milk painted on it, and all that. That was Uncle **Aaron**, would come by on his route, would come by, stop in and have a cup of coffee with us. And after, he became – no education, but there's a painting in my bedroom that he did. After he retired from that activity, he became a painter, and did marvelous flower paintings, and all that. So, that was the –

Q: Mother's side.

A: – **Kearny** side, mother's side, and some **[indecipherable]**

Q: It's really hard to imagine that **New Jersey** would be cattle country, you know? It somehow doesn't fit the image that one has of the state.

A: No, but wa –

Q: But those were the years.

A: It was. Actually though, the milk that my father sold came from upper **New York** state.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yeah, so farms up there. I think these people were related somehow, to one of my uncles, and all. But they, every – every day, every day, the bi – the bi – the big deal at the dairy would be, oh, the trailer's coming, the trailer's coming. This huge trailer would come from upper **New York** state, and back – back in, and unloading, it was unloading all the milk, came from upper **New York** state.

Q: Did they process –

A: Because the farm was gone from **Irvington**, so they had to get it from a place upstate.

Q: Oh, I see. So, did they process the milk, too? Did they –

A: No.

Q: No. It was already –

A: It was already bottled –

Q: Okay.

A: – packaged, and yeah, they were not – I think I mentioned before, the br – the brothers were at odds with one another.

Q: It sounded like that. You didn't say it directly, but it sounded like that.

A: Yeah, they didn't – the – they didn't, and so they weren't progressive. My brother, again, back to my brother, on su-summers, he would work there at the dairy. And there was jealousy that went on, say he never – they never really gave

him much of a chance. They wa – the uncles were – were not kind, not particularly congenial toward him, and we – my brother and I talked later on, and said, if they – if they had, if the brothers had had the sense enough to allow my brother and me to come in, the next generation, and run the business, it would have been a successful business. But when you – when you have brothers in the business, and they spend a good part of their time arguing or fighting with one another, and who's taking more vacation time, and tho – those kinds of things happen there. And unfortunately, it didn't become a big business.

Q: Yeah. Well, you know, it also depends on – on the f – the – the previous generation from that too, you know. If your grandfather wasn't really interested in making sure that things were divided equally, that kind of set things up too, sometimes.

A: Yes. Yeah.

Q: Okay, let's move onto a few other things. This world that you describe, sounds actually like a lovely world, in – in **New Jersey** at that time, you know, of growing up with this large family, and – and a wonderful older brother, and – and warm parents, and so – at home, were discussions about what was going on in **Europe** ever part of the conversation? I mean, the large things. When **Hitler** came to power in 1933, you were 10 years old.

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: Do you ever remember your parents, or anyone in the family making any remarks about that?

A: As I mentioned earlier wa – that was one of the things that I regretted; we did not talk about world affa – affa – affairs. And I was not introduced to – to that until I was ol – a little older, and able to read the papers ma – myself. No, we didn't talk a lot about what was going on in **Europe**, and as I say, I wish – I wish we had done a little bit more of that.

Q: Was it – was there any talk anywhere? Like in school, or in your world? I guess I'm trying to get a sense of how did events that were going on in **Germany**, when did they become part of at least something you were aware of?

A: It's very vague with – in my mi – my memory, very vague. And the best I can think of, probably not until high school, til I got into high school, that I started to become interested in world affairs, started to read newspapers re-regularly.

Q: Yeah, that would have been –

A: And then I knew –

Q: Yeah.

A: – what was going on. But I had to be, you know, 14, 15, 16.

Q: The war's already starting in **Europe** at that point.

A: And it started, right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Right. So I didn't know a great deal about it, until I s – as I say, I started reading my – on my own, in newspapers.

Q: Did you have a radio at home?

A: We did have radio. We listened to radio a great deal. I very often listened to **Joe – Joe Louis**' bouts. And oh, he was amazing. I – I – I think about that, when people – when we talk today about – when those days we didn't have **TV**. We certainly didn't have computers and all that. What did you do? Well, we listened to radio. What – what – what – what did you see? We didn't see. We saw in our own minds. And I – I fought every round with **Joe Louis** in those bouts, just listening on a big box radio, and I could point – the announcers had to be very good, and they were. And I could really, really feel that I saw **Louis** in those great bouts, in the **Louis – Braddock –** or mac – **Max Baer**, **Jimmy Braddock** championship fight. Well, **Max Baer** was our hero. Remember, he wore the Jewish star, and – and he was a braggadocios ki – kind of guy. Glamorous sor – sort of. And then defi – defeated by this small time boxer, really, from **New Jersey**. But, listening on radio, it was – it was – it was very real, and we could see it – you know, we didn't – listening now is quite different, because we ha – we've been exposed to **TV**. But, it was real.

Q: This – sou-sound has a magical quality.

A: It has. It has. And even ba-baseball games, except for one incident I remember, a baseball announcer – and you know, President **Reagan** wa-wa-was a baseball a-announcer, sportscaster and all. But the **Newark Bears** were the yank – **New York Yankees** farm team, **A** number one farm team. They had an announcer by the name of **Earl Harper**. And I used to listen to baseball – again, my – I mentioned my brother had really introduced me to baseball, maybe a **New York Yankee**. And so I used to listen to the **Yankee** game certainly, but I listened to the **Newark Bears** games, too, and **Earl Harper** was the announcer. They had to describe what was going on in the field, to gi – give you on – the only representation you could get, what, literally, was happening. So I remember **Earl Harper**, I sit down, and I was listening, he said, the si – the wind-up, the pitcher wind-up, the stretch, the pitch, and there goes a booming drive, going – look a – deep, deep center field, and – and – and a – and **Roy Schalk** steps back on the grass and takes it. **Roy Schalk** was second baseman. So that description of this long, long drive going out to center field, was really caught by the second baseman, who just stepped back onto the grass, and all that. So sometimes you got vivid descriptions that weren't very real. And they could color them if they wanted to, and some of them did, or they could

ma-make errors, and sometime they did that too, but – but anyway, radio was real to us.

Q: And so, were there other types, non-sports programs that the family listened to?

A: Yeah, I think my mother had her favorite morning drama – drama. So morning, when we're cooking, preparing lunch, and preparing for the evening meal, there were – there were drama shows on radio, and she, I think, used to listen to those. I used to listen to a lot of music. I became a musician. And I got fascinated with Big Band Swing, which was the music of that era. So I listened to a great, great deal of that.

Q: What about December 7th, 1941?

A: Yeah. All I remember about that is the president's speech, the da – the day aft – after.

Q: Radio?

A: On radio, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And on December 7th, that rich voice, December 7th, 1941, the day that will live in infamy. Yes.

Q: And was that of a – did you already know of it before the speech, or was this the first time you're hearing?

A: I must have known about it before, because I knew the two Japanese ambassadors, **Nomura**, began with a **C**, and an **N**, and a **C**, but the two Japanese were in the White House at the time. They knew the attack was coming, as it was reported later on, and they knew it, and they were negotiating with the president. So, it was really a dastardly, dastardly act. Their planes were already on the way to **Pearl Harbor**, and they were still talking with the president of the **United States**, in the White House.

Q: And you knew of this before his speech goes on. That is, people in the area would have known this already, or not? No.

A: No, I – I – I learned that afterwards.

Q: Afterwards, okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: I was trying to get a sense of –

A: Yeah, no, I didn't –

Q: By talking about radio, I also wanted to get a sense of, how does the wider world come into a home? How does it – how does news of the wider world come in at that particular time?

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm. For wa – for wa – for one thing, we weren't as alert, or interested in the rest of the world, we had a literal enclaves that we lived in. And so,

we didn't need the exposure that people need today, that we had. And so what – what we did get, on newscasts, was, you know, it was sufficient for us, at that time.

Q: Well, that's important to know.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: That's important to know. That's a difference between today's world, and – and – and the one 60, 70 years ago.

A: Oh, a very different world, yes.

Q: Yeah. And one other question that I've got is background question. What kind of image did you have in your mind, of what **Europe** was, based again, on family. Because most Americans, when they came, most Americans at that time, would not have been immigrants from the second or third generation, they would have been earlier, you know?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And **Europe** is very distant. What was – how was **Europe** painted for you, given that your mother comes from western **Europe**, and your father's family came from eastern **Europe**?

A: Even though they came from there, I had no – no knowledge really, of central **Europe**, of eastern **Europe**. To me, **Europe** was **Paris** and **London**, **Spain**. Strictly the western – the nations in **Europe**. But just – just **Europe** seemed so distant. It

was another world. Today it's very different, it's in our – it's in our backyard, and you travel to it all the time. But it was very, very rare for anybody to travel even, to **Europe**. So, it didn't play much of a role in our lives. Just a fascination, something out there that's very alluring to us, but we'd – we didn't think, we didn't travel the way people travel today. You wouldn't think of traveling to **Russia**, my gosh.

Q: Travel from **Russia**.

A: Somewheres, but –

Q: Yeah.

A: – not there.

Q: Okay, so let's go to December, after December 7th, 1941, the **United States** is then involved in a war, but it's in the **Pacific** theater, not in the European theater.

A: Right.

Q: How does your life continue? You're in high school at that time, is that correct?

A: Mm-hm, right.

Q: How were those last years of high school, and what – what was going on with you?

A: Well, obviously, I was aware that the Japanese had struck, and we were in a war in the **Pacific** islands. It didn't affect me very, very much, until, you know, four days later, December 11, 1941, that **Adolf Hitler** declared war on **America**. Now it

was a different – different story. First of all, **Hitler**, Nazi – Nazi **Germany**, Jews, all of that began to register on me, as I – as I mentioned, I read newspapers, so I knew what was going on. That started to register. In 1941, I graduated high school, then 1942, headed for college.

Q: Where?

A: September of 1942, I guess that's when it was. Pretty sure. And I was what, 19 at the time. Oh, I'm s – I'm sorry. My first year, I did not go to **Ohio** University. My first year wa – I went to **New York** University. It was convenient, I didn't have to go traveling any place. I could just – oh, about a half mile from my home, I could get on a bus, and travel to **Newark**, take a train into **New York**, and I went to **New York** University, the fi-first – first year. And that's when I read newspapers a great deal, during – during travel to and from the city. And that's when I – I knew what was going on, and – with Nazis. I knew the concentration camps were be – beginning, **Hitler**'**s** plan of the – his gru – his – his book.

Q: **"Mein Kampf**."

A: "**Mein Kampf**." All of that, so I – I got really – so I – I – I knew what was going on. The reality is that I had to leave this area. I had terrible sinusitis, and the doctor said, you must get out of this area, because otherwise you're going to have trouble breathing, constantly. Pick an area out in the Midwest. I had a classmate, who knew

I was ma – m-majoring in journalism, had a classmate, who told me about this lovely, little school, small town in **Ohio**, **Athens**, **Ohio**. **Ohio** University. Was one of the top three journalism schools in the country.

Q: Wow.

A: And so, it – it was a totally different way of life, na – going to – to college, on a ka – on a – a big, big, tall office like bi – building, was not my view of what college life ought to be. So, I didn't need much persuasion to get out of town, and I – I went out there.

Q: Did it clear out the sinusitis?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did it clear out the sinusitis?

A: Yeah, I – yeah, it wasn't – it wasn't – wasn't bad, I – I got –

Q: So, was it the pollution here?

A: Hm?

Q: What was the cause why here it was –

A: Industry. Heavy, a lot of heavy, manufacturing industry.

Q: Okay.

A: And so out there, it was all country, so that – that did help a great, great deal. So I was out there, I was now in my sophomore year, I'm 20 years old. I'm taking

**ROTC**, reserved officer training corps, at university. We're in the war. I'm in a fraternity. We hold bull sessions at night. And here we are, a bunch of guys, age eligible to be in the war, and we – and we need bull sessions. We seem to subliminally maybe, impressing one another, that maybe that's where we belong. Why should we – similar me-men, boys, are going over to fight. Why should we be here? And so most of us signed on. I volunteered to go in the army, and did.

Q: Did you finish your sophomore year?

A: Yes. They allowed us to finish the year, and then I went off to the – to f – **Fort Dix** in **New Jersey**, the reception center.

Q: And this would have been what – what year, what summer, or what –

A: That would have been the – that would have been 1940 –

Q: Three?

A: – two? No? Was maybe – maybe summer of '42? Who ma – no, '41, '42? No, I think we may have been in '43 already. I'm very vague on that.

Q: That's okay.

A: I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: The dates or the timing, but I finished a year, so it would have been in the fall of '42, I finished that year, a second year. And then maybe that's – that's when I – I went in.

Q: Okay.

A: So I – again, I had volunteered, was sent to **Fort Dix**.

Q: So you were close to home?

A: Very close to home. But that was just – just the reception center. From there you go out for basic training.

Q: Where was that?

A: **Fort Dix**.

Q: No, no, no, where was basic training

A: Oh, well that come a little bit later.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I actually was in **Alabama**.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: **Fort McClellan**, **Alabama**. Also known as the hellhole of the south. But anyway, when I got to –

Q: Was it?

A: Huh?

Q: Was it?

A: I – no, I – I – I regarded it highly, it was a – it was – it helped save my life. It was re – very, very rugged training, and I was put in very good physical, and I think emotional shape there. But no – the – of note, when I got to **Fort Dix**, I was called into the office, and there was a – a man leading the music. And you know, they had a band, a swing band, and his name was **Jack Leonard**. He had been with the **Tommy Dorsey** orchestra. He preceded **Frank Sinatra** as the vocalist for that orchestra. So he – like ma – like so many of the musa – musicians, so many, many of them, the bandleaders and all, they all volunteered, and went in the service. **Glenn Miller**, you know what happened to him.

Q: Mm-hm. What happened to **Glenn Miller**, so the people will understand. What happened to him?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. **Glenn Miller**, of course, had probably the most – certainly one of the most popular bands. We called them swing bands, dance bands. They had one of the most popular ones, had a unique sound, that he created for his orchestra. And he – I believe he volunteered. He became a captain, then a major, and he was leading – he had a – a – a World War II band, a counterpart of what he had in civilian life. And they played some of the same music, again. And he used to travel to the bases, where the troops were, overseas, and play concerts, jazz co – swing

concerts for them. **Glenn Miller** disappeared in a flight from **Great Britain**, over to **Normandy**. They never, never di – were – never discovered, what happened. He – he was off, they were going over to **France** to entertain the troops, and the plane disappeared. And there are many, many stories and beliefs as to how it disappeared, but somewhere over the English channel, **Glenn Miller** –

Q: Disappeared.

A: – was hit, and was – and disappear – dis-disappeared. But my experience in the – in music, some of the – some of the members may have been from his band, too, but I – when I ca – when I came – oh, I didn't – didn't tell you how I got to be there. I – I played in local bands here. So I played clarinet and saxophone. So I get there, and I'm called into the office. And they tell me that **Jack Leonard** would like to see you. I says, why would he want to see me? So I went to him. He said, kid, I see you play saxophone, clarinet. How could he know that? We didn't have computers in those days, how did he know? Somehow it was on my record that I had been playing with bands. He said, I – I'm going to give you a weekend pass. I want you to come play in the – play wi – in the band here. And he give me a weekend pass. Go back to **South Orange**, come back with your instruments. And I did. It was a totally different life. No more **KP**. I didn't have to even make my bed. Every – everything was cared for me. I was now a musician among the elite, I guess. All I –

I didn't have any chores, no potato peeling, nothing. And I practiced in the morning, went to rehearsal. We rehearsed in the afternoon. We would broadcast on radio at night.

Q: Live?

A: It was a great life. Huh?

Q: Live?

