

So here we are. We were interrupted briefly. And I was just asking you about how you were-- how you entered the military. And you said that as an enemy alien, you couldn't enlist. But you were drafted within a month and a half of your birthday, your 18th birthday.

That's right.

And when you were drafted, what's the first point of induction?

Yes, I went to the reception center at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

OK.

And usually, the kids stay there for three days. And the first day you get processed, you get all kinds of shots, and you get your equipment issued, your uniform. And then the second day, they wake you up at 4:00 in the morning and put you on KP.

Oh, geez.

And you stay all day in that kitchen down there until they release you, maybe about 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening. And you're worn out. And you know right then and there that it's something that you will want to avoid like the plague. And I [INAUDIBLE] pretty well in my army career, I only got KP two more times in that whole period.

But anyway, the third day you see movies. You get-- we got to see *Why We Fight*, which was sort of a propaganda film to show exactly the reason of why the United States was at war. And the second film was how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.

Oh, good god. What a combination you know. It's a double feature.

That's right. So, anyway, I went through that whole cycle of the three days. And then the next thing that should happen is you should be on orders to go someplace for basic training. Well, everybody left who I came in with and I'm still sitting there. So I take a stroll over to my sergeant. And now here's has another name I remember-- Sergeant Chereaux.

OK.

He was an Indian, American Indian. And I looked up at him as a master.

Oh, well, how do you spell his last name?

Pardon me.

How do spell--

How would you spell his last name.

Oh, I think it's C-H-E-R-E-A-U-X.

OK.

Something like that.

So Chereaux. Something like that.

Yeah.

Now, one thing, for people who don't know what KP is, what did it stand for, and what were the duties?

Well, his first name was Sergeant.

OK. OK, yes. No, no, no, I'm going back a little bit to day two. You said day two, you had KP patrol. What does it stand for? What does KP stand for?

For kitchen police.

And what do kitchen police have to do?

Kitchen police have to clean all the pots and pans, and wash the dishes, and help prepare the food if necessary, like peeling potatoes, and things of that nature, anything that's [?nasty?] in the kitchen.

So in other words, it's a very high falutin kind of term for a very lowly job.

Absolutely, anything that cooks don't want to do, that's KP.

Oh, gosh. OK, and the other thing, the other question I had is, when you watched that film about why you're fighting--

Yes.

--was it a film that focused on what's going on in Germany, and what is Nazism, and all that? Or did it focus on other things?

Yes, it did. It focused on that. They brought up Germany as it came through the political intricacies, as to how Hitler came to power. And then it went into how Hitler went into the Rhineland. And then it went on as to the start of the war.

And was it-- you see, because you were one of those people in that room who had firsthand knowledge, so you had seen it from the inside, was the film accurately reflecting those things? Even if it was, let's say, a propaganda film, was it true?

Yes, it was-- everything, from what I saw, I validated it myself as to what I had experienced, which meshed right into what they were showing--

OK.

--definitely.

OK, OK.

An honest film. And it was very good. It was an excellent film.

OK. And the other one, how would you rate the other film?

Well, let me [INAUDIBLE] a second.

OK.

Well, I went to Sergeant Chereaux, and I said, hey, I don't get any orders. And he said, well, let me check on this.

Mm-hmm.

And he came back. And he said, well, that's very simple. You're an enemy alien and you're being investigated by the FBI. So you and I, we're going to have some sessions together for quite a while, because they don't do this overnight. And so, at that point, I thought, oh, oh, oh, I don't want to go to KP again.

Oh, yeah.

So I explained I had ROTC in high school and how I had a summer term of ROTC. And that I know very well what's going on in the military. And I got all this training. And maybe this can be helpful for what I do.

He said, OK, come back tomorrow morning, 8 o'clock. So I came back in the morning. And he has an arm band for me. The arm band has a corporal insignia on the arm band. He says you are known acting gadget.

That was-- I was an acting corporal. I wasn't paid as a corporal. But I was-- I had the prestige of a corporal for all those recruits that came-- that came on. And my job was to take those recruits in formation and march them to the theater to see *Why We Fight* and the sexual disease movie.

So I have, I would say, if there is a record book to be gotten, I have seen that sexual disease film more than anybody else in the United States Army.

[LAUGHTER]

And it was very graphic, because there were numerous times where some kids would pass out. And I had to call the ambulance to get them out of there.

Oh, my goodness.

Yeah. [INAUDIBLE] kids said they couldn't take it.

Well, another person who had come to the United States from Germany is Billy Wilder. Do you remember the Hollywood director? He directed *Some Like it Hot* and a lot of other kinds of fascicles films. And what you just described would have fit in one of these films.

There you are, an enemy alien, who is now a sort of semi-official corporal, but a gadget. And what is your job?

That's right.

To bring new recruits to watch those movies. I mean, if there isn't something for set up for a farce, I don't know what it-- if this isn't it, what it could be.

I'll never forget Sergeant Chereaux's name, because he saved me from a whole two months or three months of KP.

Yes, yes.

Would have landed.

So did you ever find out how the FBI investigated you as an enemy alien?

Well, I heard from some people that I knew that they were contacted and it was very perfunctory. Do you know Frank Cohn? Does he seem to be loyal to the United States? And that was about it.

OK, OK.

But I don't know-- I don't know what they did on records and whatnot.

OK.

But it took them over two months before I was suddenly released and got orders to go Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to Columbia, South Carolina.

OK.

And there, I went into the-- well, no, wait a second. I'm getting ahead of myself. I went first to basic training, which was Fort Benning, Georgia.

OK.

And important, because Fort Benning, Georgia not only gave me the basic training, but one fine day, they took me out and brought me to Columbus, Georgia to the Middle District Court of Georgia, the federal court. And I was sworn in as a citizen.

Well, that's--

They made me a citizen.

--that's huge.

Yeah. That was huge.

Yeah.

And it was huge only for me because I don't remember anybody congratulating me, or saying anything, or whatever. Because I went there in the morning. I got sworn in. And I went back and I was in training again in the afternoon.

Wow.

But It was an humongous better feeling for me because I felt no longer as an outsider. I was now a citizen. And that made a big, big difference as far as my own feelings were concerned. So the only one who congratulated me was me.

Oh. But that's enough. That's enough. And that--

It was enough.

You anticipated one of my questions, was did getting the citizenship in such a perfunctory way, nevertheless have a change for you on the inside? And you just answered that. It did.

Yes, it did, no question. It made me feel completely different. And I was not insecure anymore. I was no longer an enemy alien. I was not on any threat situation of getting deported for whatever reason. I was a citizen.

Yeah, yeah.

As I said-- I think I said, my parents didn't have it that easy. They had to go to Canada for one day. And then they came back as regular immigrants. And then that's the time when it started for five years to become a citizen.

So did they get-- did they get citizenship before the war ended?

