Mr. Margol. I'm starting to roll right now.

OK.

OK.

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Howard Margol, on October 20, 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia. Thank you so much, Mr. Margol, for agreeing to speak with us today to share your story, to share your experiences during World War II.

We're going to start a little bit before. At the beginning, I want to get a sense of your youth, your childhood, and the forces that shaped and influenced you as well as your army service. And then we'll talk about your war experiences.

OK.

So I'll start with the very first question. Could you tell me what was your name at birth? Your name at birth, could you tell me that?

Howard Margol.

What was your date of birth?

February 22, 1924.

Where were you born?

Jacksonville, Florida.

Do you have any brothers and sisters?

I had a older brother who's no longer living. I had a younger sister who lives today in Tampa, Florida. And I have a identical twin brother. He was born 10 minutes before I was.

So you're the younger.

Right.

OK. What was the name of your older brother who no longer is living?

Melvin.

Melvin. Do you remember the year he was born?

He was three years older than my twin brother and I.

OK. So that would have been about 1921, maybe '20, something like that.

1921.

Right. And your sister, what's her name?

Bernice, Bernice Wolfe.

And what's your twin brother's name?

Hilbert.

All right. Can you tell me about your mother and your father, their names?

Yes.

Mhm.

My father was born in a small village in Lithuania called Pushelat. And when we were kids, we used to call it push a lot and stop a little.

[LAUGHTER]

That is funny.

In any event, when I made my first trip to Lithuania in 1993, they'd never heard of Pushelat. Then I says what about Pusalotus. Oh, Pusalotus they knew.

The names of the same small villages could be five different names in five different languages--

Right.

--in that part of the world.

Right.

So tell me about your dad. What was his name?

Morris.

Morris?

Well, Moishe.

Moishe. OK. And was he born in the United States or in Lithuania?

In Lithuania.

Would you remember what year that might have been?

Well, let's see. I think it was 1887 or there about, 1887 or 1888.

OK. And your mother, what was her name?

Sarah, Sorka

Sarah?

Sorka.

Sorka.

Sorka anglicized as Sarah.

OK. And her maiden name?

Her maiden name was Bernstein.

And where were they from? Where was her family from?

The Bernsteins, her father was a Bernstein. Her mother was a Klawansky from-- I'm trying to think of the name of the town in Lithuania.

Also, though, from Lithuania?

Yeah.

OK. And so your parents were first generation immigrants to the United States?

Correct.

I have a number of questions. We'll come back to Lithuania in a little while. But now I'd like to focus a little more on your parents and their journeys. Can you tell me a little bit about how your father came to be in the United States and in Jacksonville, Florida, where you were born?

Well, as I mentioned my father born in Pushelat, Lithuania. He left there in 1906. He went to London because he had an older brother and a younger sister who were living in London. So he spent 1906, he spent the year in London and, of course, learned English.

He came to the United States in 1907. And he already knew how to speak English, so it was not a problem. He went to live with a cousin in Norwich, Connecticut.

And his cousin in Norwich was Coit, C-O-I-T. And the wife of Coit was Annie. And she was from-- when she came to Norwich for the birth of my father.

Oh, she came from Norwich to--

No.

OK.

I'm sorry.

That's OK.

I'm backtracking.

OK.

Forget that.

I'm forgetting it. So your father arrived from London to the United States already speaking English after one year.

Right.

And he went to Connecticut? Or did he go somewhere else?

He went to Norwich, Connecticut.

OK.

And while he was in Norwich, he became a Hebrew schoolteacher. He graduated from Slabodka Yeshiva in Lithuania. But he did not want to be a rabbi.

So was this in Pushelat? Was the yeshiva in Pushelat?

No. The yeshiva was in Ponevezh.

Ponevezh in Lithuania. OK. So he graduated--

So he didn't want to be a rabbi.

OK.

So in other words, he became a Hebrew school teacher. And in 1914, the synagogue in Jacksonville, Florida needed a rabbi. So they contacted my father in Norwich, Connecticut.

And he told them, he's not a rabbi, but he's a Hebrew school teacher. Maybe they could use a Hebrew school teacher. They told him to come on.

So he rode the train for about 24 hours from Norwich, Connecticut to Jacksonville, Florida. And when he got there, they really didn't need a Hebrew schoolteacher. But they figured he wouldn't go all the way back to Norwich for a 24-hour train ride, he would just stay there. Which he did.

And that's when he became a peddler, because there were no job for a Hebrew school teacher. And in Jacksonville, that's when he became a peddler. He peddled more expensive ladies' dresses and clothing. His best territory was the red light district in Jacksonville.

[LAUGHTER]

At least, that's what he told my mother.

Well, there would be a need for expensive ladies' clothing, that's for sure.

But he may have had another reason to go there. I don't know.

Uh huh.

OK.

We won't speculate on that.

OK. In any event, in 1914, he was going to open up a retail clothing store in what was then the Black downtown district of Jacksonville, Florida. His friends told him, if he's going to open up a retail store, he needs need to change his name so it won't sound so Jewish.

What was his name at the time?

Margolis. In Russia, it was Margolis. In Poland, it was Margol. That's when he changed his name from Margolis to Margol, so it wouldn't sound so Jewish.

OK.

And I say, in 1914, he opened up his department store. Across the street from his store-- I mentioned it was 720 Davis Street in Jacksonville. Across the street from his store was a restaurant owned by a Mr. Robinson. And the restaurant served Blacks. They couldn't eat in any restaurant in Jacksonville at the time. Blacks were not allowed.

And next door to his store, was a Black owner of a hotel, a hotel for Blacks. There, again, because in Jacksonville, Blacks could not stay in any of the hotels at the time. In any event, that's why, at an early age, I learned to respect other people, other nationalities, and other colors.

It came from your father?

Pardon?

It came from your father?

Yes. Because, well, I got to know Mr. Robinson across the street at the restaurant. I also got to know the Black next door who owned the Black hotel. And so it taught me at an early age to respect others.

Tell me about your mother and how your parents met.

Well, my mother was born in-- I'll think of the name in a minute-- in Lithuania.