A: Live, yes, live broadcasts, and I – it was as great a life as anybody could imagine. I me – war's going on, here I am playing music here. I can play – I could possibly play – play the rest of the war, just sitting there, and playing with musicians. I was intimidated, in a way. I looked around me – cause I – I used to follow these big bands, and I knew – I knew who the – who the – the side men were. And these were not musicians, frankly, like today's musicians. They were trained in **Juilliard**, and places like that. They could orchestrate, arrange, compose. So they were great musicians, the best of their day. And there I am sitting with them, and trying to keep place with them. The very first number we play was a number from **Benny g – Benny Goodman** orchestra created, called "**Six Flats Unfurnished**." That means the music is written in the – in six flats, and six flats, it makes it tougher to play. And here I am, sitting with all these great musicians, and

playing a tough piece. And oh, tha-that was – that was – that was difficult. At any rate, that went on. Could have – could have remained.

Q: How long did it go on?

A: I don't think more than maybe a few weeks.

Q: Okay.

A: It could have been a great life. I think I could have spent probably the entire war playing music. My name came up to be shipped out for basic training. **Jack Leonard** intervenes, and gets the name stripped off. And I say, **Jack [indecipherable]** he said. I said, I – I – **Jack**, I – I do want to g – want to go – yeah, I'm – I'm in the army, I'm 20 years old. I just can't imagine – I don't say to him, but I can't imagine that I'm going to spend the war here. I know many of my peep – my age, are going overseas, and they're – some of them probably losing their lives **[indecipherable]** and whatever. But my place is not here, it's there. So I say, **Jack**, I want to go out – I – I want to – I want to go on the list again. I said, I'll go out, and you know, eventually I'll come back here. He said, kid, you leave here, you're never coming back again. And he was right, of course. I – I – I couldn't dictate to the army where I go. But so – so that was it, and I – I left the band. He took care of shipping my instruments back to **South Orange**, and I was off, basic training.

Q: To **Alabama**.

A: **Alabama**, yes.

Q: Well, what time do we have right now? Then, why don't we break at this point.

A: Oh, good. Okay. **[break]**

Q: Okay. So, before the break, we were talking about your first days and weeks in the military, and how you were in this wonderful band, but that you did not feel right staying at it, and asked that your name be put on the list to be called up for basic training. Take us from there. Tell us where you went, and what this training involved.

A: Well, so shortly after I made that determination, that I was – I was ready, I – I wanted army life, I was put a – placed on an or – a shipping order, to be shipped out. And we took a very circuitous route. I don't know why in **America**, they felt there may be threats, and we didn't go directly down to **Alabama**, but sort of weaved – weaved around. And I was told it was for security purposes. But we got to **Fort McClellan**, deep into **Alabama**. And immediately I knew that I was going to have a very, very hot summer. Temperatures at **Fort McClellan** in **Alabama**, rose at times to over a hundred degrees.

Q: Oh my.

A: So, it was a very, very hot, difficult summer. But was a – it was a standard training camp. What – what – one of the difficulties we had was that it was staffed

by what we called cadre, **c-a-d-r-e**, cadre. These are old-time army men who have been through the wars. And here was a bunch of young, college, smart-aleck kids coming down. They were not going to let us get away with an easy training period. Training was three months. They gave us the most difficult forced marches. One of the – one of the ultimate requirements was that we march, fully loaded with equipment, backpacks, and all – all th – and all the – the equipment that we would normally carry into battle. And we ru – march over **Bain Gap**. **Bain Gap** was a very, very hilly mountain. And some had trouble making it. Certainly in the – in the hot temperatures in which we were marching. We did it. I think just not everybody made – made the march. That irritated them, and they said, you're going back, you're going to do it again. And they made us march over **Bain Gap**, twice.

Q: The same day?

A: No, no, no, no, we di – different dates.

Q: Okay.

A: But the – us-usually part of the training was for building your endurance, your ability to survive in combat, where you have to do forced marches. But because we all made it, they – you know, thi-this was emotional, more – more than tactical. So, you got to march again, so we had to go over it again. The obstacle courses they set up for us, were very, very difficult. Yeah, you're climbing walls out of – you – you

run, cl – pull yourself on a rope, and go over. And jump over ponds, and you had to jump far enough, otherwise you landed in the water. Rather tough exercises. So they put us through a very strenuous program. I believe at that time I – oh, I – I was a physical en-enthusiast. I took the **Charles Atlas** bodybuilding course, because I was very small, and I had to build up – if I was small – I may be small in stature, but I will not be small in body and strength. So I took the **Charles Atlas** bodybuilding course, which was very popular at that time. So I had some things going for me already. That, plus the training that we got at **Fort McClellan**, I – I think, to a large extent, saved my life later – later on. One of the difficult things that also happened at **Fort McClellan**, is that it was a – a – it was a cu – a prisoner of war camp for German soldiers. And I didn't know, but they apparently, when they were captured overseas, some of them were sent over here, to s – to **POW** camps. **Fort McClellan** was a **POW** camp. Now, their treatment of prisoners – our treatment of prisoners, I should say, as opposed to theirs, very, very different. They – as we were marching on the-these – these tough – these obstacle courses, the marches, they would stand in the fenced-in area, laughing at us, because we were being – we were the ones who were being pushed, and they were living a – a wonderful life. They were bronzed. You know, they had no shirts, and they were absorbing the sun. They didn't have to march in the sun, they just absorbed it. They had the rights to go to

the post exchange, where they could get cigarettes, candy, any – anything that was available. They were living wonderful lives, and there they were, ridiculing us, and laughing – laughing at us. And so in – as I write, later on, I say, hm, but look at how things turned out. The guy they were laughing at, turns out to have survived, and many of them, I'm sure, did not. That was compensation. So **Fort McClellan**, again, was very difficult, but it did prepare us well for what lie ahead, and – lay ahead. And then, after three months –

Q: How long did that last? Three months?

A: What?

Q: Three months?

A: We've had three months there, and really, it was a wa – it was a very good, a ver – very good life. On Sunday mornings, we were pretty free, to do what – we could – we could go to the mess hall, and order up – what we used to order – to get at home. On Sunday morning, get breakfast. I used to be able to go up and tell the chef – I don't think we called them chef, we called them cooks, but I could tell him I wanted eggs, bacon, toast on the side, yeah. Yeah. And we were getting that. And this was army life? My gosh. It was a tough, tough camp, but sa – some of the relief on – on – on Sundays, made it palatable. The heat was so great, that it was not uncommon for people to pass out on the parade ground, when we were being marched, and all

that. And the only time in my life that I ever came about as close as you can get to passing out, I – I sustained myself. Hundred degree temperatures, sun pouring down, and we're standing out in that sun, and we're marching and marching. And I – I felt weakness, and I – I just didn't want to drop out. I remember getting to the barracks, to the steps, and fine – just about making the few steps I had to my bed, and then throwing myself on my bed. But had the great satisfaction that I didn't pass out on the parade ground. So again, very, very good, good basic training. Tough but good, at **Fort McClellan**.

Q: And after three months, what happened?

A: Then we moved on. The army developed a – a program they called the Army Specialized Training Program. It was to train soldiers, those who had some college education – I believe that was the criteria that was used, you – you had to have some education. You were being trained in one or two schools, either engineering – they always needed engineers, or foreign languages. Foreign languages would have been much more appropriate for me, because the last thing I – I – I was in – I was – had any talent for, was engineering. That's the way the army did things, though. They always wanted to train you the army way, not some habit you might have picked up in civilian life. And so, because I knew nothing about engineering, that's the school I went to. So, from **Fort McClellan**, I went to **Alabama Polytechnic**

**Institute**. Later became **Auburn University**. We had a campus life, we – we lived in dorms on the campus. We still had marching drills, but we had classroom studies.

Q: Was this training to be an officer as well, or – or was that still part of being a private?

A: That came later on, when we – I – when we tried to go to officer candidate school.

Q: Okay.

A: I'll come to that in a –

Q: Okay.

A: – in a few minutes. Because it all started where we – where we're at now –

Q: Okay.

A: – at **Auburn University**. We – so we attended class. We didn't – we di – did military drills, and – and got some lectures on military stuff. But we attended class. The – they had to reach far and wide to get in st – enough instructors for those programs. And I remember the instructor I had in engineering, was an English tea – professor in college. So, he was only a few pages ahead of us. And some of the guys who I was with, were really engineering oriented people, and they were being held back. For me it was o – okay, cause I knew nothing about engineering, but that's the way they did things. We – so, in addition to our studies, we had our weekends

reasonably free. There were four of us from the **New York** area, people – people that I knew, and we formed a – a group – like, we – we were what was a – musical promotors. We – on Saturday nights, we would have concerts. What were the concerts? The big bands of the day were the – we had a-all on record, in my dormitory room, and we would invite everybody in, we'd have drinks and – and – and –

Q: Play music.

A: – was just – huh? Music, we had music. And I remember the kickoff – I think it was the kickoff concert we had, was – we called it an awa – it – it was the bu – the – the – the – the finest black musicians of their day. And there were many, many, really some of the top, top musicians. And we had all them, you know, **Count Basie**, **Duke Eli-Ellington**, **Ella Fitzgerald**. You know, all the great, great artists. And – and that was all records, so people poured into the dormitory. So that was our – our release, our relief from the pressures we were under.

Q: Here's a question. You grew up in **Newark** in a mixed community. It wasn't just Jewish, it was also Gentile, it was also different ethnic groups, and so on. What about army life? Were there – was – did you get exposed to people, and populations and different kinds of young guys that you never would have met otherwise, and were they – how was that for you, and describe that a little bit.

A: Yes, because the people – th-those who – those of us that they brought together were from all parts of the country, and so obviously we met new acquaintances, who became some of the – who became buddies, and friends. And enemies, too. The reason I knew that the – when I say enemies – the reason I knew that we were – that I had gotten some real good out of the training at **Fort McClellan**, was that while we were there, we had one guy, he was about – he was over six feet tall, well built, and all that. And he was too – I don't remember what we called him, but too **G**.**I**. He – he – he fa – every – everything – the script – you had to be right, militarily do this right, march right, you know, everything like that. And it bothered the other guys. I mean, we were normal – normal boys, you know, thrown into army life, and he was very militaristic, and he got on their nerves. And one day, I – we got into an argument, and I just was determined on ma – I'm many inches shorter than he, I'm lots smaller, lighter in weight, but I'm going to take this guy on. And I did, and I beat him. You know, wrestling, and stren – very strenuous wrestling, and I brought him down. And – and – and the – and the guys cheered, you know, and – and it helped build relationships. I remember his name, **Bob – Bob Loring**(ph). And I remember that. But the – anyway, so our experience there was interesting, but it was going nowhere. The battle losses in **Europe** were becoming very heavy.

Q: So – excuse me **[coughing][break]** So was this after **D-Day**? You were still in **Alabama** when **Normandy** was – you know, after **D-Day** on **Normandy**?

A: June – that was June 6th, 1944.

Q: Forty-four, yeah.

A: Four – no, I think – I think on the landing – oh yeah, it had to be – yes, it had to be after the landing, because our troops had – had landed, and they were engaged in battle, acro – acro – across **France**, and all that, and our losses. Even though we moved rapidly – the British and American forces did move rapidly after – they were bogged down in **Saint-Lô**. And then after they broke out of there, and then they moved right across. But the – in doing so, the losses were heavy, and with those losses building up, the army looked at programs like **ASTP**, and said, we have to abandon them, because we need ground troops overseas. So they did. And we were –

Q: **ASTP** was your engineering school.

A: Engineering school, American special – Army Specialized Training Program. The navy had a counterpart to that. The – so that program was to be abandoned, and we were going to go into the infantry. That didn't sound very glamorous, so a whole bunch of us applied in two directions; one, to officer candidate school. Now, we – we didn't know at the time, if you – if you go to officer candidate school, you

graduate, you become a lieutenant, a let – lieutenant's place was at the front, not in the back. If you were a major, you could be in the back, but as a lieutenant, you were more exposed than anybody else. But we just liked the idea. I did, anyway. I wanted to become an officer. And I always had – had second thoughts about that, because I was small. I wanted to be good. And I was so young. By this time, I was 21. And I said, many of the people I will be leading, though, many of these guys, they're going to be older than I, they're going to be bigger than I, and I – can I command their respect? It was – there were doubts that I had. But nevertheless, rather than fight in the – in the ground – ground – in the ground troops, it would be nice to be an officer. And the other thing that we went for, air ca – air cadet – the air cadet academy in – it was in – in **Georgia**. We a – I just became fascinated, and most of us did, with aircraft. Like, you wouldn't have to be on the ground, and in the mud, and all that, you'd be flying in the air. You know, like it was a – a – an easy job. It certainly wasn't. The dangers that they were exposed to were as bad as anything on the ground. But anyway, a whole group of us applied for both. I remember going to the interview for a – for a – to become an officer. It was the most austere setting I can ever, ever remember. I walk into this room, and all I see is a long, long table, as far as I can see, of men sitting. Brass, all officers, high-ranking

officers. I'd never seen so much brass in my – in my life. And not a smile on anyone's face.

Q: Oh gosh.

A: And I had to be interviewed by them. I'm 20 – you know, 21 years old, I had never been subjected to anything like that. It was grueling, but I think I did well, and I think everybody thought they did well enough. On the – then we had to take written exams. We never did find out how we did on the written exams. During that same time, I don't rem-remember who was there before or after, we applied to – to go to air – the air academy and become fliers. So we did the same thing there, appli – applied there. In each – oh, and – and we became so infatuated with aircraft, that we s – instead of doing our studies at **ASTP**, at night we'd run through the halls, flying like planes. You know, we're young guys still, we're – we're airplanes now. And we learned the silhouettes of every plane. We could identify every American and every German plane. Which was important to know, whether it's your enemy coming at you, or one of your –

Q: One of yours.

A: – or one of your – one of your own. So, w-we – we were all air-minded by that time. We were all ready to go off to the air. As it turned out, because of the huge needs now overseas for ground troops, both programs were canceled, and we're all

sent on our way. We went to – oh, oh, for – for – for more – now, combat training, first was basic training, combat training, so I then – I was sent to – to **Indiana**, **Camp Atterbury** in – near **Indianapolis**, in **Indiana**. And there were got combat training. I learned to be able to, in the dark, strip down my – strip down and put together my rifle. You had to be ab – you had to be able to do that, because who know – under battle conditions, it may be nighttime, and yet your battle – your – your rifle was your best friend in combat. If you were without that, you were in trouble. So we learned to do that. But one of the things that the army did again, as they did with **ASTP**, they assigned you to units in which you had no experience. I was assigned to the motor pool. I knew not much more about an automobile engine than the fact that – I knew there was a carburetor, I knew there were spark plugs, and I knew somewhere, something created a spark, and that ignited the gasoline, and that created the power. That's all I knew, but I – about wha – what was under the hood, I never had any experience with. So I'm assigned to the motor pool. So in addition to ki – getting combat training, I got training in mechanics, and that. And so that – that's what I did for a very, very short time. Again, they had to abbreviate it, because we're now needed overseas. So I shipped out of there.

Q: When?

A: Oh, I just don't remember whe-when it was.

Q: Was it the fall of ’44?

A: Fall of ’44?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Forty four? Probably so. Probably so. See, I landed on **Omaha Beach** in September – let me see, the initial landing was 19 –

Q: Forty-four?

A: – 44.

Q: June. So three months later.

A: June, for – three months exactly. Three months later, in September, when I landed on **Omaha Beach**. But – so we were – we were shipped out.

Q: Direct from the **States**, or through **England**, through the **U**.**K**.?