No, no, they did not. My mother had the citizenship five years after 40-- I think they went there in 1944. So it must have been 1949 when she became a citizen. And my father died before he became a citizen.

Wow.

Yeah.

But you know, after citizenship, how long do you stay in Fort Benning?

Oh, well, I was in the military. I wasn't staying with them.

No, no, no, no, I'm saying how long did you stay in Fort Benning, Georgia at basic training?

I was about a three-month deal, basic training.

OK.

And then I still remember that sergeant's name, Sergeant [? Kingery, ?] but his full day was [? Kingery ?] on the Double. Because whenever he gave an [AUDIO OUT] "and on the double." Sergeant [? Kingery ?] on the Double.

Well, in basic training, were most of the other recruits also from the Northeast? Or had they come from all over the place?

They were all from the East Coast.

OK.

Fort Benning.

And were they like-- were they like the people that you had met New York already? Or did you get to see a bigger cross-section of US-- of US--

All over the East Coast.

Yeah.

From all over the East Coast. There were Southerners and there were Northerners. There was a whole bunch of people. And it was good camaraderie. And I had no problems. Nobody ever said anything derogatory to me. First of all, they didn't know I was born in Germany. I didn't-- I never bragged about that. I never talked about it.

Yeah.

So nobody knew. And by then, my accent had been demolished to the point that they couldn't tell.

Did you have like a New York accent?

Well, a little bit of a New York accent, yes, I would say so.

OK. And was-- did you ever feel or sense any kind of anti-Semitism in the ranks?

Any what?

And any anti-Semitism?

No, I didn't. I didn't, not at all.

OK.

But the subject just never came up.

OK.

Nobody discussed it. And I wasn't going to bring it up. So nothing.

OK. So your superiors at that point do not know about your German fluency?

No, they did not. They did not know all about it. And they didn't recognize it, although it was on my records.

OK, so after--

And what happened when basic was over, I was-- actually, going into basic training, I was advised that I was going to be in the ASTP program, that's Army Specialized Training Program.

OK.

And what that program was about, that people who had started college, like me. I had only one summer term. And if they knew what happened that summer term, I don't think they would have put me in there. But the idea was that after basic training, I was to go back to college, get a college degree. And then probably become an officer and be exploited that way.

Well, of course, it was the dumbest program in the world. And it would have taken me three years to graduate from college, which would make me a graduate in 1946.

Exactly.

What was-- so in retrospect, it was absolutely ridiculous. And somebody, while I was in training, at basic training, must have caught on to that. Because when I finished basic training, they said forget about the ASTP program. You're not going anywhere except the infantry. You're an infantry replacement. OK, so off I went to the 87th Infantry Division in Fort Jackson, South Carolina-- Columbia, South Carolina.

So you were army. Of the different branches, you were in the army. Not the Air Force, not the Navy, not the Marines.

I was the Army, yes, just Army.

OK.

Most draftees went into the army, because the others got mainly in on the basis of volunteers.

Got it.

Like Paula's-- Paula's brother became a marine. And well, at the end of-- at the end of-- he never came home. He died after-- just at the end of the war.

Oh, my.

Yeah, it was a real-- real tragedy. I don't think she ever got over that either.

What a loss.

Yeah. But anyway, here I was in the 87th Infantry. And I'm in one of the infantry units. And I tell them that I speak German. So they were going to send me eventually to the I&R platoon, the Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon.

But while at basic-- at advanced infantry training, kept me in one of the companies.

And we had a class on a gas attack because the Germans used gas during World War I. So we weren't going to be caught short. So they had training in gas attacks. And I was placed in the training element.

And I had my gas mask on while the instructor had drawn a hand grenade with which he thought was smoke to make it more realistic. And he threw the smoke grenade, which turned out to be white phosphorus.

Oh, my.

White phosphorus. So luckily, with my gas mask, it didn't hit me in the face. But it hit me around the ears. And it hit me on my hands and my pack-- backpack was on fire. And I took off to the dispensary. I was the first one in the dispensary. While running, I got rid of the backpack. So there were no burns on my back. But my arms and my ears were on fire.

And finally, they figured out what it was, that it was white phosphorus. And they got a bucket of water and stuck my hands in there. And they applied water compresses to my ears. And that stopped the burning finally. And I ended up in the hospital for over a month--

Wow.

--at Fort Jackson. So when I came out of the hospital, they had progressed from five-mile marches to 25-mile marches. So I get in there and I'm off on my march. And about 15 miles or so, I pass out. And they got to take me back by Jeep. I didn't finish the march.

Well, a fellow like that isn't necessarily the best soldier. So when the word came to the 87th Infantry Division that they were assessed people that they have to ship out as infantry replacements overseas immediately, because the invasion had happened and they needed infantry replacements, I was one of the replacements.

I could have predicted that because I wasn't being a good soldier for that company. So off I went as an infantry replacement to-- let's see, it was-- I can't even remember the name of the fort-- that was in New York-- that we went through. But after three days there, they were going to give you a pass to go home. And it was right in New York, Fort Mammoth--

OK.

--Fort Mammoth.

OK.

And I was there are only three days. On the fourth day, when I could have gone home-- and I hadn't been home for all this period of time. So that was over-- that was almost a year that I hadn't been home. They had they shipped me out, this time on the Queen Mary.

Whoa.

Yeah, the Queen Mary. But it wasn't exactly first class passes like Statendam, There were hammocks, five rows of hammocks, one on top of the other. And I got myself the top-- the top hammock. And I immediately volunteered for guard duty because I knew I didn't want to go on KP.

Well, tell me, is there a hierarchy of preference when it comes to the hammocks and whether you're on the top or on the bottom?

Well, no, it was just a matter of first come, first served.

I see. OK, and--

And it didn't matter much, because I had my shift on guard duty. And then when I went to sleep, I was usually alone because they only fed two meals. And when you finished the first meal, you had to get in line to get the second meal.

So people were in line just about the entire-- the entire voyage, except for the people on guard duty. They went on in the front of the line to eat because they got to go on guard duty.

Ah.

Yes.

So when did you leave the United States? That is, June '44 is the invasion.

Sometime in September of '44.

OK, so that's about three, four months after D-Day--

Yes.

--which was June 6th.

6th-- June 6th was D-Day because that was my wife's birthday. [LAUGHS]. So I can never forget her birthday. Oh, wait a second, I can never forget D-Day, rather.

We barely knew each other then. [LAUGHS].

Now you have two reasons to remember--

I didn't even write her.

--June 6th. I know.

She can say that.

Yeah.

Anyway, it was a-- guard duty wasn't that strenuous in September on the ocean. It was a little windy and so forth, but no problem.

OK. And where did you land?

You know what I forgot--

OK.

--what I forgot to tell you about that first class passage of the Statendam when I came to the States. The smartest thing was that we had first-class tickets, because anybody else had to go to Ellis Island. And there they would have checked and found out that my father was already in country. And they may have put me right on the boat to go back home.