Was it Valbalninkas that we had talked about off camera? Valbalninkas, was that the place?

No.

OK. It was someplace else.

And I can visualize the exact-- in my mind. I'm just having a senior moment, can't tell you the name.

That's OK. How did she get to the states?

Well, she was born there in Lithuania. In 1903, at the age of three, she came to the United States with her parents. And she grew up in the United States. They were in Baltimore, Maryland. So she grew up in Maryland.

Of course, she spoke English, because that was the only language she knew. Oh, well, she actually knew Yiddish, because her parents spoke mainly Yiddish. And that's how she learned Yiddish. But then, of course, as a child growing up, she also had to learn English, which she did.

Of course.

So she could speak English as well.

How did she end up in Florida?

Well, in 1917, she went to Jacksonville, Florida to spend the summer with a cousin of hers, Hannah. No I can't think of Hannah's married name. Anyway, Hannah's married name-- another senior moment.

OK.

Anyway.

It's OK.

She went to Jacksonville to spend the summer with her cousin Hannah. And while she was there, that's where she met my father.

OK.

Even though they were both born in Lithuania, just a few miles apart, they never knew each other there, of course. In any event, she went to Jacksonville, as I mentioned, to spend the summer with her cousin. She never went back to Baltimore.

She stayed?

Her mother came and brought all her clothes and everything. And she stayed in Jacksonville.

And that's where they married?

Yes.

And where your older brother was born?

Yes, 1921.

And then yourself and your twin?

Yes.

And your sister?

Correct.

And your father had a store of women's clothes, or did he have a different type of store?

Oh, it was general clothing.

General clothing.

Yeah.

General clothing. And that's how the family was supported?

Correct.

Did your father speak Yiddish?

Speak English?

Yiddish.

Yes. Oh, yes, fluent.

OK.

Both parents broke fluent Yiddish.

OK. Did he speak any other languages? Did either of them speak any other languages besides Yiddish and English?

Well, they could both speak Russian.

And as you were growing up with your siblings, did they talk much about Lithuania and the Russian Empire? Did they have family that was left there? Or was it their entire families came to the United States?

They really didn't talk much about it because what they left was not worth talking about. It was a very hard life. But my father's younger sister, her husband, and three small children were still living there in Lithuania in 1941. And they were murdered by the Germans, some even by Lithuanians.

And you know, that's something, that's an event that has always been very frustrating to me. I can understand the Holocaust Museum want to document everything they can, you know, about the Holocaust. But things like what happened to my father's younger sister and her family, you know, there was no documentation. The Germans didn't take names.

No.

They just said, today we kill 432 women, men, and children.

Well, there are efforts. I must say there are efforts by this museum and, as well, by Yad Vashem, to find out the names of people like your aunt who were murdered. There are different types of databases. There are different ways of trying to establish their identities so that they're not anonymous.

But it's not an easy process. And I can understand that when a person's name doesn't appear on any list, it's like they vanished, like they never were.

Right.

And for a family, there can be few things that are more painful.

I understand fully what you're referring to. And I sent all the information to Yad Vashem. Never went anywhere.

Oh, dear. We'll come to these questions a little bit later. But let's focus, again, on your youth, your childhood.

So when you were growing up, although your father still had a sister who lived there, for all intents and purposes was it so that the entire families had left this part of the world and moved westwards, whether this would have been London whether this would have been Norwich, Connecticut, or as it happened with your dad and your mom, eventually to Jacksonville?

That's correct. Yeah.

OK. Did they teach you and your siblings Yiddish? Yes, we learned Yiddish. Yes.

Did you learn it just by speaking at home or did you go to school?

Just speaking at home.

OK.

No formal education in Yiddish.

All right. And did you grow up in Jacksonville? Is that where you spent your youth and childhood and so on?

Yes.

All right. Was your family religious? If your father studied--

They were orthodox, but were not ultra orthodox. For instance, my mother always kept a kosher home.

OK.

But it wasn't extremely kosher. It wasn't ultra ultra orthodox.

Was there a Jewish community, a large Jewish community in Jacksonville?

Well, at the time, it was a pretty large community. Yes.

But how many--

I'd say in 1930 there was 30 Jewish families in Jacksonville, Florida who came from Pushelat.

Just from that place alone?

Yes. At the time, I thought, well, if 30 Jewish families came to Jacksonville, all the Jews there didn't come to Jacksonville. Some probably went to New York, some to Chicago, some to Miami. So I said Pushelat must have been population, maybe, at least 100,000.

Figuring, you know, if there are 30 families that end up in Jacksonville. And that's just from that village alone. The community itself, though, was it a large Jewish community in Jacksonville? Were there a couple of thousand? Was it more than that?

There was a large Jewish community. But the majority of them were Germans, came from Germany.

And was there any-- did that matter? When you were all together in Jacksonville, did that make a difference? Or did the families that were from Pushelat kind of stick together? Was there anything that bound them?

Yeah. There was a difference. The ones from Germany, they were not ultra-orthodox. The ones from Lithuania were more orthodox.

Got it. About how many synagogues did Jacksonville have?

They had two. But the one by the Germans was the temple.

OK.

The one by the others, from Eastern Europe, I remember. I can visualize it in my mind. I can picture it in my mind even today. I can picture-- I know the address in Jacksonville where we lived was either 317 or 217 Jefferson Street. And it was in the middle of a block.

On the corner was a synagogue, B'Nai Israel Synagogue.

So not far at all?

No. I don't know if I remember this or if I was just told this when I was growing up. But my father used to take my twin brother and I to the synagogue, I say, which was only half a block away, for minyan. And also he used to take us to the New York Yankees exhibition game, baseball game. Because in those days, all of the Major League Baseball teams had their spring training in Florida. So the Yankees, on their way North after spring training was over, always stopped in Jacksonville.

Well, that must have been something exciting for young boys.

Well, it was. But unfortunately, at that young age, we were not interested in getting autographs.

Oh.

Because we saw Lou Gehrig, Babe Ruth.

Wow.

Tony Lazzeri.

Wow. You saw the greats.

Right. But we were young kids. We weren't interested in getting their autograph, unfortunately.