A: No, to the **U**.**K**. We shipped out from **Fort Meade**, **Maryland**, and sailed on the – oh dear, dear – a bri – a – a British luxury line – liner. Which was an indication of how everybody, everybody, every business, every everything – everything was devoted to the war. **General Motors** stopped making automobiles, they made tanks, instead. The luxury bo-bo-boats were converted into troop carriers, and so I was on this luxury troop carrier. We sailed overseas, and landed in – landing in **Liverpool**. When we got to liver – to **Liverpool**, that was just a weigh station, waiting to take us across the English channel. We made it to **Liverpool**, and I remember standing

up on the deck and looking down, and there were people holding newspapers, s – **Mauritania**, the **SS Mauritania**, which what we sailed on, **SS Mauritania** sunk. Well, there – there were Nazi submarines all across the **Atlantic**, and the navigators on those ships had to weave their way across to try to avoi-void them. Many of our tr – many of our supply carrier ships were – were – were bombed, wa-was – were – were destroyed in the **Atlantic** Ocean, never getting overseas. And some troop carriers were hit. But anyway, we get there, and th-the paper said, **Mauritania** sunk. And we're looking down, we're here. So we trained a little bit more.

Q: So that meant you had been on the **Mauritania** before it was sunk?

A: No, it wasn't sunk.

Q: It wasn't sunk, okay.

A: It was just a false report.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: And the – this news reporter thought he had a – a super story, you know, a scoop.

Q: Scoop.

A: And there were to defy his scoop. So, we did land, and we trained a li-little bit more in **Liverpool**, and then set sail on a **Liberty** ship, across the English channel. Now, we were to link up with units we were going to battle with – that we were

going to battle for – with. And sailing across the English channel was not a simple thing. You started off in a **Liberty** ship, which is a very small, small version of these large, bi-big ocean liners. Started off in one of those. But to get to shore, you had to go – you had to descend from that ship, to an **LST**, yeah, a landing ship tank. There was different versions of that, they were called different names, but I think the one we were on was an **LST**. And you probably have seen pictures of landing troops during **D-Day** –

Q: Right.

A: – those – those little boats that came into shore, as close as they could get, then these big doors come down.

Q: Correct.

A: And then the soldiers are off, into the water. St – the big – the most difficult part of that trip was fir-fir-first of all recognizing, you know, now – now, this is for real, because you – you – your – you're di – you're going to face the enemy pretty soon. Now you have gas masks, rifles on – on your – on your shoulders, and on your back. And so this is – this is combat. The treacherous part of that trip was the exchange you made from the liberty ship, down to the **LST**, because you had to climb down on a net. And we were warned in advance, one false step, and it may mean your life. So you had to place each foot perfectly. We had about 30 pounds of

equipment on our backs; rifles, gas masks, everything we would carry into battle. So, you had to si – watch your step. I was very, very careful. Some did not make it. I heard stories about many on **D-Day** who slipped and fell between the ships. Now, the little ship is bobbing, and there – the two ships are crashing together. Some were crushed before they ever even got to shore. So I climbed down cautiously, and got into the ship. Now, for some strange reason, this – I mentioned earlier, this group with me at – that ran the concerts, the – one of them was with me yet. He turned out later in life to be in adver – an advertising executive for one of the big advertising firms in **New York**. But he wa – he was that kind of a person. For some reason he bought a camera, he brought a camera. We're going into combat, and **Herb** has a camera. And he says, **Bob**, tell you what to do. As soon as that door goes down, I'm going to be right up front, I'm going to get off first, and then I want you to come out, and I'm going to take a picture of you landing on **Omaha Beach**. And he did. He got a – and the – and the door goes down, you know. And this – this is crazy, really crazy thi-thinking, to begin with. You're going into combat, maybe just hours away from the enemy, and you're taking a photograph. Anyway, **Herb** did take that photograph. I never did see it. Along the way, we separated, he went to another unit, and – and I saw him in **New York** after the war, and **Herb** – he was with a big

advertising company. But he – he said, I don't know what happened **Bob**, but I lost it. Oh, terrible. But –

Q: But you know, it's also, you're soldiers, but you're also kids.

A: We still –

Q: You know, this is a – this is something that a – kids will do, because –

A: You're so right.

Q: Yeah, they're so adventurous.

A: We were not – we were not yet mature soldiers. It would take a little seasoning, under ca – under combat conditions, for us to wise up to what it was all about. And that, as a matter of fact, was characteristic of my early days in combat. I still did not recognize that this is a very serious business. But anyway, I was assigned to the six – sixth armored, and we did land, climbed that route up in the mountains. Enemy fire was not too far away. I was assigned to the Sixth Armored Infantry Division. We rode half-tracks.

Q: What's that?

A: Half-tracks are – are vehicles that have – they have an area – there's the – the driver's ca – ca – ca – cabin. Next to the driver sits the officer in charge, and the driver – and then there's an ope – big open area, wall – sides on – on the thing, but it's open on the top, and there are benches on each side. Anywhere from four to

eight – eight, four on each side, would sit in that. The back end had tracks, just like – like a – a –

Q: A tank.

A: – a tanks. They had those kind of tracks, and wheels in the front. But the tracks to give tr-traction, and the wheels to be able to guide and make quicker turns than a tank could make. And that was our – that was our home. That's wha – where we fought from.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: Until they became obsolescent. And I'll explain that in a – in a – in a moment. But anyway, there we were, and we were assi – and I – I was assigned to that – to **A** company in tha – in a platoon, and – and to that half-track. First days in combat, it was, you know, it was still – still not real yet.

Q: This was still in **France**, though?

A: We're – we're in **France** now. Now we're driving across **France** to engage the enemy. We – the first day in camp, we are shelled by enemy forces. And those shells come over. It's a frightening feeling, but I still – still, it didn't register on me yet, because they – they passed over – the ones you hear are okay, the – you know, they pass – they passed you. The ones that hit you are the ones you don't hear. You don't hear the ones that hit you, because that – that sound passing overhead doesn't

get there. They – they come right at you. Anyway, those shells were passing overhead. We had a ca – a few in our half-track who had fought in the north African campaign, they were used to this. And they knew when shells come in, that's dangerous. And they jumped – dropped to the floor, and I – I looked, and I wondered why. Well, th-they – they knew what – the seriousness of it. I still didn't know. We – there were some German soldiers came out of the woods, they were gi-gi-giving up, with their hands up, threw their rifles away. And we had a machine-gunner on our vehicle who was firing at them. And I yelled, we all yelled, stop, stop, they're surrendering. And so other troops, other American troops came by, took them away, and we continued the – the – we were a-a-approaching enemy terri-territory, and shells started to come in. The last place you want to be in a half-track is on a road that's zeroed in by en-enemy heavy artillery. And so we pulled it off the road. Now, we're off the road, but we're still being shelled. We sought cover. I jumped out of the half-track, because we were targets in there, no – no – no roof. And I – I jumped be – on the be – and I lay down on the back end of that. Some of the other fellows were in the front. I waved to them, there in the front, looking back toward us, under – under the front axle of the vehicle. And they're looking – and I'm waving, they're not waving back. And again, I still hadn't gotten the reality of warfare. This is very, very serious business. And then I see them

taking stretchers, some of our men had been hit. It begins to have an effect, I said, you know, this is a – a serious business. The next morning, I found out how serious it was. We – we pulled into a field, there were tanks, and there are half-tracks, and we were told to dig in. Mean, you – you build a bu – you dig a bunker. I was still not oriented yet to military life. I was a defiant, young, 21 year old, and ah, bunker. You know, we'll be moving on, and all the – all the effort of going through a bunker. I didn't dig a bunker. Shellfire is in the morning, early. We call it incoming mail. The enemy always strikes at dawn. Incoming mail, those are the bombs are – these – these shells are – are landing. All of a sudden, my rifle is blown out of my hand, my hand stings. I look at my rifle lying on the ground, there's a hole in the – in the ba – in the barrel of the rifle. So, a shell – a shell pierced the rifle, could have pierced me, but didn't.

Q: Close.

A: Yeah, but a quick, quick lesson. Suddenly it hits me, this is very serious business. Every moment you're out here on this – on this field or any other battle field, your life is in danger. So, quick, quick realization. From somewhere, somebody came up and handed – and ga-gave me a rifle. So now I was in combat. I never, never disobeyed that command again, to di-dig when – when we're – when

we're stopped for a while, you dig yourself a foxhole, and it could save your life, which it did – did. So that was my introduction to combat.

Q: Was that the first time you saw casualties, where you saw people being killed?

A: It – it was, and it was a strange, strange feeling. After a while, we abandoned the half-tracks, so we were on foot. And I remember proceeding on foot. We were facing an enemy, we were firing, they were firing. The man in front of me, the man behind me were both hit. And wa – my – first time I had seen anybody killed in even civilian life. And I stopped and I paused. Troops were moving on, and I just paused, and I looked at these two men, and I started to think, all the wonderful things in life they will never see, never feel again. I – those thoughts just ran through my mind, not very formally, but tho – those kind of thoughts. And then I found myself thinking about their families, they'll never be the same again, cause the father, the brother, an uncle, aunt – an uncle, they were gone. And so, now I was really introduced to warfare, and I took it very seriously from that – that point on.

Q: Sounds like it was a wake-up call.

A: It was – it was my wake-up call.

Q: Yeah.

A: I realized this is it. You – you protect yourself, you go after the enemy, but don't forget about protecting yourself, because if you don't, you may end up like that. You may end up anyway –

Q: Yeah.

A: – like – like that.

Q: Did you know their names?

A: No.

Q: Did you know who they were? Or they just happened to be in front of you?

A: I think – I think I had some casual relationship with them, because we were, you know, together. It's a casual relationship, but I don't think I knew much about ei- either of them.

Q: Now, why is that you abandoned the half-tracks?

A: Why did what?

Q: Why did you abandon – why did –

A: The half-track?

Q: Yeah, why would they abandon them?

A: Because they were sitting targets. They're a v – a large enough vehicle, that you don't have to be that accurate with shellfire. And whereas with troops – first of all, troops have – have a way of separating, or getting into foxholes, and all that.

They're not quite tha-that kind of vulnera-vulnerability. But a half-track, sitting duck. It was a big enough vehicle to be a target, and – and they were hit –

Q: And a tank – and a tank has enough protection?

A: A tank has much, much more protection. We had no protection. We had no – no top. Tanks are – are – the armor is much, much thicker than we had, and they had protection on all sides. So, we didn't have any of that protection. And that was just – those things that we rode in, those half-tracks, they were just vehicles to move us faster. Otherwise, troops had to be moved by trucks, to get them up to s-speed, and part of – part of it was marching. But a good part of the time to get – get them up on bat – in – in the battlefield, was by truck. So, we had a lot of those trucks going. But yeah, we were too vulnerable, so we were the –

Q: Do you know where in **France** you were at this point?

A: No, I had no idea.

Q: Okay.

A: No idea. Didn't – I do remember that one of the battles that we fought, and I did see it on a map later on, was the Battle of hans – hi – **Han-sur-Nied**, h-a-n-s-u-r-n-i-e-d. It was the first real, big battle that we, the unit that I was with, faced. We had to cross the **Hans-sur-Nieds** river. The Germans – we had driven the Germans over that river.

Q: It sounds like a German, or a Belgian ka – or a Flemish kind of name, rather than a French one.

A: Yeah. Well, do – I don't even reca – we – we were in **France** yet, but I don't remember any more of it than that –

Q: Okay.

A: – just what it was called **[indecipherable]** and the river was named – what then – was named after the river. The Germans had just retreated over that river, and they were sitting up on a hill above, and zeroed in right on the spot. A – very, very easy to zero in on any troops, or any vehicles certainly, coming across. So we crossed – and I remember scuttlebutt among the troops was that we're going into a very dangerous battle. How we knew, or how they knew, I do – I don't know, but a very dangerous battle. We have to cross a river up there, and we think the odds of getting across are not very great. So here's my introduction really, to combat conditions. So we – we did go on – on foot. We crossed the river.

Q: Over a bridge?

A: There was a – a – it was a – a structured bridge, structured by probably the German troops, I don't – yeah, they had to be by the German troops, but as structured for hev – strong enough to carry vehicles across. So we crossed that bridge, facing enemy fire as we – as we did. And they retreated, we dro – drove

them back, and the battle was – was an accomplishment, and it was a je – the general – a famous general, Third Army. **Patton**. One – a great, great – a great – a victory for General **George Patton**, and the Sixth Armored Infantry Division, which was our operation. We were operating within the thir – his Third Army. But it was a – a – a victory. And then, obviously, we moved on from there.

Q: What was the weather like at that point?

A: I don't remember it very well. I don't think it was yet what we – it was probab – we were probably in November weather, October, November, as we fought. So it wasn't real cold yet. That was about to come, as we moved into December, and headed toward my next major battle. And that turned out to be the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: Okay, before we get there, as you're crossing the river, and the German army is retreating, were you involved in combat, or was it there was – there were m – soldiers and infantry in front of you who were engaging with them, and you were following behind?

A: No, I don't remember where I was positioned, but we were firing.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were firing on the enemy, and they were retreating. We moved through with a – with a heavier force, apparently, and because the bridge was built strong

enough, our tanks were able to get through, too. So, the Germans were being subjected to heavy fire.

Q: Okay.

A: I'm trying to piece this together as best as I can remember –

Q: It's okay.

A: – and a lot of it is very vague.

Q: I can imagine. I can imagine, yeah.

A: But – but I'm – I'm thi – thinking two things. One, that I remember precisely, the other I'm estimating what we must have been doing at – at the time, how we must have been fi-fighting then. They were retreating, so we must have been firing –

Q: Okay.

A: – a lot of heavy stuff at them – at them. So, that went on, and – and – and battles continued until December 16, 1944.

Q: And what happened then? What happened?

A: That was – that was the – the – the – the Germans have been driven back that far. This was their last major, major thrust. And that was to turn their – that was in their view, to turn the tide of battle against the allied forces. And our forces were arrayed

north and south along – alo – a long, long, long corridor, so to speak. And that was their major thrust.

Q: But you didn't know it at the time, did you?

A: Didna – didn't – had no idea what it was, and what it was going to be called. All we knew, that we were facing heavy, heavy artillery.

Q: And you were – were you in **Belgium**, or were you still in **France**? Where wer – where do you think you were?

A: I – I was in – in **Belgium**, very southern tip of **Belgium**, near **Bastogne**, in – near – right outside of **Marvie**, **m-a-r-v-i-e**, **Marvie**, **Belgium**, southeastern corner, just above **Germany**, just north of **Germany**. And so, heavy, heavy shellfire poured in on us. We were bogged down. The unit that I had – the – the company –

Q: Were you in a field, in a forest, in a town?

A: Lots of forests. It was – it was called – th-the battle itself, I had fought through two other major battles across **France**, this was my third battle. It was called the **Ardennes** campaign, because it was being fought in the **Ardennes** forest, heavily treed. And that was southeastern **Belgium**, and northwe – northeastern **Germany**.

Q: Northwestern, excuse me for correcting, but just for the future, northwestern **Germany**. Cause the east would be near **Poland**.

A: Oh yeah, yeah, oh of – oh, of – oh, of course. Of course northwestern **Germany**, of course.

Q: Yeah.

A: The surprise – and what – the – I – I – I – I – I was – I learned to believe, let's say, from what I read later on, that the Americans expected a major thrust, because the Germans could be driven just back – back just so far. And they had tremendous, heavy artillery. Their tank corps were probably superior to the American. And so I th – I believe that our top command expected that, but nevertheless, the – the magnitude of the attack was just overpowering. The company that I had trained with, the 106th infantry division, in the **U**.**S**., on that first day of battle, lost 75 percent of its troops, killed, wounded or captured, or missing. Seventy-five percent in one day. The word was that that division that I trained with – and I left early, to be shipped over as a replacement, they were not ready yet for combat. They were green. And you read the accounts of – of – of that unit, the 106th infantry division, and you realize how poorly prepared they were. They were scattered, they ran in all directions. Some of them shot their own men. They were just firing at anything they saw. They were such in – in that kind of disarray. And I hate to think about that with an American unit, particularly one that I trained with. But nevertheless, the Germans were well-equipped, well trained, well prepared, and they – they – and

then they – they drove in-into us. The report that I read later on, when I was reported missing in action, was that the unit I was with had been subjected to heavy enemy fire. And in the process, troops were scattered, and got lost. And thus, I was reported missing in action, because I was – I was not present, not account – accounted – I couldn't be accounted for.