But as a first-class passenger, I go immediately from the boat right on the dock where my father was waiting for me.

Wow, what a difference.

So another place that we went first-class passage. And money counts. Yep, no question.

It certainly does. It certainly does.

Yeah.

I don't know why I forgot to tell you that, because that was important.

And who would have thought--

Because it was [INAUDIBLE].

Who would have thought that-- yeah, who would have thought that making such a decision, whether you go first class or some other way would have such an effect? I mean, that it could be so crucial? Generally, you would think, well, it costs more, it costs less. Those are the only factors that play.

Well, they tried to be accommodating to these-- these are all visitors coming into the States. These are not-- these are not refugees. I mean, these are not refugees, at least they're not recognized as refugees.

They're all recognized as visitors to the United States. And the first-class passengers have money, so they've got to take care of first-class passengers. And off they went right away onto the dock, and no Ellis Island.

Wow.

Just the questions of have you got any this, or that, or the other thing.

Yeah.

And off you went. Yeah, and let me see your passport.

So tell me then, where did you land? Was it in Britain someplace?

It was on-- it was-- it was on the 42nd Street, around there, the docks that-- in the-- in the Hudson River.

Oh, I see. You're talking about when you came to the States. I'm now thinking, we're back on the ship going-- on the Queen Mary, back to Europe. And did you land in Britain with--

No. Going on to the-- now this was the Statendam that I'm talking about that docked at 42nd Street.

I understand that. I understand that. But I'm back there on the Queen Mary now. And wanting to know--

Queen Mary--

Yeah.

--I'm trying to remember where we've caught it, and I can't remember where we caught it.

OK.

Because they just put us on buses, and then we disembarked and got right on the boat.

Yeah, but where in Britain did you land? When it crossed the ocean, where did you land?

In Southampton.

OK. Did you stay there?

we landed-- and we spent a whole month in Southampton, near Southampton, in a replacement center there. And why is beyond me. Because they needed replacements so badly, and here we were, at least three weeks, almost four weeks, in Britain doing nothing-- no training, no nothing.

Just hanging all around?

Just running around. At night, we snuck out, and went to the local pubs, and met girls or met people. And we usually-- even with \$21 a month, we had more money than the Brits had. There was no problem at getting a girlfriend or something for an evening for a dance. And that's all we did in Britain. No-- no type of training. Silly, sometimes.

Yeah.

But one thing that happened was I got interviewed. And they found out I spoke German. You would think that something would happen, but no, I remained in the infantry replacement stream. So after Britain, we're off on a liberty ship into mid-channel. And in mid-channel, we go down on the rope ladders into landing crafts. And we land on the beach, Omaha Beach, where the invasion was.

Yeah.

But we never got our feet wet, because by then they had built a little bit of a dock. So from the assault boat, we went right on the dock and walked with full field gears, everything, into a train, into the boxcars. And there were maybe 40 of us in one boxcar.

And it was the same type of thing that they did with the concentration camp people, except they didn't get any food. And they got shut in. And we weren't really shut in. But we could open the doors. And we could breathe the fresh air. And the train stopped at times. And they let us get out.

And one time, they even let us run over to the next village and get some cheese and bread. And then the whistle blew. Then we had to run like heck to get back onto the train. But we had gotten some nice food that way, and not the rations that were usually given out. Anyway, it was almost a pleasant voyage.

But we went from [PLACE] to Le Mans. And we stayed in Le Mans. And back, then on trains again, into Belgium. And I went all the way up to Malmedy in Belgium in the replacement stream.

And there, they put us into foxholes just to condition us before we were going to get some other assignment with the regular infantry unit. So this was now early December, 1944.

Right.

Early December, '44, I'm in the replacement stream up in Malmedy. And suddenly, I get orders to go back to Le Vesinet near Paris, for a two-week course in intelligence. They finally recognized I spoke German.

Well, in some ways, that is very lucky. Because wasn't the Battle of the Bulge taking place just around that time in that area?

Well, just wait. Yeah, you're getting ahead of me.

Oh, sorry. OK.

I get to-- I came to Le Vesinet. And it's a two-week course. One-week course-- they pull me out. They need me so badly because they need me. So I become a full-fledged intelligence agent with one week of training.

Oh, geez.

A training most of the kids, who had my background, who had been pulled out when they first went to basic training, because they knew German, they went to camp Dixon-- Camp Ritchie in Maryland where they had a six-month course in training.

Exactly.

Those were the [INAUDIBLE] that I married up which later on.

OK.

One week of training. And it made a big difference. Because instead of a PFC stripe that I had, I put on a US-US. Nobody knew my rank. I had the same rank that I was assigned to at team. It was Interrogator, Prisoner of War Team, Number 66, assigned to T-Force. That's Task Force, 12th Army Group.

The 12th Army Group was right under General Bradley. That was the headquarters that controlled Patton's Army, and the 1st Army, and the 9th Army. That was 12th Army Group.

Wow.

So we were assigned to-- all the way up to the top. And there was-- the headquarters of T-Force was in Luxembourg. I went to Luxembourg for one day. And then off to Remerschen in Belgium, where we met the rest of the T-Force forward, the people who were destined to go into Germany.

And our mission was to go into the big towns as soon as they were captured, right behind the infantry. And we would have personality targets and building targets. Personality targets were people who were going to be tried for war crimes.

OK.

And personality targets were anything that was useful to the occupying force, whether it was in support of the prosecution of war criminals, like the Nazi headquarters and the governmental headquarters, or whether it was of use to the force on the ground, like the utilities, and various other economic installations, and whatnot. Those were the building targets. That were submission of T-Force.

OK.

When we got there, it was the second week of December 1946.

'44.

One week [AUDIO OUT] the Battle of the Bulge.

Yeah, '44 you mean, 1944.

'44, yeah, '44, excuse me.

Yeah.

And one week later, the 16th of December 1944, the Battle of the Bulge broke out. And that was a mess. That was a real mess.

Yeah.

Well--

So how did it-- how did it-- how did this Battle of the Bulge come to you? In what way did you experience it?

OK, let me tell you how I got informed of it. On my interrogator prisoner of war team, it was headed by a captain and had a lieutenant, and then had an SAO in charge, and had a driver and two interpreters. A staff sergeant by the name of [? Froelich, ?] Larry [? Froelich, ?] and we called him Flo, and a PFC by the name of Frank Cohn. So we were the two interpreters.

OK.

And I met Flo and Remerschen when I arrived. And we teamed up his buddies immediately. He had a US, and I had a US, so none of us looked different. There was no question of rank. But he was older, so I deferred to him most of the time. Anyway--

Did he have history like yours?

Pardon me?

Did he have a history like yours?

Yes, he had been through Camp Ritchie. He was trained fully.

