

Vincent Koch

February 22, 2017

RG-50.030.0914

Abstract

Vincent Koch (né Vincent Kucharsky) was born on May 24, 1925 in New York, New York and soon moved to the Bronx where he was brought up. He had a younger brother, Jerome, born June 4, 1930. His parents were Abraham Kucharsky and Rebecca Golub. His father's parents came from Russia and his father was born in London on their way here and his mother was born in Minsk, Russia. They spoke English at home. His father was a painter/decorator. Vincent lived in an Italian neighborhood with some Jews and Irish. The neighborhood learned that war may be coming as listened to radio broadcasts and read newspapers but there was little talk of politics at home. Vincent has pleasant memories of his father who was not the disciplinarian and passed away at age 47. Vincent graduated from high school on June 30, 1943 and was drafted into the Army on August 8, 1943. He was sent to Mississippi for Basic Training for one year during which time his mother made a surprise visit. Vincent was in a company of 1,000 men and only five other Jews and a Sergeant was thought to be anti-Semitic. Vincent was learning to be a Mortar Sergeant in the Artillery. Every morning he put on tefillim to pray as he thought it would protect him. In November '44 his Division of 13 to 15,000 men were sent overseas. It took them 28 days to cross the ocean as they had to zigzag to confuse the German submarines. He landed at Marseilles in December '44. He received a Bronze Star for their first skirmish at Zweibrucken, Germany on February 16, 1945. He was awarded another Bronze Star for participating in the Battle of the Bulge in December and a Purple Heart for being wounded with shrapnel in his right shoulder and leg. His unit walked into Heidelberg and the German soldiers surrendered. They went around the fortress at the Maginot Line. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant and his pay rose from \$21 a month to \$28 a month. Through corresponding with his father, Vincent learned about concentration camps so knew what he was seeing when he arrived at Landsberg. He was the first American soldier that entered Landsberg, a satellite camp of Dachau, in April 1945. First he saw 15 prisoners in a hut who were emaciated and unable to walk. He offered them his food package but his captain quickly ordered him to remove it. Vincent said the odor in the hut was indescribably horrible. He spoke Yiddish to other prisoners who were walking around the camp. In the camp was a large hole of the remains of prisoners who were either shot or burned alive by gasoline the Nazis had poured on their huts. The next day Vincent took General Eisenhower for a tour of the camp. Vincent went into the nearby town with others in the 63rd Infantry Division and saw the civilians who were horrified to learn what had happened at the camp and were concerned what the American soldiers might do to them. When he arrived in Munich, Vincent was sent to Le Havre to board a ship for Japan but the war ended in Japan so he was taken off the ship. He was stationed with the Army of Occupation in Europe for a year. He went to Belgium, then Antwerp and then to Germany where he policed the civilians and spoke Yiddish to question the prisoners. Vincent was discharged from the Army and returned home in '46 and got married in January '47. After the interview, Vincent shows his

first Bronze star, a photo of himself and two Army friends in front of him and a photo of the ten men in his squad where he was the Sergeant of the 3rd Battalion of Company M.