Q: So, what happened to you?

A: Ah, that's – see, they didn't – they didn't have that – they didn't have that. All they knew was that I was – I was missing. When you tally up your troops afterward, you say, this guy's missing. They had no idea what happened to me. We had been fighting, the German attacked, and I was with the unit, I was on the line, I was fighting. We were face to face with the enemy, we were fi-fighting. And then I and others were – were ordered back behind the lines, because this had been going on for days, and I was weary. So yeah, they figured the troops need some rest, go back behind the lines, get some rest, get some food, and then you'll resume later on. So when I got behind – behind the lines, I was now with all allied forces, the ger – Germans were far removed, I heard somebody say, we need volunteers. We've lost radio contact. The Germans have apparently knocked out our radio contact with front line troops. So we have to establish where our – our lines are. We need vala – volunteers to do that. I was still 21, I think, so I was young, and adventurous. I'd

just begun to learn what war was about. But I also felt that it was a mission. Something moved me, and – and I said, yeah. So I'll vol – I'll volunteer. I saw a **Jeep** in the di – in the distance, and I said, I'll get that **Jeep**. And I signaled to five others, and they joined me. We said, we – we – we'll be a volunteer task force, we'll go as far as we can go, and see if we can identify where our lines are. High command cannot pri – plan strategy, unless they know where the lines are. So, that's what we started out to do. So, we're in this **Jeep**, it's now – the vision is not very clear, it's an overcast sky. I remember driving the **Jeep**, the roads are covered with i – snow and ice. We round a curve, and just about – maybe about 10 to 15 yards ahead of me, there's a German 88 millimeter cannon pointed right at the **Jeep**, right at us. And it's mounted on an 80 – on a – a – a German ta-tank. And so, you know, anybody pulled that trigger, we were gone. And I can talk, and I do talk man – many, many times, the number of times that you are exposed to killing, to being killed, and that was – that was one of them, and there were many, many others. So it's, you know, miracles take place, and you don't get killed. But that was one that they certainly – somebody should have pulled the trigger, and we would have been gone. They didn't. I jammed on the brakes, we skidded off the road. All of a sudden, fire from rifles – apparently mi – rifles and machine-guns, small arm fire, is pouring in from our right. And we – none of us were hit immediately. I – I say, we

have to – we have to defend ourselves yet. Have to find something, we can't do it from the **Jeep** here. We see a shack across the road, and I say, we move toward that shack. We did. One of the men had the perception to real-realize, we go near the machine-gun – some – somebody's firing a lot of – lot of ri-rifle fire at us, or machine-gun fire. So he too – he detached the one from the **Jeep**, and brought that with us. So we start racing for the shack. One of our men is hit and killed on the way over. We get to the shack, and the enemy fire is still pouring in. We have to set up the machine-gun, some way, to fire back. And so there's a big bay window in the shack. The man who took the machine-gun, I think it was him, he sets it up in the window, and he starts firing. Within maybe a minute or so, he's hit, and he's – he's killed. When I talk to student groups, I – I say sometimes people – un-understand, you do things under battlefield conditions, you do things you would not normally do, because you do it on your instinct. Something tells you that you have to take – you have to do something right now. So, my instinct, without thinking about the consequences, I was wide open, I would be killed just like the other man was, your instinct is a – is a – jump behind that gun. Which is what I did, and I started firing. And I fired the machine gun at everything I saw move. I hit some, probably killed a number of their men. And that went on – that had started early in the morning – that went on until late in the afternoon, we're running out of fire. We didn't – we had no

idea what we were against, at the time. I learned later on that there were at least a hundred – somewhere between a hundred and 200 si – over there, dug in, in foxholes. And we were – we started out with six of us, one was killed immediately, so there were five of us, fighting them, and for a good part of the day. That machine-gun really kept us going. When we ran low on ammunition, we had to devise some strategy, how do we get out of this? We had two wounded. There was another window, so two a – two of them were hit. I – I looked, and I saw a trap door in the floor of this shack, meaning there must be a cellar beneath. So the strategy was simply this; we had to make them believe that they killed us off, or that we – we – we took off toward our – our rank, toward our – our la – our American and our British lines. And so, I figure, we'll climb down into this cellar, and then when it's dark, under cover of darkness, we'll emerge. If we can take those two wounded, we will certainly do that, we certainly wanted to do that. And we – so that was the – that was the idea. We would infiltrate through their lines at night, under cover of darkness, we possibly could do that.

Q: So there were two of you who were not wounded yet?

A: Ah, well there were – we started out with six, five me – six, one was hit. So there were five of us. So there – there were two wounded, and three able-bodied. So we – that wa – that was the strategy, then we would come out and make our way back

through the lines. Because we had no ammunition, we absolutely ran out of a-ammunition. Of about – I – I don't know, it was about a half hour or so – no way to measure time, but I figured somewhere around there, I push open that trap door, maybe we could come out now, maybe it's dark now, and what I saw – and I always tell people when I – when I talk to them, there's some things in battle, in combat, or captivity, that you don't remember, that you block out, and some of them are blocked out of your mind. Either you don't ca – you don't remember them, or you don't want to remember them. Some that you have a vague re – recollection of, and others that remain visible to you, perhaps for the rest of your life, as this one does today. So as I stand before you now, I can tell you, I see that rim of black, automatic guns, all pointed down, right at my face. And behind each of those guns is a white-cloaked, camouflaged German soldier, holding that gun, trigger finger poised, ready to fire at any moment. **[doorbell]**

Q: Let's cut. **[break]** All right, so – so be-before the interruption, we're at a moment that is defining. You open up this trap door, and you see these gun barrels pointed at you, and behind them are these white, camouflaged soldiers.

A: Right.

Q: The enemy. What happened?

**Interview with Robert Max**
**July 14, 2015**

A: The – the view is still – still vivid, right here til – to – to this day, what are we, 70 years later, I can still see them there, stark as can be, in addition to all those – those guns, pointed right at me, the stark nature of the black against the white. And they motioned, come up. And so we come up, and we take the wounded up with us. What – for whatever reason, they – this German sergeant takes me aside, the others take the other Americans, and they're off. I never see them again, and the German sergeant is in charge of me now. And he's got a rifle barrel in my back, pushing me around. Usher him around the shack, to make sure there are no booby traps there, and then he pushes me, rifle in the back, across the road. This road, as I write about it, I call the moat. It was like a moat, it was – separated us, one from the other, and w-w-we were in our castle, that little shack, and the moat protecting us from the enemy. But we crossed the road, and just then – we get onto the other side, and just then, art – heavy artillery comes in. I never knew, and don't know to – to – today, whether it was British or American, but it's coming in. We had called for it early in the day, and now it just starts coming in. It's dusk, it's – nightfall is coming on, and these shells are landing. The German sergeant jumps into his bunker, his foxhole, and I motioned to come down. **Nein**, **nein**, he said, **nein**, **nein**, **nein**, **nein**, **nein**, **nein**. No, he would not let me come down. I need some shelter. I'm now being exposed – remember, it's the **Ardennes** forest, trees all around, and that's one of

the worst things you can have, because you get shell blasts when those things hit, and that – that pieces of hot metal come pouring down at you. All you need is a piece in the wrong place, and your –

Q: You're gone.

A: – you're dead.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that's the nature of things. I – I – I keep thinking of it so often – people remind me sometimes in talking, you had so many opportunities to die. That was another one. I mean, the fact that you weren't hit, with all these shells coming in, was amazing. Anyway, so the German is in his bunker, and the shellfire is coming in. I say to him, what are you going to do with me? I figure he doesn't – he speaks German. And he looks up at me, and he says, I have to kill you. In English. So here it is, the good fortune, you get a German who s – soldier who speaks English. So now, you can converse. I have to kill you. The assumption is that he will. He's going to turn his rifle on me, and he will shoot.

Q: And that's what he would have done, had he not been interrupted.

A: Chances are yes, because the order had been issued, high command. This is late in the war now, and they're not to take any more allied prisoners alive. They just can't cope with them. They have to deal with the enemy. So they just shoot them.

We're not going to house them, and feed them. So, not to be taken alive. My assumption was, he was going to pull his gun, and fire.

Q: I want to interrupt at one point, before we go on. Do you have any kind of thinking on why you were separated out? The four were taken by other guys, and why you were separated out?

A: I think was pure chance.

Q: Okay.

A: Just the way we were set up, the others were sort of together, and somebody just moved them away, and I was left with him. I think just chance.

Q: And do you think they were then shot?

A: I have no idea. I just don't know what happened to them. They might have been, because again, the order had been issued. They weren't – they just weren't taking any prisoners alive any more. They couldn't – couldn't afford to do that. So, that was it, and when he said, I – I have to kill you, I assumed he would turn his rifle on me, and I looked down the road. Now, it's – it's night, it's dark. There's a burning tank in a field nearby. And the ro – and that road we crossed over is lit up. Also at the side of the road, at their side, I see these bunkers, one after another. And I see two silhouettes on each bunker, one is a German helmet, and the other is a machine-gun. So I know, that as far as I could see, the – there were bunkers. I had been a

sprinter in school, and I just, very, very briefly thought, my gosh, all that running experience, if ever there was a time to use it, this is it. And I was gonna sprint dow – try to get out into the road and sprint down that road. Then I suddenly realized, you'd be shot out of the starting block. They had all these guns trained on you. I mean, there was no way you could es – you could escape. Behind me, if I tried to run there, there were guards there. There were other foxholes, so I – it was just no place to go. And so I – I se – I realized I had – the only option I had was conversation. But I'm talking to a German. And so, what he – and then I remembered, just a moment ago he said, I have to shoot you, this man speaks English. Maybe we can converse, and you know. So he says – he looks up at me – we pau – we paused for a while. I've given up the idea of running. He looks up and he says, why are you Americans here? This is not your war. I said, how – I said, you made it our war, how can you say that? Conversation goes on. The reason that I think this sequence would be so good on film, as opposed to just in print, you know, you have to see a relationship developing between this German soldier, and this American soldier. I'm his captive, he's supposed to shoot me, and he doesn't.

Q: What did he look like? Do you remember what he looked like?

A: The one thing I don't remember, because I kept seeing that helmet on the – he didn't look up all the time, like that. Sometimes he was looking straight ahead, and

we were talking. And I – I comment on that in my book, that while lying in the hospital and thinking of some of these events that occurred, I try to remember his face, and I can't, because again, I saw so little of it. Maybe his chin under that helmet, but not the whole face. And the conversation goes on. He reaches down into his pocket, and I figure he's got a pistol there. He's a noncommissioned officer, he's probably allowed to carry a pistol, he's going to shoot me with a pistol instead of the rifle. Instead, he pulls out a wallet. He opens the wallet, and then he turns it towards me, he shows me pictures of his wife and two children. And he says, next year, we will be in **New York City**. That was his plan. He foresaw it. He was a good Nazi, he believed that they were going to win the war, and he would – they'd go on vacation, and they'd take, of all places in the world, **New York City**. To them, it's like **Paris** is to us. And so, the conversation wears on, and we're talking. And I – I ke – I – I feel a change in attitude. This guy is not the – he's not the enemy an-any more. And I don't think he sees me as the enemy either. And we're talking. His English is more than good enough. I mean, I understand everything he is saying. And so, we converse. After a while – and as I say, attitude is changing, we're – we're not antagonists. The way we were –

Q: Are the shells still falling?

A: By this time, I think they had ceased. Yes, they had.

Q: So, he's in the foxhole, and you're on the ground above it.

A: I'm standing above him, looking down.

Q: So you're standing?

A: I'm standing. Oh yeah, I've – I was completely vulnerable while the shells were – were landing. Oh, I – I was standing all the time. I didn't get an invitation to sit at the edge of the foxhole and dangle my feet into it, nut – nut – you know, there was no – no invitation. I just – I stood all the time. But again, there's something changing in our relationship. And finally, he looks – he looks up at me, he says, for you, the war is over. And I assume he's going to turn his rifle on me, kill me. His next statement is, I'm going to send you to a prisoner of war camp. He knew, and he knew that I knew, in the **POW** camp, you don't have to fight any more, you get shelter, food, good treatment. They did – I'm quite certain – I – I – I – I – I – I know this, that they – they did follow the **Geneva** con – the rules of the **Geneva** convention, and if I did go back to a prisoner of war camp, that I would not have to fight any more. And that was his way of ex – of recognizing gallantry. And he said – he went on to say – he says, we had many more men than you, but you fought well. And as I said, how – I didn't think right at the moment, but later on when I – when I thought back about that, what gallantry. You know, here's a German soldier, my archenemy, and he's going to save my life, because he understood and

appreciated the way we fought against these extreme odds. And he said, you killed many of our men, but you fought well. And so he – he, in earnest, was about to save my life. He orders over two guards to take me away. As they do, there's – we're stopped along the way, and I can look – I can see by the things on the man's shoulder, or wherever they were, that he's an officer. And there's a German conversation that goes on. I don't know what the conversation is, but I soon recognize what it was. No, I'm not going to a prisoner of war camp, they don't take prisoners any more, I'm going to become a slave laborer. Because one of the things that they needed – and there were ma-many, a-as you well know, non-military men who are forced into slave labor. And slave labor in many of the camps, existed. Anyway, that's what I'm going to be.

Q: And how do you understand this?

A: What followed. I didn't understand what they were saying, but when I realized afterward, that no longer did I have those guards, somebody else took me, and pushed me – al-always I – did I – rifle barrel was in the back, kept pushing me with the rifle barrel, until suddenly, I'm confronted with a bunch of soldiers; I don't recognize the uniforms. As one of my friends, who's a historian told me, he a – he a – told me those were quite likely Russian troops, that had – then he describes how Russian troops would be in that area. And chances are they were, because they were

completely foreign uniforms. They were not German, they were not British, they were not American. And so I see all these uniforms, and others from different – obviously some other countries involved in there. And I'm pushed by rifle butt, and I – I fall to the ground. I see all these people around. I don't know what it's all about, I have no idea yet. So we – we sit there, we're sitting on snow, and finally, a rifle butt to the back again, up, and then the rife – he sort of motions up, up, and we're into a forced march. Before they did that, though, they stripped me of my winter coat, and the gloves. This is **Germany**'**s** coldest winter on record. The temperature during that period, I was told later, was between zero and five degrees **Fahrenheit**. The coldest on record. So now I'm going to go without any gloves, no winter garments, just a thin jacket. That's it as I go ahead, forced marched with these others.

Q: Did they ever find identity papers on you? Did you have identity papers, did you have –

A: All I had on me was my dog-tags that had a **J**. Some had a **J**, some had an **H**. I had a **J**. I had two other things on me. One was a **Mogen David**, a Star of **David**, a Jewish symbol, and the other was a miniature **mezuzah**, what we Jews put on our doorposts. I wore them with my dog-tags. I was 21, and I was defiant. There was no way in the world that I was going to remove those. I was told, though I didn't see it,

but I was told that some destroyed their dog-tags, because they didn't want to be identified as Jews. But, I – I – I – I stuck steadfast to that, and I wore them. I didn't – I – I – I – I didn't know what I – what I was getting into at this point, and nobody was talking in English, so I had no idea where – where we were going, what we were going to do.

Q: Did they know you were Jewish?