OK, but he was also from Germany or Austria and had come to the United States.

He was from Germany.

He was from Germany.

I-- I forgot what town.

OK.

Anyway, we teamed up. As a matter of fact, we went in Paris together on leave during the time of the training. I had met him already.

OK.

And I had a few words of French, which I had known from my German schooling. So I was the only one who was a linguist in French. We met a couple of girls from France, from Paris. These were schoolgirls who wanted to date a soldier. And we saw them sitting there.

And we-- with my French, I was the one who was sent out to make contact. And with my great French, and my hands and feet, I communicated that we would like to invite them to our table and buy him a drink or whatever. We had a wonderful night that time.

And I had gotten stature, because I spoke French. So Flo was very happy to team up with me. Anyway--

So when you get--

--here we were in Remerschen. And I said, I was all the way up in Malmedy. And I had met some girls in Malmedy. And we went to their homes, would you believe it, their fathers were on the pictures on the wall in German uniforms. They're fighting us, and here we're invited to their homes.

You want to see that? And Flo said, yeah, let's go to Malmedy. And Malmedy was a place that Germans, they hit right in the beginning.

Wow.

And this is 16th of December. And we're halfway up to Malmedy when the truck gets stopped and said, the Germans have just broken through, you've got to get back to your units. So we immediately got off the truck and hitchhiked on another truck.

The other truck, of all things, had unexploded demolitions. So we were sitting on unexploded demolitions in the back of a truck, going back to Remerschen.

Wow.

And when I came to Remerschen, it was havoc. Everybody was running around trying to pack because we were going to have to move out. And there was-- it wasn't that easy to regroup. Because they had-- they had spread out to train and whatever, and had made arrangements for training, I guess. And all that had to be taken down and whatnot.

And as chance would have it, I had been through, in the replacement stream, through a town called [?Chievres?]. And there were some very nice Belgium people who invited me and my buddy at the time-- again, we had volunteered for guard duty in order to get out of KP.

So he was on guard duty for one shift and I was on guard duty for a different shift. So when we slept, we had a pup tent, we could have the whole pup tent for sleeping because the other one was on duty.

OK.

So that worked out beautifully. But when we were both off for one-- because these were eight-hour shifts. So eight hours I was on, eight hours he was on, and eight hours we had enough time to do something together. And we went around and reconnoited. Went down the hill and we found a guest house. I guess-- I forgot the French name of it.

Anyway, it was a place where you drink. And they had some sleeping accommodations too. And the people were very nice. There was a daughter, our age, which we, naturally, associated with. And there was a-- she had a brother who was a little bit older.

And then the father and mother were there. And they were very kind. And offered us a sleeping arrangement upstairs in a feather bed instead of the pup tent. So naturally, we took that offer up. And we made an agreement that if anybody-- only one of us would be sleeping there, and the other one would be on duty.

OK.

If there should be any orders coming through, the person who was there would have to run down about a mile and a half and get us, and get back, so that we wouldn't miss shipment.

OK.

Well, one nice Sunday morning, I got up early from my-- not early, but late, from my feather bed. And I stroll up the hill. And I look where the hill had all the pup tents, and all I see is one half pup tent, mine.

Oh, geez.

Everybody had left. I said, oh, my god, I missed shipment. Why didn't he get me? Why didn't he get me? So I go into a field next door, where they had a battalion headquarters of the replacement depot. And sheepishly, I tell the sergeant, I

don't know what happened, but I missed shipment.

And he gets the orders. He said, of course, you the shipment because you were the only one who wasn't on shipment orders. Well, I didn't know why that happened, but I knew that's why the kid never got me.

And later on, I figured it out. Because they had already earmarked me to go back to Le Vesinet. And that's why I wasn't on shipment orders. But when the whole battalion moved up to the Belgian border, I naturally had to go with the replacement battalion, up there to Malmedy.

OK.

Anyway, here I am now, going back. And the girl and boy from that guesthouse and found out that we were very close by in Remerschen. And they had come to visit me. So I told them, well, I'm sorry, but you better go home immediately because the Germans have broken through. And we were going to move out.

And I was almost in tears telling them goodbye. Because I didn't want them to get caught by the Germans again.

OK. And did they leave?

[?Chievres?] was overrun by the Germans, but only about a day or so. And they survived. I found that out later on.

OK.

Anyway--

So what about you folks? Your-- did you-- I have my notes that part of your job was looking for Germans in US uniforms.

That came-- that came after getting out of Remerschen.

Oh, I see.

The first thing we had to do was to get out of Remerschen. And they put me on guard duty of a little trail coming into the headquarters while they were packing for the move. And my orders were don't let any Germans come in. Here's your rifle. Here's your flashlight. And that's it. No other orders.

Well, this was the most scary night that I had in the whole war. Because nobody knew what was going on. All kinds of rumors the Germans had broken through. They're right next door. No, they're not right next door. Parachuters was coming. They're right on top of us. No, they're not.

Anyway, I'm standing there. And a truck comes. And I get in the middle of the road. And I halt the truck. And the driver says, what the heck are you doing? And I said, I'm stopping you to make sure you're not one of the Germans because we're packing.

He said, if I was one of the Germans, you would be dead right now. Don't stand in the middle of road, get in a ditch. And get it from there.

OK, good idea. So I go in the ditch. The next vehicle comes. I yell, halt, halt, halt. They don't hear me. They go right through. I'm about doing my job. I don't know what to do. And here-- and people came walking around and said-- and you could hear firing in the area around us.

And they said, yeah, the Germans are right on top, they're down there, they're fighting over there. And they may be coming in any minute or whatnot. It was really, really scary.

Around midnight, they finally called me in. And we go into a Jeep, a blackout move. And that's a real risky situation. At that time, I didn't know how to drive. And luckily, I was not a driver. Because his mission was to see a little slit of light that was in the back of the vehicle in front of him.

And if he lost that little slit, and he lost the vehicle in front, then everybody behind him was going to be lost. So it was very critical that he would still take a look at the slit. And he told me, you too, look at the slit. And we kept looking at the slit to make sure we weren't losing the vehicle in front. The whole thing was a mess.

And we finally-- we were for, supposedly, to Antwerp. But we never got to Antwerp. Antwerp was this port that we would have to hold under any circumstances. And that was the target of the German offensive.

I see.

But we got to Namur. In Namur, we got orders that Germans had broken through, four in a Jeep, in American uniforms. And they were causing all kinds of havoc in back of our lines. They were blowing things up. They were moving direction signs around. And shooting single soldiers if they found them and so forth.

So our mission was to find those Germans who had broken through. And by that, we started patrols all through Belgium. Remerschen, Dinant, Rochefort, Chimay, [PLACE]. I still remember the towns that we were going through.