Yeah.

If we'd got their autographs, be worth a lot of money today.

They certainly would be. They certainly would be. Tell me, did you grow up-- I mean, the impression I'm getting is you had a pretty large enough Jewish community that you could grow up within that. Or did you grow up in a community that was mixed, were your friends both Jewish and non-Jewish? Or tell me about that.

No. There was two, I guess what you'd call cliques. As I mentioned, one from Germany and one from Eastern Europe. So my friends were the ones from Eastern Europe. We were familiar with others who were from Germany, but they were not our friends.

Did you go to public school?

Public school? Yes.

OK. What was that like?

Well, I remember when we were in sixth grade, and we lived on-- trying to remember the name of the street. Anyway, maybe it'll come to me. But I remember going to school. We walked about a mile to school and a mile back.

Much longer than to the synagogue.

Right. No, to school.

I know. But compared to the synagogue--

Right.

--much longer.

Correct.

Silver Street. We lived on Silver Street.

OK.

And I think it was 1712 Silver Street in Jacksonville. And as I said, we used to walk a mile to school--

And a mile back.

--and a mile back. So when World War II broke out, I felt that we were better prepared for what we had to go through in the army during World War II than present day American soldiers. I'm not taking anything away from the present day soldiers. I'm just saying I think we were better prepared mentally and emotionally because of what we had gone through. Today, they don't go through all that.

For instance, in Jacksonville, I guess we were about 14-years-old, two of our friends skipped school one day and went hunting. They were riding their bicycles. Each one had their rifle swung across the handlebars of the bicycle.

They were riding along. And the one on the left hit a bump in the road. His rifle accidentally fired, killed his friend to his right. Well, it was tragic. We were all sad about it.

But the next day, we went to school. We dealt with it. And that was it. We learned to deal with adversity.

Today if an accident happens in school, and one of the students gets killed, they bring in the grief counselors right away. They sit there. They hold their hand. They sympathize with them. Those kids will never learn how to deal with adversity.

It's a different time. It was a different time back then.

Correct. Tell me about-- you were going to mention something that happened in sixth grade. 14 is when you would be a little bit older. But in sixth grade, was there something that you wanted to tell me about? I asked you about school. What was school life like?

Well, not really. But I remember the name of my school was-- trying to think of her first name. Her name was Beal, B-E-A-L. I forget her first name.

Were there are kids who were of all different backgrounds in that school? It was all kinds, Jews, Gentiles, everyone.

In general, did you grow up feeling different in Jacksonville, or like you were as American as anybody else?

Well, we knew we were Jewish. And we ran into a little bit of antisemitism, not a whole lot at that age. But some, we did.

For instance, my best friend was a Gentile kid by the name of Clayton Johnson. And he and I were good friends, even though he was a Gentile and I was Jewish. One day Clayton and I got into an argument and we ended up fighting each other.

And I beat on him. He beat on me. And we both ended up with bloody noses.

So I went home, explained to my parents why I had a bloody nose. And my mother said she would get in touch with Clayton Johnson's father and get it straightened out. Before she can even do that, she heard from Clayton Johnson's father. He apologized for his son's behavior and apologized for what his son did.

And instead of what I thought, he was a real redneck, he was just the opposite. He was very liberal, very understanding. He was not antisemitic.

So that was, in that sense, a positive experience.

Right.

That even though you had a falling out with your best friend, it didn't develop to the point where antisemitism was involved.

Correct.

Did your parents ever experience anything like that in their business? Did your father ever experience it in his business?

No. But if I mentioned this before, please stop me.

OK. Then, I'd say in 1914-- oh, I'm sorry, 1917, when he was going to open up a retail store--

That's right.

--in Jacksonville. That's when he changed his name.

Because of the fact it could sound too Jewish if you stayed Margolis. Let's cut for a second. We're going to cut until the phone's off.

Mhm.

OK. OK.

As you were growing up in the '30s, did world politics ever kind of enter your world? Did your parents note what was going on in Europe, what was going on in Germany? I mean, in 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany, you would have been, like, 9 years old, 8 years old, something like that? Was there discussion about such things?

Not really. They really didn't talk about it. But when Hitler came to power, we had some idea what was going on.

In what way?

I need a rest.

OK. Is this time coded?

Mhm. Let me just get rolling again.

OK. I know. I want him to open his eyes. OK.

I'm ready.

OK.

I'm rolling.

So Mr. Margol, I'm going to ask now more about the war years. Do you remember where you were when the war broke out? And I'm talking about when Germany invaded Poland in September 1, 1939. Were you still in high school?

Yes.

OK. Did that make an impact in Jacksonville and in your family and in your community?

Not at that time. More in 1942.

What about Pearl Harbor, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, December 7, 1941?

I remember my brother and I were at an AZA meeting at the Seminal Hotel in Jacksonville, Florida.

What's an AZA meeting?

That was a Jewish fraternity.

I see.

AZA.

What did it stand for?

Aleph Zadik Aleph.

OK.

And as I say, we were at a fraternity meeting. We were not at the University of Florida yet. But we had just graduated high school in January 1942.

OK.

So at the time, it was not a question of if we go in the military, it was only a question of when. So anyway, we went to this meeting in Jacksonville. And that's where we were told about Pearl Harbor, about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor.

And so we decided to go ahead and graduate high school right away. And we did. We entered the University of Florida. Well, we graduated high school in January of 1942.

OK.

And a couple weeks later, we entered the University of Florida. To show you how ill-prepared this country was in 1942 for World War II, in Florida, we went into ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Corps. We had horse drawn artillery.

We rode horses. And horses dragged behind us 105-millimeter howitzers. We had guns that were nothing more than a piece of wood carved to look like a rifle.

And shoot with that, huh?

It was just a piece of wood. It looked like a rifle, but it did not do anything. In any event, we were at the University of Florida. We got a year of ROTC.

The Army then told us, those students at the University, instead of the Reserve, if we would join the regular Army, they would let us finish college. Well, we figured we had another three years to go. So that was a no brainer. Three years later, maybe the war would be over with all right. So a lot of us joined the regular Army. Well, several weeks later, we were all called to active duty.