A: Not at that time, beca – remember this, they have – each – each of these soldiers has a responsibility. Theirs was not ideology, theirs was not to eradicate all the Jews in the world. Theirs was to get work done. That work was rebuilding their railroads, bombed by allied planes. That was the only mission they had. So – but I didn't – I did not know that. I did not know what we were going to be doing, what I wa – I didn't know what I was. I just knew that I was – I was thrust into something with a bunch of other men. I was nameless, numberless. I was just a body, working hands, and that's what I would be. And only later did I learn that I was there for slave labor, and whether I lived or died, made no difference to them whatsoever.

Q: How did you learn that you were there for slave labor? What told you that?

A: Well, later on, when I saw what we were doing.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, it's ti – I don't know this yet.

Q: Okay.

A: And we're being force marched. Darkness descends. When they took off my gloves and coat, I assumed that they were going to – I was a prisoner, I was their prisoner, I was going to go to a barracks someplace, and I'd have shelter. That wasn't on – on their minds, at all. So when darkness fell, they motioned, down, down, and pushed some of us down on the ground. On the ground. We're on a road. Off to the side they push us, and say – I don't remember what they said, but it was obvious we were going to lie there, and that's where we were going to sleep. The roads were covered, most of the time, with snow, or ice. Sometimes they're just dark, dirty – you know, dirt, you know, but most of the time was snow or ice. And they had guards patrolling. That's where you spent the night. For the next 80 some odd, out of 90 nights, that's where I slept, without a coat, with no gloves, hands – hands tucked in here, to try to keep warm. Toes moving constantly. Toes and fingers cons – constant movement. Otherwise, they would have frozen. Which they did later anyway, I had frostbite. But this is one of the remarkable things that happened during that period. Desperate, you're freezing, almost freezing to death, really, because much more of that, and I would have. The only thing that could sustain me, was mental or emotional. And what I thought of was food. And one thing you never really want to think about when you're starving – I think everybody

would s – would s – would re – remember that, you don't think about food. But that helped to sustain me. It's not only physical pain, but emotional pain that I was going through. And so, if I could draw some kind of an emotion, that would give me some hope for the future, maybe that would help to see me through whatever this is that I'm – I'm getting in-into.

Q: What did they feed you?

A: What did they feed – feed me?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Crusts of dark brown bread. That was the standard. And that – most days – I'm not sure if we got that every day, but that was – that was the food. There were two camps we passed through. Labor camps, not prisoner of war camps, but labor camps. E-Even that would have been better than what we had. Cause I had the maximum of exposure you could. But in the – in these camps, we – which we just passed through, only spent the day going through them, I remember in jeros – in **Prum**, **p-r-u-m**, **Germany**, a labor camp, we were given six, one inch in diameter crackers, sort of dry cracker, and that was it for the day. We went on marching. We got to **Gerolstein** in **Germany**, and there they gave us a can – and I don't mean a canteen, the way the military has, but a ti – old – like an old, tin **Campbell's** soup can. And old tin can, and in it was some hot water. There was a little piece of potato

at the bottom, that was the flavoring. So that was called soup. And we drank that hot water, that was it for the day. I don't have to make any more clear than that how our – how our nutritional needs were not being met, and malnutrition set in rapidly, and you could feel it happening. But that essentially is – is the – is the amount of food that we had.

Q: How does one feel malnutrition? **[technical interruption]** How does one feel malnutrition set in? What happens?

A: You know –

Q: What happened to you?

A: Consciously, you know, of course, that you're not being fed adequately. And just from logical standpoint, you begin to say that, you know, you – you – this can't go on too long. So intellectually, you realize that something is going to be happening to your body. Then you start to feel weakness. The marches are more difficult, they're getting more and more difficult. You feel pain in your stomach, cause there's nothing to fill it, and that radiates through your body. So y-y-you – you know that there're physical aspects taking shape now, and you know – I mean, I – I knew that bodies do deteriorate if you don't get – you know, I was brought up as a child, eat your cereals, eat your vegetables, and so forth. You have to, to build your bodies. So I knew I wasn't getting any of that, so my body had to deteriorate. After a while

– that – that takes a lot of days, and maybe weeks before you really see it. And I could feel my shoulders, they were very boney, and my arms were starting to lose some of the flesh that they had. And so I began to realize that, yeah, there was some kind of deterioration going on here. But weakness probably was the greatest recognition that I had, that something was happening to the body. Then, as we were being force marched, sometimes from location to location, when we worked on railroads, people were dropping out along the way. And I realized that they were dropping out from weakness, from the malnutrition. Must be – must be a – a chemical **[indecipherable]** condition, whatever it was. But they were –

Q: They were starving.

A: – they were dropping along the way. Dropping out was not a good thing, because you were no longer useful as a slave laborer, and so either – in some cases – why they made the decision, I don't know, but in some cases, they left the man there to die. In other cases, they shot the man. Yeah.

Q: Did you see these things?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did you see those things?

A: I saw them. One of the – be-before I leave the subject altogether, I just want to go back to that period of sleeping at night, and the food. And I thought about food.

It sustained me emotionally, to be able to go on. Why? Because I figure someday I'm going to get out of this, I d – I don't know how, but someday I will – I will – this will be over, and tho – and the wonderful foods – when you're starving, you think about food. And I said, I ca – those wonderful foods, the things that my mother used to make, things we got in the pizza parlor. You know, all – all the wonderful thing, someday I'm going to have that again. And that emotionally helped to carry – carry me. So rather than – rather than drop out and die on th – on – on li – lying there, I was able to sustain myself with the belief that someday I would have access to those foods. Months later, when I was hospitalized, I asked a nurse to bring me a little book – booklet of some sort that I could write on, I recorded that. I have that here.

Q: Oh wow.

A: It's – I call it my little brown book. I recorded 84 foods. They're in that book, if you want to see later, it's r – it's right in an envelope over there.

Q: We'll – we'll take a look and we'll film it. That'll be great.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: I have that book, along with the dog-tags with the Jewish emblems on them. I ha – have those here. So, might be nice to do that. But those – so I remembered the 84 foods, and that did, emotionally, it helped to sustain me.

Q: I also – I'm sorry that I'm interrupting, but I also have another question. You had said that your basic training in **Alabama**, in a hundred degree-plus heat –

A: Right.

Q: – prepared you. Yet, when you were under the strain and you were in – captured, you were at minus something Fahrenheit temperature. What about the basic training, then, was transferable from one climate to the other?

A: It wasn't the climate, but it was the bo – the strengthening of body.

Q: Okay.

A: They built our bodies, as I told – the exercise drills, were ve – were reasonably extreme. And so, I was probably in the best condition of my life, physi-physically. So that's all. But wha-wha – what's – what's odd about that is that I went from the extremes in temperature in basic training, from a hundred –

Q: Right.

A: – down to zero, you know.

Q: That's right.

A: And that was – that was a gr – a great, great vari-variation. So these forced marches went on. We stopped along the way, to work on the railroads, but to work on the railroads, we had to move railroad tracks, long, heavy railroad tracks, one area to another. If their sup – to keep their supply line going to their troops, they had to maintain the railroads. And so, we had to get tracks, sometimes from one abandoned railroad, to another that was in service, and needed. Mostly at night, we were forced marched again, we had to carry those railroad tracks on our shoulders. Now, this is when I knew they – they became boney, because ri – they hurt. We would carry them sometime, from one town to another, many miles. And I would have one on my shoulder, and somebody in front would have ano – have the other end of it on his shoulder. So we had to carry those railroad tracks, town to town.

Q: Did you ever speak with any of the other prisoners?

A: Speech was not allowed, conversation was not allowed. If you – if they caught you talking, they turned their gun on you. I don't remember seeing anybody shot, because we maintained the code of silence pretty well, I don't remember seeing. But I have no doubt that if they – we were caught, we would have. What we did do though, is to – when we could, when we saw there were no guards right around, who could see it, we would exchange the sabotage work that we did on the railroads. This was, again, youth, my youth, that I was yo – figures they're not

going to do this to me, I'm not going to build anything that they can use. And the others had similar attitudes. So, when we were required to build the railroads, these – these tracks, put them together, we didn't always line them up well. We didn't put the pins in where they should. And that was with – with some pride, that we did that. So, when we had the opportunity to exchange something, he – thi-this guy would tell me what he did, and I would tell him, with delight, that I didn't put those pins in there. And we – we felt we were – we were giving it back to the Germans. So that – that continued, more and more star – started to decline in health. I have – can I show that shoe? It figured so –

Q: Can – can we cut for just a second? **[break]** Okay, okay, so we're rolling. So tell me, what about – what is this shoe?

A: Symbolic of the torture – the torturous mind, that I also had – had to live with – physical torture, yes, but the mental, sometimes was even worse. I contracted frostbite, particularly in my right foot.

Q: Okay.

A: And as we marched on and on, it became more and more painful. My foot was now exceeding the size of the shoe. And I wanted to scre – yell out, the pain was that great. I didn't dare, cause had I done that, I probably would have either been pushed aside and left to die, or prob – quite possibly would have been shot.

Q: Is this the shoe you wore?

A: No, but this is exactly like the shoe. This – this is a shoe that I wore when I left later on, I left the hospital, I was just – once I discharged. This was my discharged shoe.

Q: I see.

A: How it became torn, I don't know, but it's very, very representative of the shoe that I wore, which was – had been battered around quite a bit.

Q: Okay.

A: So, I –

Q: What does it mean to you, the shoe?

A: It says to me that – it reminds me of what I went through, reminds me of the struggle that I had, and the struggle that I was able to survive, because this – the – the – the emotional stress that this gave me, was as bad as the physical. To make the decision. I'm being force-marched, I can't drop out. If I do, may be my death. So what do I do? The pain is so incredibly great. I – I – I – I've gotta get this shoe off my foot. Fortunately, there comes a break.

Q: Now we can focus back on him. Did you bre – **[break]** – and you were say –

A: Fortunately, we're stopped along the way, and we're forced to sit down on the side of the road, fortuitous as could be, because I could not have gone any long –

any – any longer. And so I made the decision. That was the emotional tug, do you take a chance of – of dropping out along the side and trying to get that shoe off? If they see you, you're shot. Do you do that, or do you continue, and try to stick it out? Take the pain, as bad as it is? And then comes this break, that we're stopped, and I can now take my shoe off. I take it off, I don't want them to see it, so I throw it over a hedge, or some kind of a bush. The only winter garment I have is a scarf. I take the scarf from around my neck, and I wrap it around the foot. So I have one shoe and one scarf, and that's the way I conduct myself the rest of the time that I was a prisoner.

Q: So you walked on a scarf?

A: I walked on a scarf, on snow and ice. Periodically, we got some sunshine, and some of the snow would melt, so that became wet. It didn't help the swelling in the foot, but at least there was expansion that I didn't get from the shoe, so I could survive the pain. And so, that went on and on.

Q: Did they find out that you were Jewish?

A: No.

Q: They never did, huh?

A: No. Again, defiance, that I'm – I'm going to – I – I will do it. If they had ever interrogated me, I would have – I would probably have been required to show my dog tags, at which time the others, that were attached to them –

Q: Sure.

A: – would have – would have shown. So I had no reservation in that, but once you become a slave laborer, you're not – you're not anything. You're not registered, and they don't care about your dog – dog tags, they don't care what you are, you just work, or you die. That's just as si-simple as that. So ha-had they insisted I – I – I identify myself, of course I would have. But the fact that I didn't, what it would have meant, would I be – have sacrificed my life? I don't know. Would I have been sent? Chances are I might have gone to a slave labor camp. Chances are **[indecipherable]** something like **Berga**, where so many of the Jewish soldiers were sent.

Q: Jewish American, yeah.

A: But that would have been – that would have been a lifesaver. As bad as the treatment was, the treat – treatment at **Berga** was harsh, terribly harsh. And – but yet, I would not have been subjected to the exposure that I – that I was. So that might have happened.

Q: So, in this time – **[break]** Okay. So, during these 88 days, is that how many you were sleeping on the ground?

A: I – I'll explain. There were 90 days altogether. I'll explain where the other six days – other 10 days come in. And just – I was just about to get to that.

Q: What was my question, oh my. In this time, you had neither a name, nor a number –

A: Right.

Q: – nor anything that – no – you were anonymous to your captors.

A: Anonymous, I was – I was not a human being.

Q: Mm-hm. How did they – did they yell at people, did they kick them, did they – how did they behave?

A: **Raus**, **raus**, **gemma**(ph), **gemma**(ph), **gemma**(ph). Yes, there were shouts in German. We got to know what they – what they meant. And usually the ri – the rifle p – the point of the rifle usually was the indication of what we were supposed to do. Go this way, go that way, get up, up, down, down. They used that most often, but there were a few German expressions that they use, and we got to know what they meant.

Q: So **raus** means get up, get out.

A: **Raus**, **raus**, get up, mm-hm.

Q: Okay. And –

A: **Gemma**, **gemma**, **gemma**, I don't know what th – what – what in the world that meant. I don't know, but they used to yell it an awful lot. And I guess, maybe get regimented, get in line, get wa – wa – whatever it was. But I just did whatever the others did, and wa – and that's the **[indecipherable]** if that's the **[indecipherable]** what they wanted, fine.

Q: Were there any – did you ever find out whether there were any other Americans in this particular colon – colony, or column of slave laborers?

A: I am quite certain there were other Americans. There was no buddy-buddy system.

Q: No.

A: I knew mi – I knew so many different troops, I don't know any of them. I – I – I – I – we – we – we – there was not even a buddy system, because you were constantly living to survive for yourself. And I was about to get to that now –

Q: Okay, fine.

A: – the next – the next stage. Now the tide of battle turned. The allied forces had regrouped, they were driving the Germans back. They had to move us faster. They – boxcars. Those same boxcars that transported Jews and others to the concentration camps, that was where – that was our destiny.

Q: Okay, go ahead.

A: There's one thing I wa – wanted to mention too, that I didn't, that made travel during these forced marches, more difficult. Most of the marches were at night. The railroad tracks were carried at night. Some of them were in the daytime. When they were, often, we were fired upon by allied aircraft. From 10,000 feet in the air, you can't distinguish the s – the soldiers marching, are they British, American, or German uniform? You can't tell from the air. And they would fire on us.

Q: Did they ever hit?