And it was-- the worst part of that was it was miserable. It was cold and it was overcast. And it was either sleeting, or snowing, or freezing rain. And here we were in a Jeep with a windshield down, because you can't shoot through a windshield. And even going 25 miles an hour, the blast of air that hits, even at that speed, at that temperature, is just miserable.

But being a PFC, I was in the backseat behind the captain. And what he didn't know was that he was my shield. Because he got the worst of the blast. I just got what blast was left after it got wiped out on him. So I was in much better shape than he was. And, of course, I never told him that.

Well, did you ever find those Germans who had been-- who had infiltrated in US uniforms?

Well, we never caught any. But we did find them. Because when they hit-- we were stationed in Namur. And when we got to Dinant, one of the infantry roadblocks had intercepted these Germans, and had taken a bazooka, and shot the Jeep apart.

And there were four Germans laying dead. And we went over there to examine them. And the only thing we found on them were dog tags. They had gotten themselves dog tags from either dead or captured soldiers. We confiscated them and turned them in. But we got no other intelligence out of them, because they had no other papers except maps of the area, which were not even marked up.

But we know it was a legitimate mission because these were definitely four Germans. You could tell by their haircuts they had and the features that they portrayed.

So their identity-- their actual identities were never established.

No, no, never established. And nobody could care anyway.

Of course, of course.

And we didn't bother with them. We left them laying there. And the infantry left them laying there. And God knows what-- whoever removed the bodies. I don't know.

Where did you go after that? Did you cross into Germany? Or did you stay in Belgium?

Well, during the Battle of the Bulge, we-- everybody stayed in Belgium.

OK.

Because we had gotten-- some units had gotten to capture the city of Aachen--

Right.

--across the border in Germany, and they were chased out--

OK.

--when the Bulge started. So there was no-- there was nothing in Germany of the US force when the Bulge started.

OK.

We were [INAUDIBLE].

So It was only after the Bulge was over.

Right. Well, after the Bulge-- well, of course, this lasted-- do you want one story? It's a funny story--

Sure.

--in a way.

Sure.

It wasn't funny at the time. What happened was we were making these rounds. And we could tell at one point it was-- it was a captain, the two interpreters and a driver. That's who the four were trying to find these Germans.

So we could see the captain looked at the map, and looked around, and looked around. He didn't know where we were. And this is not healthy. You don't want to be lost.

No.

As chance would have it, we could see an American unit deployed on a little hillside. And we said to the captain, let's just stop, let's stop and let's find out where we are. So reluctantly, the captain says, OK. And we parked the vehicle. And he says, Cohn, come with me.

So the two of us trudge up the hillside. And there was a lieutenant who had drug a table out of the farmhouse next door. And he had his maps over there. So it was very simple. All that-- Captain [PERSON] was his name-- all he had to do was ask where-- can you show us where we are?

But no, he didn't want to show that he was lost. He said, "Lieutenant, I'm Captain [PERSON], Military Intelligence. Give me a briefing on the situation." We didn't have any ranks on. We have only the USUS. And he looks us up and down.

He says, "We got reports of four Krauts who penetrated our lines, and you guys look just like it. The captain said, now, of course, we're Americans, "What do you want?" So the lieutenant said, "OK." He says, "What's the fifth general order?"

Well, there were 12 general orders that every soldier knew. The first one was to walk by the post in a military manner. I don't remember the others anymore. But at that time, I did. But they didn't ask me, they asked him, and he had no idea.

Well, he said, "OK, who won the World Series?" The captain looked at me. I looked at him. I didn't know who won the World Series. That was not of interest to me and it wasn't any of interest to him. So he didn't know.

He said, "OK, recite the "Star Spangled Banner."" And the captain says, "Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light." And you gets stuck. He's not singing it and he gets stuck. Well, by now, more and more people had gathered around us. And now there, the other interpreter, Flo-- Flo was a refugee just like me. But he came when he was a little bit older.

OK.

So when he came running up he came with a heavy German accent, yelling, [SPEAKING GERMAN].

Oh, god.

That's all that was needed. An MI was in my stomach. An MI was in the captain's stomach. AN MI was in Flo's stomach. And they ran down and got the driver. And we were now prisoners of war of the Americans.

Oh, god. Oh, god.

It lasted for seven hours. And it was not pleasant, believe me. And it was not funny, believe me. Now it's funny. It wasn't funny then, having that [INAUDIBLE] and being out there for seven hours in the miserable weather without a shelter. Because they weren't too kind to us.

How did they find out that you actually were who you were?

Well, of course, the worst thing was Flo kept yelling that, "Well, I'm American, but I was born in Germany." And that didn't help any.

No, it didn't help.

It took seven hours until they finally figured out that we were legitimate. And the lieutenant gets us and said, "Get the hell out of here." Then the captain gets us, and says, "I don't want anyone to say one word about this to anyone, do you understand?" "Yes, sir." We came back-- it's funny now.

"Hey, what goes on here?" They had heard the whole story when they were checking us out. [INAUDIBLE] never lived that one down.

Well, I can--

Well, that was my--

Yeah, it is, it is--

The funniest story a the war.

It is a very funny story. It is a very funny story.

Oh, gosh.

So you found out where you were though?

Oh, yes we did. And well, after the seven hours, we went straight back to Namur. There was no question we were going any place else. But the next day, we went back out. And the only thing happened in Namur, we had one air raid of one single plane. And the ack-ack was trying to get him, but the was too high. They never could catch him. And you could

hear him.

And I know when he-- when they had an air alarm, one of the kids wanted to get into the basement so quick, he fell down the stairs, broke his leg. That was the only injury from our unit as to the only casualty for the Battle of the Bulge. Everybody else survived unscathed.

So tell me, this last-- the battle lasted into January, didn't it?

Pardon me?

The battle [INAUDIBLE] into January.

Well, actually what happened was at Christmas time, the weather finally cleared and the planes started to come over. And when I say planes, I mean the sky was just full of airplanes. And we're down here. We're yelling, and screaming, and hollering, and applauding. Of course, they couldn't hear us.

But we knew the Battle of the Bulge was over. Because with that air power, that's all we needed. They were going to stop them and they did. So right after Christmas, the whole thing folded up. There was no more problem.

OK.

And we didn't bother making any more patrols or anything. We just stayed around. And then we got orders to move to Liege. And in Liege, right near Liege, was a small, little village, Vieux-Villez. Old-- Vieux-Villez. Which means old village, I guess.

OK.

Vieux-Villez-- and I imagine that the officers received some training. But we, we just again were just trying to keep busy in Vieux-Villez. And those people were very nice. Every one of us-- they T-Force headquarters took over a castle. And the first night we were in a castle-- and the castle was not the best place to be.

Because it had stone-- stone floors all over the place. And you couldn't really sleep on those stone floors. And even our sleeping bags weren't too helpful. It was pretty miserable. But the Belgian people invited us. And we got a room with some older Belgium person. And we gave them some cigarettes and some rations. They were happy to get that.