Oh, my goodness. OK.

Well, that's how the Army snookered us into joining the Army.

And was it your brother and yourself together?

At first, we were separated. Because, as I may have mentioned, when the five Sullivan brothers went down on the same ship in the Pacific in 1942, the American military would not let brothers serve in the same combat unit. So they separated us. I was in 104th Timberwolf Division in the Mojave Desert. My brother was in the 42nd Infantry Division in Camp Gruber, Oklahoma.

And the 104th division, I had desert training in the Mojave Desert in infantry. I was not a happy camper, I can tell you. But right there, I remember, in the Mojave Desert at that time, during the day, we could walk around in undershorts.

Mhm.

At night, we slept under six blankets.

Really? Such a variance in temperature.

In a small tent.

Wow.

And because it was cold at night in the desert. I remember--

Hang on just a second.

We're going to cut?

Yeah. We're going to cut. And we're going to ask Aaron. Aaron?

OK. So you were in a tent under six blankets at nighttime?

Correct.

How did you and your brother get together?

Well, as I mentioned, at the time I was in infantry in the 104th division. My brother was in Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. Well, fortunately for me and my company, only four of us were Jewish. But the company clerk was Jewish.

So he told me that in a case of twins, President Roosevelt would make an exception. And he told me what to do. As a result, anyway, I called my brother in Oklahoma and told him what I found out. And I says, our mother can only request that her twin sons be put together, but you may end up here with me instead of me ending up there with you.

He said, well, we have a 50/50 shot at it. Go ahead. So that's when I called my mother, told her what to do. And she wrote a letter to President Roosevelt. And they said the matter would be taken care of.

Well, the matter will be taken care of told us nothing. We still didn't know who is going where. A few weeks later, I was called into the captain's office, and told a transfer came through, transferring me to the 42nd division in Oklahoma. He wanted me to refuse the transfer.

Refuse the transfer? I wanted to hug and thank the guy. You know?

[LAUGHTER]

I said, sir, I'll follow orders. Whatever the Army orders me to do, I can leave in 30 minutes. Well, they sent me to battalion headquarters, regimental headquarters, and then division headquarters. I was there for of a colonel.

And they all said the same thing. They wanted me to refuse the order. And each time I told them the same thing, I'll follow orders.

Well, the colonel at division headquarters said the orders came through not from the regular military channel, but direct from Washington. And I must know somebody pretty high up in Washington. I wasn't going to tell him about President Roosevelt.

[LAUGHTER]

I said, sir, I don't know anybody in Washington. He probably figured I knew a Senator or a Congressman, that kind of thing. At any event, 6 o'clock the next morning, the colonel, with his Jeep driver, picked me up at my brother's barracks, took me to Colorado Springs.

I had a private compartment on a Colorado Eagle, which at that time was the finest passenger train in all of America. It was the first passenger train that was all aluminum. And it was a streamliner. Like I said, I had a private compartment.

Pretty cool.

Oh, I was feeling pretty good.

Mhm.

Well, the train pulled out of the station in Colorado Springs. And about 30 minutes later, the conductor came along. And said, out! I said, out? What do you mean, out? I said this is my private compartment. President Roosevelt arranged this for me.

He said, out! Well, I had no choice but to get out. And I lost my private compartment. I went through the train, people standing up all over the place. It was an 18-hour train ride from Colorado Springs, Colorado, to Kansas City, Missouri where we were going to change trains to go to Oklahoma.

Well, I saw six Marines that just got out of a hospital in California. And they were going home from the Marine Corps. I told them my sad tale of woe. I said, let's go to the military police on the train and tell them. And demand we get our private-- they also had private compartments.

And they got chucked out of those, too?

They got kicked out also. I said let's go and tell our tale of woe to the conductor. They said, they already did that. The conductor on that train is the commander-in-chief on that train.

He's in charge. He makes all the decisions. So it was a waste of time.

At the time, I felt that the conductor was probably selling our private compartments to someone, making a lot of money off the war effort, and that's how it worked. Whether it did or not, I don't know. But that's what I felt.

In any event, I finally arrived in Oklahoma at my brother's barracks. The guy said Margol, you left yesterday on emergency leave, a two week leave for emergency? The Red Cross was able to contact my brother in Oklahoma. They couldn't find me because I was on the train.

So I said, no, that was not me that left yesterday. That was my twin brother. They said, now we know you're bucking for a Section 8 discharge, which means that you're crazy. Now you're claiming that you've got a twin brother, and you're acting crazy, trying to get out of going into combat.

I said that was not me who left yesterday. That was my twin brother. They said, now we know you're bucking for a Section 8 discharge, claiming you have a twin brother. Well, for two weeks, they gave me every dirty detail they could think of.

Oh, my gosh.

And you know, I had to clean latrines and all that kind of nonsense. When my brother got back to the unit, the guy saw I did have a twin brother. But to this day, none of them ever apologized to me. OK?

In any event, I told my brother my sad tale of woe. He gave me no sympathy. Why?

Because he found out later on that some army clerk had looked at the records and he saw a Hilbert Margol, Army serial number 140778, and Howard Margol, Army serial number 140777. It had to be a mistake. Must be the same person. They're just accidentally listed as two people. So he eliminated my brother from the records.

Oh, my goodness.

Had my brother not come back to Oklahoma, they never would have missed him.

[LAUGHTER]

Really?

Right. He could have stayed home the entire war. And I say, he gave me no sympathy when I told him what happened.

How soon after that did you guys ship out to Europe?

Probably about, I'm guessing now, about four to six months before we shipped over to France.

Directly?

We landed in Marseilles, France.

And this was when, what month and what year?

This was late December or early January 1942.

That is-- but wasn't the invasion of Normandy in June 1944? So you landed in Marseilles a full two years early?

Oh, I'm sorry. 1944, not 1942.

OK. So it was December 1944, January 1945?

Correct.

OK. And so D-Day had already happened?

It was probably the first week in January 1945.

OK.

We landed in Marseilles, France.

OK.

We spent about three weeks outside of Marseilles living in two man pup tents while we're waiting for our guns to arrive.