A: Huh? Oh yeah, yeah, they hit some. Some were killed. And that was very, very difficult to take. Even worse – well, I shouldn't say even worse, but also, emotionally, what really hit me so much, and maybe the others, the physical aspect, of course, the danger of being sh-shot and killed was bad enough. But when I saw those planes finish their run – and mind you, I knew something about the air force, because we all – I and those who were with me at the time, wanted to become pilots. And I s – they swooped down, and they – they did their firing. When their run was over, when they be – they proceeded ahead of the train, then I saw them make the big U-turn, I knew they were heading back to their base in **England**. There were officers in those planes, and I knew they were going to the officers' clubs. And what were they going to do? They were going to get a nice, comfortable

couch, warm room, cocktail, food, cigar. Nice, nice life. The frustration in realizing what they were going to, and we had – I had – had no future at that time. I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't know if I would be alive, dead, escaped, whatever. Didn't know. So that was terribly frustrating, emotionally. It tore at me in some respects, even more than the physical aspect of it. So now, we've co – we're continuing, we're working on these railroads, or sabotaging them, and the tide of battle does turn. We're now forced into these cattle cars. All it has, one big sliding door, no windows, no lights. And we're pushed in – they're called 40 and eights. Eight horses can fit in, 40 humans. We were about 80. We were packed in, bodies stacked against body. And I knew – some people used to criticize me, on something so cliché, you said you were packed in like sardines? Well, it's a – it's a – it's just probably the be – most apt description I can give, because just the way they l-lay, one over another. That's the way we were stacked. And there was no room to sit. Once a day, that door would slide open, and they would throw in some crusts of bread. By this time, we're all quite weak. It – we couldn't attack one another with enough strength to harm, or certainly to kill one another, but we had be – we did become a – a – a pack of of animals. We clo – we crawled and clawed our way to those scraps of bread. As soon as a man got a scrap in his hand, he thrust it into his mouth; the hunger was fierce. The – we had no – no bathroom facilities, we used

our helmets. You can guess what the atmosphere was like in that car, 80 humans. Some started to die, some did die in the car. Some wou – became mentally deranged. Were they out of their minds? I don't know. But they certainly were – had no mental stability. And that's what we lived with for six days and nights.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: So when I say this kind of slave labor is distinguished from any kind of treatment in captivity, in probably – in possibly any war. Finally, on the end of the six days, that big door is swung open. They pull us out, and now it's a forced march. I only have one shoe, and I can't endure another march, certainly on snow and ice. I have to make a decision. I always knew that one option was escape, if a time or situation presented itself. And I said, this is it. We were being – we were put in – in lines for forced march. I looked and saw where the guards were positioned, here, here, so forth. It occurred to me that if we came to a curve in the road, there would be maybe five to 10 seconds where we would be – not be vi – we, where we were situated, would not be visible to a guard. There were two others near me. I don't recall that I had any particular connection with them at all, but they were the nearest to me. And so I told them what I had whispered the – watch, and they made sure the guards don't see, and I would call them, when I give a nod, like this. And we got to that position, when the guards were separated that far, I gave a nod, and

the three of us threw a – threw a – there was a – a hedge, some – something – some growth of some sort, we threw ourselves over it, and just lay there. I think the troops behind us, recognizing what we did, used discretion, and said, I should clo – we should close up. They closed ranks, I think. I'm not sure of that. But the fact that we were not detected, that there were no soldiers out searching for us, suggested to me that maybe that's what happened. And that saved us. So they marched on by, and they were gone. We had gone through a town while we were on the train, not too long ago. And we could see through the cracks, there was something there, it was a some – something, it was not just the treed areas that we had been through, so it was probably a village of some sort.

Q: So, the train, when you were packed in like sardines, was moving. The cattle car was moving during those six days?

A: When – when we were – at which point?

Q: When you're packed into the cattle car –

A: Yeah.

Q: – like sardines, you're not stationary for six days –

A: Oh, no, no, no, the car –

Q: – it's moving.

A: – oh, it's moving.

Q: It's moving, okay.

A: Mm-hm. Oh, it's moving all – all of – most of that time. So we – we then decide to go back into this town, it's not far away. The other two are able to walk. I was on twos and fours, the foot, I couldn't move fast enough on foot, so sometimes on fours, and sometimes on all fo – all fo – four – fours, my – just my feet. We crawl into this town, and as we – we're coming down a hill. I have a picture of it, on back behind the screen, I have a picture of that town. I never went back. I kick myself many – many, many times for not having gone back, and you'll hear in a moment why I wanted to go back there. But somehow, the story of what I went through, got out someplace, and in the mail I got two photos of this town, of wise – ri – **Reichenbach**.

Q: **Reichenbach**.

A: Right, **r-e-i-c-h-e-n-b-a-c-h**, **Reichenbach**. I get photos, tourist photos of these towns, from – I don't know where they came from, somebody, somebody sent them to me. And I look at it and try to envision where it was we were – I remember we crawled down a hill. We get to the bottom of it, and I hear familiar sounds. The kind of sounds I heard on the battlefield, tanks, vehicles, moving. We get closer and then I see German tanks. I see soldiers all around. We had escaped into a Nazi staging area.

Q: Oh, good God.

A: If s – if sighted, we would be shot.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was the order, no prisoners to be taken alive. And so we had to crawl through back alleys. We – we did that. We're now at the edge of an alley, there's a big open area, and in the distance, there's some houses. Simple houses. One house just catched my attention, it's painted white. And I say to these other two, that's a safe house. They look at me. How do you know it's a safe house? I don't know how I know, but I know. So they s – no other choice, all right, we'll go along. We wait until we see no – no soldiers nearby, and we crawl as fast as we c – we – they ran, I crawled as fast as I could, out to the door of that house. We needed some kind of shelter, it's still cold. Needed some food. Knock on the door, and a young man, probably in his early teens, comes to the door. He takes one look at me, you know, I'm – I'm – I'm filthy, beard, hair is shaved, I – I contracted lice. And one other element that we had to fight, lice had covered – covered my body, and many of the men had that.

Q: Even in those cold temperatures.

A: Even in those temperatures, lice on our bodies. But so my head was shaved. So I had bristles, I just – just – dirty face, and just torn, the clothes were torn. And he

doesn't know what to do. Looks at us. And I try to explain who we are, I don't think he knew. He starts to close the door. I have one good foot and shoe, I stick the left foot in the door. And then I hear voices from the rear. They sound like elderly people. And he motioned for them to come to the door. They do, and it is this elderly couple. I notice the man takes a look on the jacket, I have a **U**.**S**. emblem, and he looks at it, and there's a – a smile on his face. I say, what – what – what – what's he smiling about? We're desperate here, and he's smiling at us. He comes walking out to the porch, to look up and down, to see if there are any soldiers. He then takes us – he then motions – he sees no soldiers – if they're captured – i-if – if – if – if the g – if the German soldiers come by, and we were in their house with them, not only would we be shot, they would be shot as traitors. In all likelihood, that's what would happen. So he has to look out and see if there are any soldiers. None there. Motions for us to come in, and his wife joins us. She sees our condition, and almost without saying anything, she goes, I guess, to the kitchen, and she comes out with three ladles of so – ladles and some – some kind of cups of some sort, of hot soup, with a piece of meat in it. Perception on her part, she sees the condition, and she recognizes, more than anything. To us, just seeing a living quarters, it was so startling. I re – I remember just – just standing there, even before taking the food, and just looking. There were curtains, drapes, carpeting, furniture, lamps. We

hadn't seen that in a long time, we were living just in the outdoors alone. So that was striking. But then, the food was so delect – just absolutely delectable. I – normally when you're hungry, you – you gulp it down. But I – I savored it, just the taste of food, was so great. After they fed us, we talked for a little bit. Amazingly, they spoke reasonable English. Why did they want to save us? Some years earlier, this couple had traveled to **America**. They spent time in **Pittsburgh**, **Pennsylvania**. Their experience with Americans, and **America**, was so good, when he saw that emblem, that's what made him smile. And that's what probably – probably got them to take the risk of bringing us into their home, and take – and take – you know, and feeding us. After that experience, they then knew that they couldn't keep us there. They got a piece of paper, and they drew a map, showing us alleyways to go through. We could hear shellfire, not – not small arms fire yet, but we knew we were fairly close to allied lines. And they knew too, that the allies were near. So, if they could get us to a safe place, they thought that in a few days, the way the allies were moving, from reports they had, I guess, heard, or whatever, we would be rescued.

Q: The two were – who were with you, were American, or not?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Oh, so you were three Americans.

A: They were two – there were – there were three americ – three American boys, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So, they drew a map, and we followed that map, crawled through back alleys, to – to a barn. We craw – got into that barn, we pulled ourselves up into a hayloft. I don't remember how long we were there, two days, three days, just don't remember, no sense of time. But I do remember – I think it was a – the first morning, I heard some scurrying down below. I separated the hay and looked through a crack. I saw a scene that is as clear today as that – as that scene I mentioned earlier, of the Germans standing over us with the guns. That is so clear. I see a stool, I see a cow, and I see sitting on that stool, it must have been a German soldier. Now, he had his top of his uniform off, and I could see that long, white underwear, extending out of his black pants. Underwear, and black suspenders stretched over the underwear, and then the big, black boots he was wearing. And he's milking a cow. I stirred a little bit, and some hay falls through the crack. This is – this is like a mo – a movie, you know, because – an-and I have to w – I watch, I'm almo – almost breathless, waiting to see where that – if it lands in front of him, that hay, he – he – he is likely – all likelihood, he is going to know there's something up there, and whatever the consequences might be. Might he shoot, might he summon

troops? Whatever it would be, it probably would not be good for us. Because again, no prisoners taken alive. We were obviously Americans. But it **[indecipherable]** behind him. So, it's of no real consequence, but I have that image of him. Must have been a day or so later, we're lying in that hay, and again, aware that we're not far from the allied troops, I'm looking down an alleyway, through – must have been, you know, maybe it's a knothole, but I s – I can see down there to – down there. At the end of that alleyway, something goes by – someone goes by, and he's wearing a helmet. Could be a German soldier, but then again, that helmet looks familiar. It looks like our helmet. I'm not sure, and I wait, and I tell them. They – they – they don't know whether to believe me, I said, I think the American are here. You – you're delirious. You're delirious, then – they couldn't be, we're not that close yet. A few minutes later, a vehicle rolls by, and I see – **[phone ringing]**

**[break]**

Q: Okay, so you think that it's the American army troops that you see through that little peephole –

A: I see –

Q: – your guys don't.

A: I don't – I'm not sure yet. I see that helmet, it looks familiar, it looks like my helmet.

Q: Yeah.

A: I think it might well be. And they think I'm delusional, because they couldn't be that close yet. A few minutes later, I see a vehicle go by, and it looks like a **Jeep**. Not only is it a **Jeep**, I see that white star on the hood. That's an American **Jeep**. Yes, they are here. This time, they believe me. I say – we roll out of that hayloft, we literally roll, we're so weak at this time, and I'm almost deli – delirious. We're so – you know, we – the condition we were in. And I remember just rolling down that alleyway, and there, American soldiers, Third Armored Infantry division.

Q: Excuse me.

A: I don't even hear it. Fortunately, I don't. But the Third Armored Infantry division, again, **Patton's** Third Army, the – we were the first Americans they had come across. They couldn't treat us with enough kindness. They tried to feed us. The first thing they thought of – they were obviously not nutritionists, was chocolate. Bad, very bad. And then, any food they could get into us, they did. I – I – as I say, I was in very bad shape by then, I was mildly delirious. I couldn't – I couldn't carry on a conversation with them. As I think I mentioned, we were the first Americans that they came across, so they treated us as well as they could.

Q: Okay, I'm interrupting at this point. I don't need to go into many graphic details, but it's an unanswered question. When you say the chocolate was bad, what was bad about the chocolate?

A: The sweetness of it, it just – we reacted, the stomach somehow, whatever the system is, that does whatever it does with your food after you've eaten it, it just didn't take to chocolate very well. It – I think the fact that it was rich, instead of just plain, ordinary taste, probably a leafy vegetable would have been easier to take. But that made – the other two, I think, were sick, I was just delirious –

Q: Okay.

A: – so I don't remember what happened. But, the troops almost cradled us in their arms, because again, you know, we were almost out of – out of it.

Q: You weren't able to tell them your story, at this point.

A: I couldn't – I couldn't – I couldn't talk, I – I couldn't – I didn't want to tell them anything, I was just, again, semi-delirious, and just hung there. They saw the – the right foot, with the –

Q: Scarf.

A: – rag wrapped around it, and they knew there was something wrong there. They rushed me to a field hospital. It was a hospital very similar to, those who have seen the **TV** show and the movie, "**M*A*S*H**." Field set-up, doctors work – working

under very, very difficult conditions, but providing great, great service to men wounded on the battlefield. So, I don't remember where the operation took place, whether it was in the field hospital – because my mind went blank. I did learn afterward, that from that field hospital, I was sent to the first general hospital in **Liege**, **Belgium**. And from there, transferred to the first general hospital in **Paris**, **France**. I don't remember any of that, at all, because as I say, I was delirious by that time. I don't remember where the surgery was done on my foot, whether it was in **Liege**, **Belgium**, or in the field hospital. But they did, they had to cut away. The foot – bottom of the foot was all black, and it would have continued on up my leg, and I probably would have lost part of the leg. So the timing was just right, and they – they caught it, but then I spent as – I'd say, a month – a month to a month and a half, in the hospitals in – in **Europe**.

Q: So, you lost a part of your foot?

A: Yeah, the flesh of the foot, oh, it was – it was bandaged for a long while, and the flesh had to grow back.

Q: So you didn't lose toes?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did you lose toes?

A: I didn't lose any toes, no, no. But as I say, much later than that, I'm quite certain I would have lost –

Q: Yeah, of course.

A: – some part of my foot.

Q: Of course. Gangrene sets in.

A: Gangrene, it would have set in.

Q: Yeah.

A: I had both frostbite and trench foot, and the combination is wicked, because trench foot, you know, that's wet, and then frostbite freezes it, so an awf-awful combination to go through. But, in this ho – in the hospital, in – in **Paris** – as I say, I was there for about a month, they couldn't get my fever down. In one of the ex – one of the times when we were in these forced marches, when I was a slave laborer, twice during that time, at night, instead of sleeping – when I say 80 out of 90 nights, six of them were in the –

Q: Right.

A: – car, the train –

Q: Right.

A: – and the other two, I don't remember other two. I came, maybe it was 82 out of 90. But two nights we did sleep in – in barns. And in one of the barns was a cow,

wa – one man who came to be my friend, my buddy, long after the war – we correspond every Christmas, we send greeting cards to each other, and **Myron** would send me – **Myron Berringer**(ph), a farmer from **Rushville**, **Indiana**. On that card he would always say the same thing, year after year after year, things sure aren't like they used to be. And all of that. **Myron** called me over, lie down **[indecipherable]** under the cow, under the udder of the cow. He milked directly into my mouth –

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: – from that cow. So, along with 20 other diseases I contracted – out of that little brown book that I mentioned before, where it has the 84 foods?

Q: Right.

A: I have about 20 diseases, illnesses, fevers that I contracted during the 10 months of hospitalization. One of them was undulant fever. Now we didn't – in the hospital in **France**, in **Paris**, they didn't know what it was, but I had a raging fever. It was caused by that incident with the cow, it was undulant fever. No doctor, no military doctor was able to discover what it was. That kept me from going – getting back to **America**, because they couldn't – they were going to fly me, which they did, I – I flew in a hospital plane. They wouldn't do that until they got the fever down, and they couldn't get it down. Finally, they did force it down enough to get me on a

plane and over to **America**. Years l – years later, I – I – I finished college, I'm working now, and I broke out in a sweat. Like the body just opened, water just poured out, and these little red dots all over. The doctor called it petechiae, and this was a result of that incident. How was it discovered? The doctor that I – I had that night, was substituting for another doctor. He was young, he was an intern, and he immediately saw – thought that I had a contagious disease. And I was – and he ordered an ambulance, they took me immediately, that night, from home, to i – **Belleville**, **New Jersey**, to a – a hospital where children with polio were. It was an isolation hospital. And I was put on the isolation floor, with these children. I was there a full month. My wife **Shirley** could only see me during that month, through glass. I was isolated because he thought that I had this contagious disease.

Q: Did you?

A: No. No. Fortunately, the doctor in that isolation hospital was very thorough, and very smart. He said, you have this raging fever, and you're going to continue to get these attacks. We have to find out what you have. We – so he says, I'm going to ask you a lot of questions. And he was so thorough. He took me through the whole campaign.

Q: Did he really?

A: It turned out that he traced it back to that incident in the barn. He said, I believe that you have something that's called – well, whatever feve – I'll think – I'll think of it in a – in a few moments. But you have that disease. Now, it's a **Mediterranean** disease. But, I said, I wasn't in the **Mediterranean**. He said, but it also – this was a very intelligent doctor – it also can be contracted from unpasteurized milk. And that is the disease you have, and we can treat that with certain such medication. He did, and he cured me of it.

Q: And you've never had it since.

A: Never had – never had an attack again. The – I just can't think of it.

Q: So, you were – you had the operation at one of those three hospitals that you mentioned to me?

A: Yes.

Q: The – one thing that I wanted to ask you is that you mentioned earlier, your brother **Lester** figured in some way in your story here, in your experience here.

A: Yes.

Q: He himself was in the European theater.

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me, how did that happen? What was that – what was that connection?