And they even made breakfast for us with eggs. We ate better than that then the people who were in the castle, that's for sure. And that lasted-- oh, it lasted a number of months. And we had recreational trips to Liege by truck, where we could finally take a shower. I remember the first shower that I got, I stayed there-- I must have stayed under that for 20 minutes.

Because before that, the only thing we got, we had two sets of underwear. One we wore and one we hung out in the air to dry. And the next day, we switched them. And they never got washed, they only got switched.

Oh, jeepers. Oh, jeepers.

I had to cancel our shower. We just had a helmet liner full of water and that was it. And we were bunch of stinking servicemen. And that first shower, they couldn't get me out. For 20 minutes, I was standing there. That water kept coming over me. And to this day, I'm happy to take a bath. I don't even take showers now. I take a bath because of that time that I never got a-- never got a bath, or a shower, or anything.

It stayed with you.

Boy, I enjoy my bath every day.

So this was--

Anyway--

How long did you stay in Le Liege, did you say, or stay in the area of Le Liege?

We were in this group. I left for definitely the rest of December, all of January, and all of February. And I guess it was around March or so that we started to move back into Germany.

And as I indicated, we were supposed to go right behind the troops into the bigger cities. And as we moved into Germany, the first city that we moved through, but that was not a target city, was Aachen because Aachen had been occupied before.

But what we went through Aachen, you saw GI's, all with German paraphernalia, some of them running with top hats and all that kind of German stuff. They were looting everything that they could find. It was terrible really. And the captain said, take a look at that. We're never going to do things of that sort. And it was a lesson, just going through. The first target city was Cologne.

OK, so but when you go through-- and this is-- you had not been to Germany before. This is the first time you're entering Germany since you had left it on that visitor's visa in 1938?

That's correct.

OK.

Yes.

So even though the US army had occupied Aachen, you hadn't been there with the US army?

Yeah, well, Aachen was a surprise that the military was not more disciplined.

I see. I see. Well, it's interesting, the places that you're mentioning are familiar to me. I lived in a town for about two years that was very close to Liege, on the Dutch side in the Netherlands. And it's called Maastricht. And there's a road between Maastricht and Aachen.

I know that, yeah.

And there's a huge cemetery, American-based cemetery, of some of the soldiers who died, were killed in the Battle of the Bulge.

Yes.

And it' a lovely, beautiful--

Because the way the Germans broke through, part of the American army was with the British on the north side, while all on the south side were Americans.

Yeah.

And we were-- we were on the south side.

Yeah. And it's-- those three places, those three cities and these three countries meet at this corner. Of course, they have some distance between them, but not that much. Liege on the Belgium side, Maastricht on the Dutch side, and Aachen on the German side.

Yes.

Yeah.

We were always in the French speaking part of Belgium.

Yeah, I see. I see. OK, so you March in to Germany. And you see this looting. Is there any special feeling that comes over you when you're on German soil again? Or by this time, not so much? You are an American. You now have citizenship. You have no connection to this country.

That was the enemy.

Yeah.

That was the enemy. As far as I was concerned, all those Germans, they were the enemy. They were not anything that I had any relation to whatsoever, except that I could communicate with them, which was a big plus. Most people couldn't.

OK. And what kind of interaction did you have with-- did you have when you first came over, that is in those first days or weeks?

All kinds of them. Let me tell you about Cologne then.

OK.

We went into Cologne. And Cologne was-- in the middle of Cologne, it was just flat. The air force had just demolished every building around. The only thing that was standing, and we could see it from the distance coming in, was the cathedral. The cathedral was still intact, although, it was damaged. We could see that when we got close by.

But it was still intact. It was standing there. It was Cologne. And next to it was a hotel that had been demolished. And a lot of two and half ton trucks had lined up in front of it. And we went over there to see what they were doing.

Well, they discovered a wine cellar underneath the hotel that was still accessible even though it was all rubble on top. And they had brought the two and a half ton trucks to bring all the wine and the liquors out of the wine cellar and move them up.

And our sergeant, oh, well, we got to get part of that. So he dumped the water cannon out, and went down there, and he filled up the water cannon with wine, which was a big mistake later on. Because we had run out of-- we had run out of water and we needed to have water for washing and so forth. And you don't want to wash in wine, that's for sure. [?A bit?] of the wine and put water back into the cannon.

Well, that's sort of like the target of opportunity, and the opportunity wasn't that great then.

That's correct. That's how it was. And now we had to find some quarters. And we had to go to the outskirts of Cologne to find places where there were building still in good shape. We found one and kicked all the Germans out. And we took over one of the blocks of that out-- outlying district of Cologne.

And the Germans were in the block right across from us. And Flo-- here was another cute little story. Flo, of course, was very-- well, he was from Berlin and had a good Berlin accent. And he could use that Berlin accent.

And what he did was, he opened an window and started-- and he knew how to play an accordion. And somewhere he found an accordion and had liberated the accordion.

OK, yeah.

I think that came from Aachen.

OK.

So he did, in fact, do just one bit of looting. And that was the accordion.

OK.

And he started playing the accordion, all these German tunes. And you could tell the people were opening their windows and listening to that. And when he knew he had the attention of everybody, he started to make a speech imitating the Fuhrer. And he was able to do that beautifully.

And so he started out in the terms that the Fuhrer always used in addressing the people when he went on the radio. [SPEAKING GERMAN], or whatever the terms were. And he said-- he said, "We get reports that you have a shortage of coffee, but you know, it's just not true. The only reason you don't have any coffee is because the coffee is in a warehouse sitting behind the butter. And we can't get to the coffee because of the butter in front of the warehouse."

Everybody slammed their windows down. They didn't want to hear that. They didn't have butter. They didn't have coffee. They didn't have anything. So he was able to stick the finger against the Germans a little bit.

And he did it in German.

And he did it in German, yes, in the right accent too. But anyway, there were other things.

It's fun. It's cute, it's cute, that kind of story. And it's something they wouldn't have expected.

That's right, they would never expect that among the Americans, there's somebody who spoke German that well.

Yeah.

And with a Berlin accent, no less. Oh, well, anyway.

So in Cologne, how long did you stay in Cologne?

We stayed in Cologne probably-- probably almost a month.

OK, so that's March, that's kind of March.

Well, less than a month.

OK.

A little less than a month. The first was one of the-- when we went for personality targets, it was a nothing. Because the Germans were on the other side of the Rhine. Cologne is on the Rhine.

Right.

The Germans had gone to the other side of the river. And we were on the western side of the river, which was the major part of the city.

That's right.

One of the-- well, there's a couple of stories here. The first one was a Gestapo headquarters, a man that we had an

address for. We went to the address. And we could tell somebody was in there. They had barricaded themselves in.

So we just shut the door, were shooting with rifles to open the lock because they wouldn't come and open it. And we went in. And what we found was a woman. She had been the secretary to this Gestapo guy.