So we're cleaning the gunpowder out of the guns and get ready to go into combat. It was probably the coldest place outside of Marseilles, France.

Really?

Well, it was a cold winter that winter.

Yeah. We nearly froze to death. But you know, the Army didn't care. In any event--

How did you make your way North?

Pardon?

Where did you go from Marseilles? Where were you sent from Marseilles?

When we left Marseilles, we went up the Rhone River Valley, which there was no combat there. And we went to a small French village called LunÃ©ville. And we were in LunÃ©ville for about two weeks.

And then we moved up to Wingen-sur-Moder, France, Wingen on the Moder River. They call it a river. We would call it a creek. You could step from one side of the river to the other side of the river. OK?

Not a big river.

Right. In any event, at Wingen, we relieved the 45th division. They were coming out of combat. We were going into combat.

Was this the first time?

Yes.

OK. And in Wingen, there was a glass factory. And the mayor of Wingen had appreciation for the American forces liberating the town from the Germans. They wanted to give each one of us service for 12 of this glassware that was made in Wingen.

Well, our captain, Ed Hoffman, fired them, but refused to let us have the glassware. OK. When I saw Ed often later on at our Army reunions, I said, Ed, you remember Wingen? You wouldn't let us have the glassware?

But I'm sure you took some. And he says, he did send several packing cases of the glassware home. But he says in transit, several pieces got broken. I said you still have it? Oh, yeah. He still has it all.

I says that was Lalique glassware, original. He said, what's that?

Oh, my. Oh, my.

I said, when you get back to Boulder, Colorado, take a few of those pieces of that Lalique glassware to the local store, like a crystal store or a large department store that has a crystal department, and show them a couple pieces of it. Tell them it's original Lalique.

So he did that. And that's when he learned what Lalique was all about.

Yeah.

In any event.

You went into combat.

That's when we went into combat. Yeah.

Tell me what was that like.

Pardon?

Where did you fight? Where did you fight and what experience did you have?

Well, as i say, we fought starting in Wingen, France. And after a few weeks at Wingen, that's when the entire American and British forces jumped off on a big offense. And we crossed the Rhine River.

In fact, when we left Wingen, I remember going through, just a few hours later, going through a small village in France. And two women were sitting on a street corner. So our truck driver stopped to ask them some questions about directions. And one of the women says, I don't speak American. I speak English.

She was originally from England. She had spent the summer there with her friend, visiting. While she was there, that's when Hitler invaded. And she cut off. She couldn't leave and go back to England. So she spent the entire war in that small village.

Oh, my goodness.

In any event, we talked to her. And that's when she told us she spoke English. She didn't speak American.

Did she give you directions anyway?

Yeah. Yeah. She was very helpful, very nice. In any event--

Did you-- OK. I'm sorry. I'm going to interrupt. I'm going to ask a couple of questions. By this point, had you come across any prisoners of war yet, German prisoners of war, had you met any Germans by this point in this offensive, or not yet?

Not yet, no.

OK.

It was only later on that we encountered German prisoners of war. I'm talking about German soldiers--

That's right.

--who were prisoners of war.

That's right.

Yeah. That was later on.

OK. And when you met her, and this offensive, was that, like, February '45, March '45? When would that have been?

I'm pretty sure it was sometime in January of '45.

Oh, so it was still early on?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Still early on.

Yeah.

OK. So at this time, did you know that there were such things as concentration camps?

No.

Had you heard of anything like that?

We didn't know anything about concentration camps. Dachau was really created in 1932 by Hitler, where he got rid of his political opponents.

That's right.

So it was really like a prison, not a concentration camp. That was in 1932. It was only in, I guess, in early 1941, '44, whenever, when it was changed from a prison to a concentration camp.

OK. Let's go back now to what you were telling me about this offensive. What happened after that? After you got the directions from this person, this English girl who had been caught up and had to stay in this village, did you see fighting? Did you engage in any battles? Tell me what happened.

Well, at that time that I mentioned, we were on the offensive.

That's right.

I remember we crossed the Rhine River. And in fact, we crossed the Rhine River. And then we were captured a number of towns. I remember we captured-- I'm trying to think of the name of the town, on the other side of the Rhine River, a major city that we captured.

Koblenz, maybe?

No. It'll come to me in a minute.

OK.

Well, I remember we captured WÃ¼rzburg, and then Schweinfurt, and then Nuremberg, and a German airbase in FÃ¼rth, Germany. FÃ¼rth is right outside of Nuremberg. And in the airbase, some of us went into several of the buildings on the former German airbase. One building we found loaded with German parachutes, the German Air Force parachutes. The parachutes were made out of white silk cloths. And we took our bayonets, we cut up some of the white silk cloth and made next scarves out of it. I have pictures of me taken with one of those white neck scarves around my neck.

And in any event, it kept our necks warm.

Yes.

Because we were outside 24/7, and it was very cold. But well, I had about three or four weeks. The Army made us do away with them because it was not official Army issue. We were out of uniform. OK.

[LAUGHTER]

In any event, that's why I remember that German army base.

Yeah. It's kind of the absurdity of army rules while fighting this war. You know?

Right.

Yeah.

Well, for instance, our battery executive officer, a Lieutenant Davis, in civilian life, he was a window dresser a five and ten cent store. OK? In the Army, he became what we call a 90 day wonder. 90 days in school, he came out as a second lieutenant. My brother and I were supposed to do the same thing, become second lieutenants.

But we turned it down. Because we knew second lieutenants, they were not allowed to serve together. They would definitely separate us. So we turned down the opportunity to go to OCS school.

In any event, Lieutenant Davis, as I say, had no common sense. Strictly GI, everything according to the book. If we dug a foxhole two feet deep, it had to be four feet deep. If we dug it four feet deep, it had to be six feet deep. That was Lieutenant Davis.

It sounds like he was a joy.

Right. In fact, we were in combat-- well, before we went over, some of the guys said, as soon we get in combat, Lieutenant Davis is going to get it right in the back. Well, guys talk.

But when it actually came down to it, you know, they didn't do any thing. But we were figuring out a way to get back at Lieutenant Davis. We came out with an idea after we were in combat.