A: Okay. When I – in the ba – in the bulge, when I was captured, I was reported as missing in action. Standard procedure, a telegram from the War Department to my parents. And months go by, these three months go by, and there's no word. I learned later on that my mother had a nervous breakdown, because the assumption was, if he's missing in action, after two month – two months **[indecipherable]** and there's no word, he must be dead. So that was the – the a-assumption. There's a man in charge of communications, another soldier, an American soldier in charge of communications for another unit, perhaps another – probably another di – I think another division, and a company within that division, he's the communications person. When the report went out that I was missing in action, he learned of that. He started to send communication to other units in the area, have they come across a **Robert Max**?

Q: **Robert Max**.

A: They come – no word. When I finally do get back to allied lines, there's a report – oh, how did I get back to – I di – I did not comment on how I got back to i – our a-allied lines. Oh, the escape, and then the – the troops and all, so – so when I did get back, I'm not sure which hospital it was, but it was reported; **Robert Max**, social se – number a – army speciali – the number of my – my – my –

Q: Dog tag number.

A: Yes. Was alive. Word was sent to this person via the interconnection of radio – radio contact with troops through that area, he got word that I was alive. I have the original letter now, right behind me, that he wrote to my parents –

Q: **Lester** did.

A: You can guess – it was my brother, my eight year older brother **Lester**, who had followed my route as a slave laborer, maintained the contact, so that when I did show up in a hospital, reported alive, he was among the very, very first to get that information. And he sat up that night until he couldn't think any more, and wrote to my parents. And I have the original of that letter.

Q: That's amazing.

A: The – the – the odds of something like that happening, the first man to learn that you were alive, happened to be your own brother. With millions of troops –

Q: That's right.

A: – in the area.

Q: So, he was a communications officer? Is that –

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: He – he was a sergeant, he was in charge of communications for his unit.

Q: Okay.

A: As all communications flowed through him. And strangely enough, the thing that got me captured, was trying to find a break in our communications lines. And, you know, and he's in another unit, apparently not far – not far away, and he's in charge of communications. But it turns out, the one who cared for me as a child now, is the first to – to have pursued the search, and then to learn that his brother is alive.

Q: That must have been some letter.

A: Well, it's a beautiful letter. I have it, if you want to read it.

Q: I would.

A: You c – you can.

Q: I would like you to read it.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Af-After we finish the interview –

A: Oh, okay.

Q: – it would be wonderful.

A: All right, sure.

Q: Okay, so – so, does he see you when you're in these hospitals? Is he able to visit you?

A: No, he's still in the service.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, the war in **Europe** ends, and many of – many of the soldiers in that war are now assigned to units going to **Japan**. He was assigned to go to **Japan**. So while all this is going on, he's on a boat. He's – he's – he's on a boat going across the **Atlantic** first, then he has to cross country. Before he gets – I'm not – not chu – before he get – gets to battle any – any battle station, the war with **Japan** ends, and so he's free to come home. And he – I don't ne – I don't remember – I don't remember how we first became – he's – how he saw me. I do remember that my parents came by, and I was so misshaped. My f – I remember, I was in a private room because I was – many serious illnesses, and so I – I was in this room, and the door is open, and from what I learned later on, my father looks in that room, sees me, and just goes right on. Doesn't recognize me at all. You know, the – obviously the face is sunken, and slightly distorted. I have no hair, because it was shaved. So I don't look like the one he remembers. Many of our relatives who came past the door too, never recognized me. I think my mother did. I think, you know, mother's instinct. I think she – she – she did, but that was the beginning, of course, of 10 – of nine more months of hospitalization.

Q: Where were you hospitalized here?

A: In this country, in – on **Staten Island**, part of **New York City** –

Q: Right.

A: – one of the boroughs, on **Halloran General Hospital**. It was a military hospital, at the time.

Q: Were n – when were you in shape – did the army ever ask you the details of what had happened to you when you got missing – when you went missing?

A: I –

Q: Were you ever debriefed, in other words?

A: When I was debriefed? When I – not overseas, when I was in the hospital over here, a military officer from – came from **Washington** to interview me, but the interview was more about the war crimes commission, because I witnessed a killing of an American soldier. As I've said, if you were unable to work, you were either left to die, or you were shot. There was an American soldier who could not get up. He was just that weak, that sick and this German soldier takes out a gun, shoots him. I learned later that this German soldier's name is **Eisenhauer**, spelled **h-a-u-e-r**, instead of **o-w-e-r**. Somebody – I don't remember how I learned it, somebody told me, because he was a notoriously bad actor, and so be – I – so I gave testimony about that incident. I don't think I talked about my conditions. I don't – don't recall that I talked with anybody na – na – officially. I just don't recall. Though, while I was in the hospital, I remember being awarded the – the Purple Heart, and then a second award, with oak – the Oak Leaf clover, and then raised in rank from **PFC** to

corporal. So, the – you know, there was procedures, and officers came by, and – to do the things while I'm – while I'm lying in bed, and all that. But I just don't recall anybody questioning me –

Q: About your experience.

A: – about the experience. I don't remember at all. And that's why I ne – I never talked about it, for all those years, it's 53 years –

Q: Excuse me, let's cut the camera, I'm so sorry. **[break]** So, yes, you said that – was there anybody, or – put it this way, who was the first person you ever really told what had happened to you? When was the first time you did that?

A: Actually, I – I – I deviate from what I – what I've said to you, that I never talk with it – talked about it. When I got back to college – I'm trying to remember the name of the unit, but they were a bu – a bunch of old men. And they – they met in, you know, there – there – there are groups that meet. And I think I told you that when I got back to college, I had been interviewed on –

Q: Right.

A: – network radio, and all of that. And – and so there was – there were people there on the campus, who knew the experience that I went through, and something must have gotten out to this senior men's group, and all that, so they asked me to come to speak. The problem was, first of all, I didn't know what I was talking

about, you know? I hadn't really – really, really pulled together my – my – my experience over there. But, I did – did talk to them and tell them. The problem was that most of them couldn't hear what I was talking about. Some of them had – you ever – in – in – in those times, there were still some who used ear trumpets.

Q: That's right, that's right.

A: And – and what'd I say? And they couldn't quite get it. And I guess that was when I decided that nobody's really interested, and I – I don't want to talk about it. Why I to – and I just gave a few – a few highlights, that I was a soldier, and I fought on y – but I – I didn't go into any of the details at all, about it. Was just a – a soldier's s-story. But that was the only thing, and from that point on, that was when I decided, it's not pleasant, I don't want to talk about it, and I f – I – I stopped, for 53 years after that, I didn't – but wa – over here, when did I decide that I should be talking about it? In this room, my – I had two grandsons have, at that time they were seven and nine years old. And one of them said – we're sitting here, and one says, **Poppy**, were you in the war? And then, between the two of them, they fle – throwing questions at me. What di – where did you sleep, what did you eat? Did you have a gun? Did you ever fire it? Did you ever kill anybody? And just something is triggering in my mind, as I say, my guess, if these kids are asking, maybe I should be talking about it. In 1988, **Shirley** and I, we had set up a

foundation at **Ohio University**, to bri – well, it was b – bl – bla – based on religious lines, to bring religious elements on campus, so there should be no anti-Semitism and so on. It was a very – a very good thing We f – and so we founded this – this organization. One – in ni – in 19 ay – in ninety – we did it before that – in 1988, we invited **Elie Wiesel**, **Elie Wiesel**, to come to campus for a weekend, to talk. He agreed to do it, because there was a woman, a young woman, a student, a graduate student, who had written, and – a – a – I guess her – her papers for her degree, on **Elie Wiesel**, on either hi – one of his books, or on his life. She died a short time afterward. It was – it was an unfortunate illness, from something she ate. He was aware of that. I don't recall how he was made aware of it, but she was someone special to him, and he was made aware, perhaps by his rabbi, who had been a rabbi at **Hillel [indecipherable] University**. And when he and – when he – and he agreed to come, but only on the condition that we memorialize her name. And so he came to the campus. I don't have to tell you – oh, he insisted on certain things being done. One, that he speak **[phone ringing**, **break]**

Q: So you were talking about **Elie Wiesel**.

A: So – w-w – so w-we – so he – he is the weekend guest, and of – and – and **Shirley** and I are also the guests, of the president of **Ohio University**. We – the president's guest house is turned over to us. **Elie Wiesel** has the master bedroom,

his rabbi has another bedroom, and there's a third bedroom for **Shirley** and me. **Elie Wiesel** comes to me, he says, **Bob**, take the be – master bedroom. I said, I – I – oh, I – I – I couldn't possibly even fit – think of doing that. That's your room. He said no, no, no, listen to me, believe me, take the master bedroom. We do. Next morning – and so we go – go to bed at night. The next morning, we come down for breakfast. We had ordered – this is a little town, we'd ordered from a – a – a larger city in **Ohio**, kosher food. Comes the breakfast, he eats a few grapes, you know, he doesn't eat much of – much at all. He eats a few grapes, and all this kosher food that we brought in, from **Columbus**, **Ohio**, nothing. He eats nothing. But he said, I hope you slept well. I said well, you gave us the room. I said, did you sleep well? He said, well, he said, I didn't – I didn't stay in the – in this building. Wh-Wha-What – wha-what – where did you go? He said, there was a little motel down the road. He asked somebody to make arrangements for him to go to the motel. They didn't have any rooms vacant. He had a little hole someplace. There was room enough for his typewriter and him, and I guess maybe a place to lie down. I said, you spent last night there? Why? Why would you do that? He said, I didn't want to wake you up. What do you mean wake us? He said, I do my writing, a lot of my writing –

Q: At night.

A: – at mid – in the mid – middle of the night, in the morning, 2:30, 3:30, any time like that. He used a typewriter. He said, if I were writing at night, I would keep you awake. Imagine this man, I would keep you awake. So I went out of my way to go down to this little motel, I spent the night there. I was pleased, and I could do some writing. He slept very, very little. My guess is probably maybe three, four hours a night, at most. Ate very little. And –

Q: Quite a story.

A: – it was a – but this aft – huh?

Q: Quite a story.

A: Incredible, the per-per-personality of – of – of this man. So here we are, now it's Saturday afternoon. We're in the living room of the president's guest house. There are three people there, **Shirley**, me, and **Elie Wiesel**. And I'm – I'm really mesmerized by him. I am not – up to that time, I still had not, other than that thing with the el-el-elderly group, I had still not talked, and I didn't want to talk. If there was anybody I suppose I should have talked with about my experiences, I guess it's **Elie Wiesel**. I think I was intimidated, or either that, or I didn't think it would be very important to him, based on what he had gone through, and what he had done. And so, I never talked about it with him. But just being in the room with him, and talking other things with him, was, you know, I mean, a – a – a thrill beyond

anything I can imagine. When I was influenced by the two boys, I attribute it also, the fact maybe that sm – meeting with **Elie Wiesel** suggested to me, just as he had been talking about his experiences, maybe I should be doing th – maybe I should be doing the same thing.

Q: Did **Shirley** know everything?

A: No, I don't think I ever talked with her about it, no. She only learned while we were d – writing the book.

Q: Wow.

A: Although that she did go to a lo – so – a lot of the presentations that I talked. So she learned, she learned that way abou – about it. And occasionally, you know, we'll be having dinner or something, and something would occur to me, and I would make some reference to the war. But – so – so, I think, when the kids started talking – and then I'm thinking **Elie Wiesel**, and then I reali – I – I realized, we have a Holocaust council here in the – in our federation, and Holocaust education is mandated in **New Jersey**. Now, I'm not a Holocaust survivor, but I survived maybe the equivalent to sa – to most of the survivors, and maybe – maybe in some sense, maybe even worse. Not those who went to the death camps, of course, nothing compared with that. But at least, may – and maybe – maybe this is a story that should be preserved. I didn't know it was unique at the time, and I really didn't

know until **Heidi** became my editor, and she did a lot of research, and the man in charge of – of th – of press for the city of **Newark**, was also a World War II historian.

Q: Yeah, you mentioned him to me.

A: I mentioned him. And so he di – he did a lot of research too, so he – he thought there was something unique about it. But an-anyway, it was that combination. And then somehow – and I don't – I don't know how, the head of our Holocaust council got word of my experience, and induced me to start talking to the school kids. So when I learned that that's what they were doing in **New Jersey**, so these young people would grow up as being witnesses for the future, that seemed an imperative, and that's when I decided, time to start talking. And if you don't – may – make you feel any happier, I don't hear that over here. You feel – remember, you feel it. Oh, dear. So that was the – that was what urged me.

Q: And that was 50 year – more than 50 years later?

A: Oh yeah, that was 53 years later, that I started talking.

Q: So that would have been like 10 years ago, you would have started talking?

A: I've been doing it for about 10 years, right –

Q: Wow.

A: – right. And –

Q: One other thing that I want to ask is, those 90 to a hundred days, what was different about the person who came out of that, than the person who went into that?
A: Was a totally different individual. I went – I went in as a – a – as a kid, very unsophisticated. And I knew something, because I did read newspapers, did know about the war, and about concentration camps, and things of that nature, and a little bit of politics. But – but I was really very, very unsophisticated, and had no particular design on life, I didn't know wha-what I wanted to be. So, very unsettled, I was still a student, and that was – that was all. My Jewish life was pretty much set by my mother, so I knew I had to go to synagogue, even though it was done in extreme form, like a Orthodoxy, and all that. But my shi – but my mother insisted, and I was brought up, you know, as a – as a good Jew. But when I – af-after going through what I did, I don't know what the maturation design was, but when I lie in – in the hospital bed for those 10 months, I had many sleepless nights. Now, a lot of them were because of physical conditions, and the pain was such that it was hard to sleep. But the others were just emotional, I – just thinking, thinking, thinking, constantly. Some of that thinking would go back to incidents that took place during the war. I constantly had an image of this elderly couple. I had an image of the helmet of that sergeant, and I kept reaching for – trying to – trying to get his face. And I couldn't – couldn't – couldn't get away from – from remembering that, and

what – what – what I went through with him, and how – and the great good fortune that I had, that it happened to be somebody like that, who was a humanitarian, as – as – a-a-as well as a – a good soldier, I guess, and you know. He recognized valor, a-and so, I – I had thoughts about them, and some of the instances, sometimes I would get an image of that tank, like an ogre, a big monster, with that cannon. But more – more often though, my thinking was about the future – wha – wa – what ha – how – how – how – wha-what-what i – what is ordained, what am I supposed to do? I mean, it's – it's – it's going to be a total change. Sure, I'm gonna go back to school, then I have to go to work, and all of that. But my life, somehow, it just feels very, very different. I'm not the person I was before. I'm much more mature, for one thing. I was a kid when I went in, now I'm reasonably mature, and I start to think. I was very, very lucky, as – as when I – when I talk to senior audiences, very often men will come up and surround me, and say, your life was a miracle. You – you should have been killed many, many times, but you're still here. So that – that thought ran through my head, and there was something urging me inside. I – I don't know what it – I don't know what it was, but I – I knew I had to respond in some way, to what I had been through. And that some way happened to turn out to devoting the rest of my life to Jewish causes, Jewish interests. When I was 83, I had my second Bar Mitzvah, which is in the book, incidentally, my second Bar Mitzvah,

how that – how that came about. It's – it's quite rare. Very, very few Jewish men have a second Bar Mitzvah.

Q: What is the purpose of a second Bar Mitzvah?

A: The purpose of it is, back in – in **David's** time, bibli – **[phone ringing, break]**

Q: So, you were saying –

A: According to the psalms –

Q: Okay.

A: In King **David's** time, longevity was considered to be 70 years. If a man lived beyond 70, he started life all over again. And so, 70, and recognizing that the age of Bar Mitzvah for boys is usually 13, so you figure, if 70, life begins again, 13 years added to that, 83. So at age 83, a Jewish man becomes eligible for a second Bar Mitzvah.