So we brought her back to where we had a detention center. And the detention center had been set up for men, of course. Never thought that we would get a woman in there. So we had to do everything for a woman. Then she had to dig herself her own latrine and whatnot.

Ooh.

Anyway, we started interrogating her. And we found out she had a venereal disease. Not only did she have a venereal disease, but she also had the picture of a captain, of an American captain. So we ask her some more, where did she meet the captain and whatnot.

It was an infantry unit that had been right next door where we found her. So we figured we'd better check with the captain. And sure enough, we found the captain in the-- next door. And we asked him, first of all, what kind of relationships he had with her. And he was reluctant to say anything, but finally he admitted that it was sexual.

Well, did she try to get any information out of you? What information did she get out of you? No, no, no information, it was just a sexual relationship. We said, well, we hate to tell you, but she has a venereal disease. And he immediately took off for the medics.

Oh, good god. Well, clearly, he hadn't seen the movie in Fort Dix.

No, apparently, he hadn't looked at the movie. He was an officer. He might have gotten through ROTC or whatever. Yeah, they didn't see that. He didn't come through a reception center that way.

Yeah. So she was--

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah. So did she have any intelligence value at all?

Not really, no. Not really. Although we didn't let her go. We turned over to the military government, and whatever they did, I don't know.

OK.

But we didn't get any information out of her that way. The only thing, she did-- I guess she did verify that she had worked for this particular person that was on our target list.

OK. And he, of course, was no longer there.

But she only did typing for him and didn't know what he was doing.

Yeah.

But--

OK.

And there were no other personality targets that we found. We had a dozen targets. Well, here was one thing-- a German kaserne was one of the building targets. And the kaserne was right on the under river, right along the river.

Does a kaserne mean a barracks, German barracks?

German barracks, yeah.

OK.

We parked behind the building and went in. And you could tell the Germans had left in a big hurry because there was stuff strewn all along the hallways, and the room, they were disorderly and left behind. And the only thing alive we found was a canary bird.

Oh, jeepers.

And they had put enough-- we thought, well, we'd better feed the poor bird. But they had put so much fodder for the bird into the cage, and water, so the bird was real happy. But it was just a real awkward thing to see this canary bird sitting there in the cage, all alone, attended by the enemy, and not needing anything. But we couldn't talk to the bird as to what happened.

The bird also didn't have any intelligence value.

No intelligence value. But as we're staring at the bird, we heard a mortar round coming and exploding. And they must have somehow detected our Jeep. And it was-- and the way the mortars work, there's a round over, and a round short, and then a round fire for effect right on the target.

And this round was over. So we dashed back into the Jeep as quick as we could. And rammed the-- and started the Jeep. And the short round had dropped near the explosion, very nearby. And we took off like mad. And the third round was exactly where the Jeep had been standing. And we got the heck out of there.

So this was now personal. This was not artillery fire or whatnot. That's impersonal and anybody can get hit, but they're not targeting you, specifically.

Yeah.

This one, they were targeting me, you know?

Yeah.

That's not great [INAUDIBLE]. That really guts you. Good grief, they're really trying to kill me.

Did you find them? Did you find who was doing this?

That was the first feeling in the war that I got that I was in danger. The other danger was road danger. Because one fine morning, we're on patrol, and something feels strange. Both the driver, and both me, we both look at each other and say, it's in the fog, we can't see anything, but it feels strange.

So we stopped the vehicle. We get out. And we find that we were on the first leg of a bridge that had been blown. Had we proceeded another couple of 100 yards, we would have fallen right into the Rhine River. So, it's funny how you got that strange feeling that something is wrong, and it was wrong.

Wow, wow.

Yeah. And you couldn't see it.

No.

Until you were on it, you couldn't see it.

Yeah, couldn't see it, couldn't see it until you got out. And then we said, oh, my god, we're right on a damn bridge.

OK, so--

The last--

OK.

The last story on Cologne I'll give you, it was a very nice story.

OK.

And we were on patrol to enforce the curfew. Because there was a curfew, a night curfew. The minute night came-- and about one third, not even a third of the city had stayed behind. Most of the-- certainly anyone who was in the Nazi Party had evacuated to the other side of the river. So there weren't that many people left on our side.

But there was this curfew. They were not to go out at night. So we're making the patrol, and we see a figure running across the street, and we chase the figure down. And it was a young girl about 17 years old. And we questioned her a little bit-- what are you doing out here on the street in violation of the curfew?

And she indicated she was hungry. And we said, "Why are you so hungry?" And she said-- well, it took a little bit longer, but she admitted-- she said, "You know, I'm Jewish." I said, "My God, you're Jewish. Well, what happened here? How did you survive? All the Jews were put in concentration camps."

She said, well, she and one other girl had been sheltered by a Dutch lady who lived-- and I still know the address-- 49 Stutvongirtle, Stutvongirtle number 49, in Cologne.

Wow.

That was the address.

Stutvongirtle in Cologne.

Just sticks in your mind. And that one, that address stuck in my mind. Anyway, well, the first thing we did is we gave her some of the ration that we had. And put her in the Jeep, and said, well, let's go to your address to check it out, if nothing else.

So we get in there. And certainly, there's this other little Jewish girl, also same age, about 17. And the Dutch lady-- the Jewish girl we stopped, her name was Ellen. I don't know her last name. But Ellen sticks in my name-- in my mind forever, Ellen.

Ellen, Ellen. And did they tell you anything of what had been going on? Did you actually have longer conversations with them?

About how they survived. The Dutch lady had one ration card for herself. So she drew her whole ration. And then, she apparently had money. And was able to go to the black market and get food supplemented, so that the three of them could stay within a reasonable diet.

But when the Americans started to get close to Cologne, all the Germans fled. So the ration card was dead. There were no more rations. And the black market was dead. There was no more black market. So they were really at the food's end.

They had no more food. They hadn't eaten for a day or two. And they were really hungry. But we have some food in the Jeep. We gave her the food. And we said, we'll be right back. We went back to our headquarters, and loaded up with some food, and brought it over there.

And we gave them the food that we had. And, of course, they told us a little bit, how precarious it was. That kids had to stay in the house all the time. They couldn't put their noses out. And the neighbors didn't know anything about what was going on in the house.

Was it only the three of them?

Pardon me?

Was it only the three of them in that household?

Only the three of them. Only the three of them.

Was it was a single-family home or was it an apartment?

It was a house, a whole house--

It was a house.

A villa, a little villa, yeah.

OK.

And apparently, she was a widow. And she was suffering under cancer. She had cancer. And then we came back and talked more. And she asked, "Can you get me some of that wonder drug, penicillin. Because maybe it cures the cancer."

Oh, dear.