I was on a 105-millimeter howitzer, as well as my twin brother. I was a gunner on gunner number two. He was a gunner on gun number three. At times, we could talk back and forth to each other. At other times, our howitzers were so far apart, we couldn't even see each other.

In any event, Wingen-sur-Moder is where we went into combat. And then, as I mentioned, from there the entire Allied military went on the offensive.

So how'd you get back at Lieutenant Davis?

Lieutenant Davis? Well, no one shot him in the back of anything. No, no, no, no. But we did figure out a way to get back at him.

One night, while we were in combat, we were told that a German patrol had broken through our area, that we needed to be on the extra alert because of the German patrol. That gave us an idea. Our gun sergeant called Lieutenant Davis on his field telephone. Davis was in a bombed out house about 100 yards from our gun position.

He told Lieutenant Davis one of his men was sick, was throwing up all over the place. We needed Lieutenant Davis to come to our gun position and decide what to do. Should we send him back to the medics or just try and deal with it right there or just what?

Hold on a minute. Can you stop for a minute?

OK. So Lieutenant Davis is called to the gun position. Someone's been throwing up. What should we do?

Right.

OK. What happened?

Well, Lieutenant Davis came out of his bombed out house, and as I mentioned, about 100 yards from there to our gun position. But we had stationed men about every 10, 15 yards between Lieutenant Davis' position and our gun position. So Lieutenant Davis said OK.

Well, he knew the German patrol was in our area. He said OK. We had stationed guys along the way.

They waited until Lieutenant Davis go, walk about 15 yards. One of them threw a rock. Lieutenant Davis knew about the German patrol. He went flat on his stomach on the ground, whipped out is 45 pistol, had it at the ready.

He laid there for about 10 minutes and then he got up and started walking again. Another guy threw another rock. And Lieutenant Davis again hit the ground, whipped out his 45 pistol, had it the ready. But this time, he didn't get back up. He started crawling.

They let him crawl about 10 yards. And--

Another guy?

--another guy threw another rock. And he kept crawling. Anyway, he crawled most of the way from his command post to our gun position, which as I mentioned was close to 100 yards.

Boy, that's sweet revenge.

When he got to our gun position, our sergeant told him everything was OK. Evidently, this man that was throwing up, throwing up cleared everything. Got rid of everything that was bothering him. Everything was fine. So that's how we got back at Lieutenant Davis.

Well, that sounds like sweet revenge.

Right. If you saw that in a movie--

Yeah.

--you'd say, well, wouldn't never happen in combat. It'd only happened in a movie.

But it really happened in combat.

Right.

Let's move forward a little bit. I want to come to the point where you and your brother, or maybe it was separately, I don't know how this happened, how did you come upon Dachau? Where were you and how is it that you ended up going there?

OK. We knew nothing about Dachau. Knew nothing about any of the concentration camps. They were completely foreign to us. We had never heard of them. Our mission that day was to capture Munich.

OK.

On the way to Munich, we pulled off the side of the road to set up a new gun position. And there was a strong odor in the air. Some other guy said, must be a chemical factory in this area.

I said no. That odor, I don't think, is from a chemical factory. I say, it reminds me of our mother used to go to the local meat market. In those days, they didn't have a kosher meat market. It was just a regular meat market.

So she would buy a whole, freshly dressed chicken, which you had to do in those days. They didn't sell parts of the chicken, like only the chicken breast, that kind of sort of thing. You had to buy the whole chicken, which she did.

She brought the chicken home, turned on the gas flame and the gas stove in the kitchen. Waved the chicken back and forth over the gas flame. It burned off all the fat. In the process, it also burned off some of the skin, gave off an odor.

I said, that's the odor I smell. Not from a chemical factory. So I said, I don't know where that odor was coming from, but that's the odor I smelled. Well, one of our Jeep drivers, Kenny Engles was his name, from Kansas City, Missouri, he came back and he said, there's a strange camp nearby.

I said, that's probably where that odor I smell is coming from. How far away is it? He said, you just walk a couple minutes through that wooded area, and you'll be at the camp.

And my brother and I walked through that small wooded area, and the first thing we saw was the entrance to the concentration camp which it said, Arbeit Mach Frei, which means work makes one free.

Did you know that that's what it meant?

At the time, we could read it, because it was German. And Yiddish was close enough we could understand what it was saying. But we didn't know what it meant.

Then we went into the camp and everything was quiet. The prisoners were all in the barracks. They were not outside having roll call or anything.

You know there were people there?

Pardon?

You knew that there were people still there?

Oh, yeah. We didn't know why it was so quiet. We found out later that what happened was we got there on April 29, 1945. The day before, Victor Maurer, who was a representative of the Swiss Red Cross, managed to get into the camp. All the SS officers had fled.

Many of them fled with a group of 2 to 3,000 Jews on a death march. You know, from that standpoint, I never could understand the mentality of the Germans. I would have thought that the German SS officers who wanted to flee, they would just leave, try to get into Switzerland or Italy or wherever.

Well, but they didn't flee by themselves. They took several thousand Jews, each one on a forced death march. I never understood that mentality. In any event, that's what happened.

So there you were in the camp. It was quiet. All the prisoners were in their barracks. What happened then?

Well, my brother only stayed in the camp about 40 minutes. Because we were afraid that-- well, we did see the ovens and then realized what the odor was coming from. But we didn't know anything about the camp. We didn't know if there were more camps like it, or this was some unique type of camp or what.

Were there still bodies near those ovens? Did you see anything? There were human remains?

Yes. Well, there were some bodies stacked up waiting to be put in the oven. In other words, as far as we knew, or found out later, they didn't put live people in the ovens and burn them alive. They only took the bodies of dead people and put those dead bodies in the oven and burned them up, you know, like cremated them.

But when you went in with your brother, were you alone? Or were you with other soldiers? Was there a unit of you that went in there?

Pardon?

How many American soldiers were with you, with you and your brother when you went into Dachau?

Well, originally, I don't know how many were there. Because, as I mentioned, we were on 105-millimeter howitzers. We were in close support of the 232nd infantry regiment-- or battalion, 232nd battalion. So I don't know how many went in the camp in addition to my brother and I.