Q: And how does that change from the first Bar Mitzvah? What's different?

A: Oh, it's a world of difference. It's a to-totally different world. It's always been my belief that 13 may be a little bit too young for a boy to understand the ritual that he was going through, and the me – what it meant to become – because you assumed new responsibility in life, a more mature responsibility, and you're responsible for your actions, and your future. And you – I – I find that hard, at 13,

to be able to think that way. So 83, not only you have – you're well beyond that point –

Q: Right.

A: – you've been thinking – thinking of your – your life, and planning for many, many years. But your whole perspective on life is different, because you've had a life experience. In my case, I had an unusual life experience, the military life, and I had a ga – an interesting Jewish experience, too, because my family, my mother was rigid about it. We were not Orthodox, but we were Reform, but nevertheless, it occupied a big, big part of her life, and became part of my life.

Q: It's like an identity.

A: So a ritual was important. Pardon?

Q: It's an identity, it's the forming of an identity.

A: Exactly. I had – had a strong Jewish i-i-ident – identity. So that I knew that I wanted the thing – to do things spiritually, but more in terms of aiding pe – aiding people. If I survived what I did, there are other people who had difficult times, and I ought to be able to do so – do things that would be helpful to those people. The bar – Bar Mitzvah was more symbolic than anything. It allowed me to restate my – my – my Jewishness.

Q: Yeah.

A: And, as I say, it had meaning, it would – had me – real meaning. It was the first time I had read from our sacred Torah. And that had a lot of meaning, because when I was 13, in Reform congregation, we didn't – the boy didn't read from the Torah. This was my first opportunity to do that. So I learned to read Hebrew without the vowels underneath, and you had – were either experienced, or were very adept at learning how to do it. And I did learn. It was my wife **Shirley**, who came up with the idea. She said, **Bob**, you're 83 now, you know, you could – you could have a second Bar Mitzvah. I'd like you to have it. And so I did it, to a large extent, for her, because she wanted it. We had a rabbi at the time, who – who agreed – agreed abs-absolutely. And I spent sessions with her, preparing for it. And we – it was the most – probably the most exciting event in my life.

Q: Oh my.

A: Well, I guess I have to say, second to my marriage. But – but it wa – it wa – it wa – so exciting to be – now I felt more totally encompassed within the realm of Jewishness. The things that I did in life, first of all, I – I became president of two synagogues, and wherever I went, we were so deeply involved. **Shirley** every bit as involved, and you see in her obituary how totally committed she was to Jewish causes. She sat federation boards, women's division boards, worked for organizations that were nationwide – Jewish nationwide, worldwide. Served on the

– on those boards, and on committees, and all that. So, totally engaged. Well, that was my – my role, too. I assumed the presidency of the state association of Jewish – all Jewish federations in **New Jersey**, there were 16 at the time. You know, those kinds of roles.

Q: And you think – yeah – you think that if it hadn't been for this experience, that your life probably wouldn't have taken that direction?

A: I think that is probably the case. I – I would not – I do – I – I don't see how I would have had any opening to that. I knew things about Jewish life, and Jewish philanthropy, that I learned only late – later on. I didn't know as a – a youngster, and maybe I never would have come across it. The fact that I became president of **Hillel**, a Jewish international organization, did help me a great deal, in understanding that a Jewish life is important, and saving j – other Jewish lives is important, too. So, when it came time to set up different type of operations, I set up – I – I – congregational life was – was important. I sat on a number of different boards. I did fundraising for United Jewish Appeal, because that money went not just to people in need, an-an-and in many ca – in some cases, not even to just Jewish causes, cause many of the things that we did as Jews, went for the public at large. Many of our operations are required even by statute in the state, to serve other people's needs. Jewish family service, Jewish vocational service. Social service

agencies like that do provide services to people who are not Jewish. So, that was what I was committed. One of the places I – I became very much involved in, was the Daughters of **Israel** Geriatric Center. This was a home for the aged. I had aging parents. I ha – I – I got to know the age – the aged there. They had lived full lives, now they were in the last stages of their lives. I served there for about 15 years, I was vice-president there. So – but getting to know them. So one of the kinds of things that I set up, with another member of our Jewish community who had owned some department stores and all that, we decided we wanted to do things for elderly people, the late stages of life, and many of them had given up life. The retirement age – and I think it may still be today, still recognized, when you're 65, back in those days, when I was a youth, that was automatic, 65 you closed the book, no more work, you retired, and lived the golden years. I never have found out what those golden years are.

Q: And you're age what? Ninety-something now?

A: Huh? Yeah.

Q: How old are you now?

A: Ni – ninety-two.

Q: Amazing. Amazing.

A: But I never found out what the golden years are. I – I realize in some other people's minds, it becomes stopping work and just enjoying yourself. You know, travel, go see your grandkids, take vacations, things of that nature. Those are the golden years. But I saw people in housing, senior housing in **New Jersey**. They were not Jewish, just Jewish based. These were people who had given up on life. I developed a program that would hand – may enable them to re-reengage with life, reinstitute things that they had done earlier in their lives. Some had been great cooks, some had worked in the industry, some had been musicians, and all that. But now, you're over 65, so you stop doing all of that, and in the process, you lose the essence of life. You still have some years ahead. And so I wrote this program out, and my par-partner, he and – he had access to people who would fund it. We got the funding, developed. That was a non-profit corporation. We didn't charge for the services. We went throughout **New Jersey**, to homes for the aged. The experience was not lectures, I didn't lecture to them, but there were big charts they had on the wall. And each of them would go to their chart, and they would plot out – I would le – give them leading questions, what were you – and they – and those questions brought out their interests in life. What things that they did before. Some of them were musicians, they gave that up, some were great-aunts and uncle – whatev – but whatever it was that they were interested in life, some were great cooks. Whatever

they did, which they were doing no more. So they plotted that out. And I – I go – guided them through that. And many of them adopted new careers, absolutely careers. The most – probably the most dynamic one in all of them was a Holocaust survivor in a home for the elderly in **Cranford**, **New Jersey**. A Holocaust survivor was just waste – sitting out her – her closing years. And she was only about 65.

Q: Oh wow.

A: And she was re-ready to just –

Q: Pack it in.

A: That's it. That was it. She didn't talk. I don't think that – I don't know that anybody else there knew that she was a survivor. But that came out. One of the leading questions that I would throw at them –

Q: Right.

A: – brought it out. This was part of her life experience. She then started to talk within – with the group, started to talk about her experiences, which she had never disclosed to anyone. Some months after that series of seminars, I got a letter from her. She had found a new life. She was speaking, not to Jewish – Jewish organizations, the **YMCA**. Those were people and children who wanted to know about this thing, too. They knew there was something like a Holocaust.

Q: But what was it, and –

A: But what was it? They had no idea. And they knew there was a war.

Q: Yeah.

A: Course, they got a little exposure to that in school, but what was the Holocaust? And so, she was invited to many places. The place there wa – the Young Man's Christian Association **[indecipherable]**, and places far and wild – wide. And so she wrote me this letter.

Q: That must have been so gratifying.

A: Oh, I mean, those are the kind of things that were so, so gratifying. And – and that's – that's the kind of stuff I've – I've done ever since. Raised a lot of money for Jewish philanthropy and all, but –

Q: So, I wanted to turn in a little bit different way, but taking from this route of, you know, how life changed, and how – what kind of a person it made you, through this experience. Did you have conversations with God, while you were in captivity? Did you have any before? Did you have any after?

A: I don't know about during captivity. It's always been my belief that I'm a mortal, and I don't have access to God. But I learned, through reconstructionist Judaism, when – when I decided we wanted to go that route, and I took a whole group, and we formed a new congregation, I learned that there's a spark of God – when we are created, all of us, all the human being, there's a spark of God in each

of us. And you can do something one way or another, with that spark. And I've always looked to that spark. Now, that wasn't during – during the war, because I had not been exposed to reconstructionist Judaism yet, and I – I didn't know about that. But I did appeal to some something, beyond mankind. I didn't know what the force was. I didn't think I had the right to talk directly to God, but I appealed for some kind of help, support. And then, as I got to know later on, then I – I – I reali – but in the hospital, there was a moving force. I could never identify what it was, something with – inside me, it's a quality, a character – each person has some kind of character within him. It was a character in me, I think it might have been an essence of guilt. The fact that I came through. Not the fact that I sacrificed so much with the danger, and the torture of living as I did, and all that, but a feeling of maybe guilt, that I – I – I was blessed. There are a lot of people in life that are going through torment in their lives. May not be what I went through, but it may be the loss of a family member, it may be a – a sickness, that your – your – you're confined to. Whatever it is. But that's where my leanings ought to go, whatever I – I – I can do that will help other people, you know. It sounds like pie in the sky.

Q: No, no, no. I mean, this is very real.

A: But it's re – re – very real. I – one place where I differed with **Shirley**, my wife **[indecipherable]**, she was very social. She did wonderful things for – for the kind

of organizations, I did, too, but she was very social. I – I'm not that – that kind of a person. To me there must be purpose. And I think that was a word that would describe most anything. There's a purpose in life, and I have to find what that purpose is, and always fulfill that purpose. I couldn't do it just sitting around a ca – a – and drinking beer with – with the guys at night. That didn't serve any particular purpose. But, sitting at a table, meeting with a group of people, functioning people, who were doing good for some organization, an agency, social service agency, or any other type, that felt right to me. So, always purpose in life. Your meeting, your – your time. Your time is worth something. Use it in some good way. Just lounging around isn't going to do anything for anybody else, and in the process, doesn't do anything for you too – either. So there was some self-redemption that came out of it. Some – something selfish, yeah, I would get something out of it. And I do, and I have. When I leave one of those schools, and I see these kids come up to me and talk, and tell me about their grandfathers, and all that, and then I – I get the letters from them, and they say, your story was so real, I – I went home and I talked to my parents. I'm going to talk about it, just as you said, I will talk about it with people, as long as I can. I – oh, kind of remarks like that, that's what moves me. Social context just don't. So that – that was – that was what evolved, and if you ask me to

describe it clinically, why that happened, I couldn't. A psychologist, psychiatrist might, but I'm not sure they could either.

Q: Oh, this is why I asked from the spiritual perspective. It is – it is –

A: Spiritual yes, preserving Judaism, because I got – even though I'm not – I'm not very well informed on it, but from all that I have read, and all that I learned about what Judaism stand for, it's all the good things in life. And it's – it's – it's dealing with mankind, and it's devote – devoting part of your life to mankind. All the – all the – th – the good – the good things we do for one a – one another, man's – I'm trying to think of a title of a book – man's search. Oh, this great – great – oh, just can't think of his name. His – his book, a book that he wrote some time ago, "**Man's Search for Meaning**."

Q: Is that **Viktor Frankl**?

A: That's exac – exactly.

Q: Okay.

A: Great.

Q: Okay.

A: Great. **Viktor Frankl**.

Q: Oh yeah.

A: I read his book. I read that very book of – of his, and that – that struck me. Just fairly recently, this maybe a year or so ago. And I said – and I – I wrote, and I wanted to put it in the text. And **Heidi** and I went over it. Didn't – somehow just didn't quite fit in the – in the text. Was a little bit too emotional. But, whatever. But that gave me the rationale. I said, **Frankl**, what he preached, way back then, that's – that – that's me. That's – that's what I became. So I was a di – a disciple of him – of his. Didn't know him, didn't know his work.

Q: But it spoke to you.

A: He spoke. He must have spoken to me, yeah. So – and that – that became my – my remaining life's work. But helping others find meaning in their life. That's the meaning in my life, is helping others find meaning in their lives. And that's what he – that was the theme that he – he preached. And the fact that he was a concentration camp survivor himself, and went through all that. And his experience, when he saw people who gave up, Jews who gave up on life in the camps, others who pulled themselves through, by maintaining that conviction about life. And he, of course, was one of them. But oh, that – that experience.

Q: It's pretty powerful.

A: That did it.

Q: Yeah.

A: I'm glad you remember his name. When – when you get to be 92, that happens, face it. It's on the tip of my tongue **[indecipherable]** just won't come.

Q: Well, I want to say, I'm very grateful to you for speaking with us today, for sharing your story with us today, for sharing your thoughts as well, and your reflections on it. And I'll say that, for this part, this will conclude the formal part of our interview with Mr. **Robert Max**, the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Robert Max**, on July 14th, 2015, in **Summit**, **New Jersey**. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

Q: Okay. And now what I'd like us to do, is get the letter, and have you read the letter from your brother.

A: Oh.

Q: And so, we'll disconnect – **[break]** So, I – I wanted you to be able to read the letter that your brother wrote to your parents, on learning of your rescue. So, I pass the floor to you, please.

A: Okay. It's dated **Germany**, April 26, 1945. "Dear Mom and Pop, I'm so happy, I could cry. Just a few ye – hours ago, I received a letter from European theater of operations headquarters, telling me that **Bob** was okay. Here is the first paragraph of the letter: Dear Corporal **Max**, I'm very happy to report that your brother, **PFC**

**Interview with Robert Max**
**July 14, 2015**

**Robert R**. **Max**, **ASN** 15311529, was liberated by our advancing forces, from a ger – German – from a German prisoner of war camp, on 4 April, 1945, after having been previously reported as missing in action on 4 January, 1945. I'd previously written to **Bob**'**s** company clerk, and his answer was written before the report of **Bob**'**s** liberation was received, at Sixth Armored Division headquarters. So, along with the letter from **ETO** headquarters, came a letter from Sixth Armored, dated eight days earlier, stating that there was no further news of **Bob**. The letter read, in part, **PFC Max** was with his company as they attacked enemy positions, about one and a half miles northeast of **Marvie**, **Belgium**, on je – on 4 January, 1945. An enormous amount of armored enemy artillery, mortar and small arms fire, was encountered, and squads and individuals became separated at times, because of the necessity of seeking protection from this fire. After this engagement, **PFC Max** was not present. A search was made of the vicinity, but he could neither be found, nor accounted for, and up to the present date, there had been no further information on your brother. Well, further information came today, and I don't think I've ever received anything that made me happier. Captain **Budrogy**(ph) informed me that all prisoners of war, for more than 30 days, are returned to the **United States**. If that is so, there is an excellent chance of your seeing him soon. I wish I could, too. If he is going to be reassigned, I'd like to get him into my outfit. Better still, I'd like to see

him stay in the **States**. I intend asking Captain **Budrogy**'**s**(ph) advice tomorrow. What can I add to a letter like this? I'm overjoyed, and can't think of another thing right now. I know how happy you both must be, and I know now that God must have heard your prayers. All I can say is that we have a lot to be thankful for. Call **Diana** when you receive this letter. I'm too excited to write any more tonight. When I calm down, I'm going to write **Bob** at Central Postal Directory, **APO** 640, **U**.**S**. Army, and within few days, I'm going to send you the letters for safekeeping. Right now I want to enjoy them myself. Write soon, and God bless you. Love to **Ruthie**."

Q: Lovely. Thank you very, very much.

A: Yeah, that – I can imagine the emotions under which he wrote – wrote this. I-I-It wasn't easy, because again, the relationship was that genuine, that he felt this kind of deeply, and he, like my parents, thought that I wa – I had been gone. But he kept up the search, and eventually –

Q: He found out.

A: – he found out, mm-hm.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much.

A: Ah, dear. It's – it's – it's – it's a privilege to real – to – to do it, leave it in some other permanent form, and it'll be recorded in here. I don't know how long this piece of paper will remain, it's getting pri – pretty thin now.

Q: Yeah. Well, there are ways of preserving those, too.

A: Yes, I'm – I – I know there are.

Q: Okay.

A: But yeah, this is such a splendid interview.

Q: Thank you.

A: I've had –

Q: Now we can cut. Thank you.

**Conclusion of Interview**