I should rephrase that. What I wanted to really ask is when you went in with your brother, were you alone with him, or were there more soldiers with you, American soldiers with you?

Oh, no. We were in-- our battery was about 100 men, 100, 110 men. So we were all together.

OK. OK. And you say you stayed there for how long? You stayed in the camp itself for about how long? About 40 minutes?

About 30, 40 minutes, yeah.

OK. We want our parents to get a message from the war department telling them that their twin sons were missing in action. So we figured that's why we got back to our unit and didn't stay longer in the camp.

So you didn't know if there still would be German soldiers around there.

Correct.

And then what happened?

Well, as I mentioned, our target for that day was to capture Munich. And coming across Dachau, we just happened to be there. There was other American soldiers, maybe a mile away. They never saw Dachau, never heard of Dachau. Did not even experience Dachau.

The 45th division for years claimed they liberated Dachau. And the argument went back and forth, back and forth between the 45th and the 42nd of who actually liberated Dachau.

Well, we were there on April 29. The 45th was there on April 30. So they were there after we were. All the [INAUDIBLE] records show that.

Was there anybody from your unit who stayed? Or did you all retreat out of the camp once you saw what was there?

Well, we all retreated, because as I say, our target for the day was to capture Munich.

And you didn't speak to anybody then. Did you know that they were Jews in the camp? Did you have any idea of who these people were who were the prisoners? Yeah. We thought they were all Jewish, but of course, they were not all Jewish. Other nationalities were there as well.

My question is, how would you know that they were all Jewish? If you hadn't come across a concentration camp before, if you m hadn't seen this one before, you didn't know what it was, how would you realize that they were all Jewish in there, or many of them were Jewish?

Well, we just felt they were Jewish. In other words, it's just a feeling we had.

OK. OK. Did you ever go back after that to Dachau?

I went back in-- trying to remember the year. Anyway, a small liberal college in New Jersey had a weekend program for the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Dachau. And my wife and I went to that university for the weekend. And that's when I went back to Dachau.

50 years later?

Yeah.

But at that point, when you retreat and you continue to try and capture Munich, at that time you didn't go back?

No. Just kept on going.

Correct.

OK. Do you know what happened to any of the prisoners there? Did you ever come across any of them again?

Yes and no.

OK.

The reason I say yes or no is this. I've come across a number of survivors, Jews who survived Dachau. But Dachau, in addition to the main concentration camp, a 30 mile radius of Dachau, had about 30, 35 small work camps.

All of the survivors I have come across who were Jewish, they were not in the main concentration camp. They were all in one of the small work camps.

I see.

So they could tell me nothing about what happened when Dachau was liberated.

Got it. Got it. OK. So at this point, this must have been a shock. I mean, it would be a shock to anybody. But it must have been a shock to you, your brother.

It wasn't really a shock. Because by that time, we'd already seen enough death and destruction. You know, I wouldn't say we became immune to it. But we did become used to it. So more death and destruction just didn't affect us that much.

OK. How did things progress? I mean, the war is coming to a close. What happened with you?

Well, the war in Europe, you know, May the 8th, 1945. Nine, 10 days after you liberated Dachau.

Right. In any event, at the time, it really did not mean that much to us.

Did you ever know of what happened to prisoners? Like, were they taken to places? Once the liberating armies came in, how they were then treated? Were they fed? I mean, because many people who were starving and then were taken to hospitals and things like that, were you involved in anything like that?

No.

OK.

At the time, I had liberated a camera. It was a small Agfa, a brownie camera and a few rolls of film. So I took some pictures. I didn't take a lot of pictures, because I only had a limited supply of film. I didn't know if I'd be able to get more film after I used that film up.

So I said I took some pictures. But not a whole lot of pictures of any one place or any one event. But at Dachau, outside of the main gate, there was 30, 35 railroad boxcars.

The infantry guys in front of us had broken the locks off the boxcars and slid the doors open. They were freight cars. In other words, the doors would slide open. And inside, there was 30, 35 people.

And of course, it was three weeks from the time the train left a concentration camp in Poland until they got to Dachau. By that time, everybody inside were all dead. And over the three weeks, a lot of the train tracks had been bombed out by the American and British Air Force. So that's why it took three weeks for the train to get from point A to point B. In any event--

Did you take any pictures of that?

I took a picture of one of the boxcars when the doors were open. There was a body that was leaning up against the door. The body was still inside, but an arm or a leg would sort of flop out of the boxcar. So I took a picture of that.

Years later, I sent it to the Holocaust Museum in Washington was created. My wife and I went to the weekend commemoration of the liberation of the camp. And I gave a copy of that picture to the Holocaust Museum at that time.

Thank you.

Since then, they said they have no record of receiving that. It's possible they thought it was film. It was not film. It was just a picture I took with this small camera. There was no video or anything. So maybe it was before the Holocaust was looking for a video. I don't know. I don't know what they were looking for. But in any event, I do remember donating that copy of that picture to the Museum.

Well, we'll look for it. We'll look for it again. So when the end of the war comes, where were you? Were you in Munich? Or had you already gone beyond Munich?

When the war ended in May 8, 1945 in Europe--

Yes.

--we were in Rosenheim, Germany.

Rosenheim, OK.

Which was close to the Austrian border. So we then went on occupation duty in Salzburg. Before Salzburg, our first place of occupation duty was in Kufstein, Austria.

OK.

And Kufstein-- I'm laughing because I remember so well-- we were instructed to check everybody going on a train, a train going from Switzerland or Italy to Austria or Germany and also going in the opposite direction. We didn't know what we were doing. We had no training on how to interrogate these people.

So we would just look at their papers. Some of their papers were fake. We had no way of telling the difference between fake papers and real papers. And a high Nazi official could have appeared before me, told me his real name and everything, didn't mean anything to me. I just waved him on.

The chaos.

And in my opinion, that's how a lot of the high Nazi officials managed to escape to Argentina or Brazil. Because we didn't know what we were doing.

How long did you stay in occupation as an occupation force? How long did that last?

[SIREN BLARING IN BACKGROUND]

Well, I'd say after [INAUDIBLE], we were in occupation duty in Salzburg.

Mhm.

We'd better stop, and we'll pick it up from [CROSS TALK].

Oh, because of this? Mrs. Esther-- is she back?

OK. So when you were in Salzburg, tell me about that. And was that where you met up with other survivors?

Yes.

OK. Can you tell me about that?

Well, we were on occupation duty, as I mentioned, in Salzburg, Austria. So some of us were ordered to go to a concentration camp and take several thousand Jews to the Austrian Alps, to Bad Gastein, and off Bad Gastein in the Austrian Alps. Before the war, they were two of the finest reserve areas in all of Europe.

Then, and the same thing, still today, no difference. The hotels there piped in from deep underground hot mineral water into the hotel baths. And the hot mineral water didn't really do anything except make one feel better. But it didn't cure anything.

But then, and also today, same thing. The hotels would advertise, come there to that hotel, bathe in the hot mineral water, it will cure everything. And it will cure cancer. It will cure broken toenails. Whatever your problem, it would be cured.

Of course, it didn't cure anything. But that's how they publicized their hotels. That's why before the war, those hotels were very fine resort areas. People came there to bathe in the hot mineral water.

So what were you told to do?

Pardon?

What were you told to do?

What were we told to do?

Yeah, as occupation forces, regarding these hotels?

Well, for one thing, in Salzburg, we were at a former German army camp.

OK.

There was probably about 5,000 people in that former German army camp. All survivors, not only Jews, but other nationalities as well. And some were from Ukraine, for instance, and from other areas of Europe.

I remember all the prisoners, all of the survivors in the camp were told that on the outside of the camp was some railroad tank cars. It was German jet fuel in those tank cars. But not to go near them and definitely, don't drink that

German jet fuel because, you know, it would kill you.

Sure.

Well, some of the Russian men do not believe that. They thought it was vodka and the Germans were just telling them it was jet fuel because they didn't want them to get the vodka. So several of them climbed over the barbed wire fence at night, got into the tank cars, drank the jet fuel. And of course, the next morning, they were dead.

So this was already after the war, after that camp was liberated.

Right.

And so did you then try and heal, or did the army try and find some sort of medical help for the remaining prisoners?

Well, I was not in the medical corps. So I really don't know what the medical corps did or was doing. But we were--

Were you told to take them to these resorts that you mentioned to me in the Alps?

Yes. Well, one morning, I don't remember which camp it was, but we were driving all day. We had over 200 army vehicles and there was maybe 2, 3,000 Jews. We were riding all day. And late in the day-- I was not a driver. I was riding shotgun for one of the truck drivers.

Late in the day, there was screaming throughout the convoy of all of the army vehicles. All the drivers stopped to find what the screaming was about. All the Jews got out of the trucks and sat down on the side of the road.

The leaders of the Jewish group said it was Friday. The sun was going down. In a short while, it will be Shabbos, the Sabbath would start. They would not ride on the Sabbath.

I said, what you've been through, at another 30 minutes, we'll have you at the hotel. You'll have hot food, hot baths, clean clothing. What's another 30 minutes after what you've been through? They absolutely refused to go. In my mind, in my opinion, I felt that for years those Jews were not able or allowed to observe their Judaism.

That's right.

But in their minds, they held on to their faith. And that was probably one of the reasons that helped them to survive. In their mind, they had something to hold on to, something to look forward to, and that helped them survive. Whether that's true or not, I don't know. But that's the way I felt at the time.

So what did you guys do?

Pardon?

What did you do? Did you just stay there?

Yes. The army brought out blankets. The field kitchen prepared hot food. And Friday night and all day Saturday, they slept under their blankets and the hot food the army provided. And then when the sun went down on Saturday, they all got back in the trucks, we took them the remaining 30 minutes to the hotel.

Wow.

And frankly, emotionally and mentally, that affected me more than being at the liberation of Dachau.

How do you explain that?

How do I explain that? I just felt that. I just felt that here was--

[PHONE RINGING IN BACKGROUND]

OK. I'm sorry. There was an interruption.

I just felt that, you know, that's what happened. And that's the way it was.

That it hit you more. It just hit you more.

I said emotionally and mentally, it had a greater effect on me than being the liberation of Dachau concentration camp.

When did you find out about your father's youngest sister and what had happened to her?

Well, as typical in those days, our parents never talked about the old country. Because what they left in Russia was really not worth talking about. They had a hard life, a difficult life there. So they didn't really talk about it.

But my father did mention several times about his younger sister and her husband and three small children who were still living there in Pushelat, Pusalotas Lithuania, when the Germans invaded. They could have been murdered by the local Lithuanians. Or they could have been murdered by the Germans.

Some of the Jews in Pushelat were murdered there, mainly by the Lithuanians. And the rest of them were forced to walk to Ponevezh, which was about, I don't know, 18, 20 miles away. And in any event, so I don't know why they were murdered in Pushelat or whether they were murdered after they were in Ponevezh.

Do you know your aunt's name?

Pardon?

Your aunt's name, the one who was murdered, your father's youngest sister? What was her name?

I did know it. But right now, I'm having a senior moment. I can't remember.

OK. Do you remember when you learned of what had happened to them? Was that after the war?

Yes. After the war.

And would it be right after the war or many years later?

It had to be years later. Because as I mentioned at the time, we didn't know anything about these camps. And we didn't know what they were all about. We didn't know what happened there. We didn't know what they were like before that. It was all just unknown to us.

Would you like another Kleenex?

I have got it.

We're coming to the end.

Can we go forward? Mr. Margol, I have only one last question to ask you. Is there anything else you'd like to add to what we've talked about today?

Anything to add?

To what you've told me.

I can't think of anything at the moment. I'm sure I will. It often happens. It often happens.

We have a way of capturing some of those thoughts later. So we can be in touch about that. But if not, then in that case, what I will do is I'll conclude our interview. And I will say that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Howard Margol, on October 20, 2015, in Atlanta, Georgia. Thank you very much.

Thank you.

OK. I really appreciate--