Well, I didn't [INAUDIBLE] cancer. I had heard penicillin was a wonder drug I didn't know about anything with cancer. But I wrote back to my mother and said, send me some penicillin. I don't know what my mother thought, but believe it or not, she sent me some penicillin in a package.

I didn't get that package until way later after I had left cologne. But when I opened the package, the one thing-- you had to declare what was in the package. And she had declared penicillin, and then the baloney, and whatever she put in. And everything was in there except the penicillin. Somebody had lifted it. And they needed it more than I did.

Wow.

But anyway, it wouldn't have mattered, because, well, first of all, it wouldn't have cured her. Secondly, I don't know how I-- how fast I could have gotten back to her. Because we were in the middle of Germany by then. And thirdly, by the time it could have gotten there, she had died.

Oh, so she was really near her deathbed then?

Yeah, she was on her deathbed. We didn't know that. But anyway, after we gave them the rations and heard the story, went back to the headquarters and went to Lieutenant Levy. And said, "Lieutenant Levy, you wouldn't believe it." And I told him the whole story. And Levy says, "I'll take care of it, don't worry about it."

So a couple of days later or so, we were on patrol. And I said, let's go by to the house and see how they're doing. Besides, I liked that girl, Ellen. She was very cute. Anyway, we got to the house. And there's a big off limits sign. Off limits means you cannot enter. You're not allowed to enter for whatever reason. Off limits, by order of-- and has the

local commanders' names.

I went dashing back to Lieutenant Levy, all in a rage, and said, "What the heck is going on? I know we got the anti-fraternization order that we can't associate with Germans, but these two kids aren't Germans, they're Jews. And they're certainly are escaping from Germans. And you know that."

And he said, "Whoa, whoa, wait a second, wait a second. I have no idea what you're talking about. Let's go back." So he hops in the Jeep and we go back to the house. And we go in. And, of course, we're greeted like old friends. And Lieutenant Levy now says, "Well, what's going on?"

Well, she says, "Well, you know, after we met Frank and got some rations, and then he had sent you, and you came, and you arranged for rations because a truck came, and gave us all kinds of food, well, no sooner that the truck left, there were more and more trucks coming in with more and more food.

My basement is completely full with food and I didn't know how to stop it. So I went to the commander of the American unit next door, and I said, help, we got to stop this. They keep bringing food and we can't use it anymore."

Oh, my.

He said, "I'll take [INAUDIBLE]." And that's how we put the off limits sign on. And from then on, the trucks stopped coming. But it's a lovely story. First of all, about the Dutch lady who made those two Jewish girls survive the war for at least two years that they were in that house. And how generous the Americans were when they heard about a story of that kind.

That is-- it really is a lovely story.

Yes. Did you ever know what happened to those two Jewish girls?

Yes, I did. And what happened was, when the war was over, I was stationed near Frankfurt. And that was the American zone. And Cologne was in the British zone. So, I really had no reason to go into the British zone. But one fine day, I had a free day for some reason. And I thought I'm going to check on those girls. I'm going to check on Ellen, to be specific.

I took off for Cologne all by myself. And halfway-- halfway there, I was on the Autobahn, and they have all kinds of detours. And the detours were in bad shape. And believe it or not, my Jeep tipped over. And I had to have help getting the Jeep put back on. And I wasn't hurt. I was just thrown out.

And I was scared that [AUDIO OUT] didn't work anymore. [AUDIO OUT] was still working. And everything was fine. So I proceeded to Cologne. And [AUDIO OUT] house. And there was-- it's probably interrupting again, somebody is trying to call me.

I got that sense, yes.

Yeah. Anyway, I got to the house. There's nobody there. So I went by and saw some of the neighbors. And they said, "Oh, yes, yes, we know about that house. There was a Dutch lady and she died. And she left the house to the two girls. And the girls are out there working somewhere. And if you wait till 6 o'clock or whatever, you can probably meet them."

Well, with the accident I had, and with no authorization to be in Cologne, my feet got cold, and I thought I can't take the chance of waiting here any longer. I just took off. And I think I left a note of some sort. I took off and I never heard of them again.

I see.

So I never saw them again either.

I see. I see.

So you just learned that the lady had died. The house was now theirs. But their further fate was something you didn't know about. Did you know, by the time you had gone into Germany, of what had happened to the Jews?

Very little. There was very little information. We knew about the concentration camps, but we didn't quite understand that there were six camps that were for the eradication of Jews, that were killing zones for them, where they went in, until--

Extermination camps.

--at home, later on.

Is that where you learned about it, at home, later on?

[AUDIO OUT] very sketchy stories about concentration camps. And lots of people killed there, but we had no idea that this was in the number of 6 million.

OK. So no idea that there was actually a genocide that was perpetrated.

That it was a-- well, we knew that they were killing a lot of Jews, yes. But we didn't know it was a factory type of arrangement.

OK. And when you entered Germany, did you try to find out about any particular family members at that time, while being with the American military?

I didn't do that until the occupation started. Because we had no time to do anything really.

OK.

We just got-- just from one order, from one city, to the next, to the next, until the war ended. But when the war ended, I tried to find the aunt-- the mother of Ruth Lubitz, which we knew was stuck-- not in Chemnitz anymore. She had gone to Berlin. And she had married somebody else by the name of Liechtenstein. So her name now was Elsa Liechtenstein.

And do it I tried to-- tried to see if I could get to Berlin to trace her. And that's another story. But I did get to Berlin. And I traced that she had been evacuated to Theresienstadt, and from there most likely to Auschwitz. And that she was definitely not alive anymore.

So this is Max--

I found--

This is Max [?Berdis'?] wife, Max who was killed in Chemnitz on the street in 1932. Ruth Lubitz is his daughter.

Yes.

And we're talking about her mother--

Yes.

--Elsa. I see. OK, so after Cologne, where are you sent?

Well, the next thing was we were crossing the Rhine over that Remagen Bridge. Remember one bridge they didn't blow

and they were able to move our troops across for-- a little bit over, I think, 17 days.

OK.

And somewhere along the line, we were able to get across that bridge. And the next target then was Dusseldorf.

OK, that's not far. Dusseldorf is not far from Cologne at all.

Oh, no. But it was a-- a really big, big distance because of the crossing of the river.

Ah. OK.

Had we [INAUDIBLE], it would have been a real problem getting across. But this changed the quickness of the war, no question about it. It shortened the war considerably. Because they didn't have to make any assault across the Rhine.

OK. so--

Anyway, we got our--

Excuse me, when you say target, are you saying military target or for your group, the intelligence target? In other words, is the military already in Dusseldorf? Or is the Germans still in Dusseldorf.

It was a [AUDIO OUT] target.

Excuse me?

It was an intelligence target for us.

It was an intelligence target, OK.

It was a target city for us.

OK.

To get behind the infantry on that.

OK.

We were on the outskirts of Dusseldorf, and the picture, the military picture was very distorted. Nobody knew exactly what was going on. And the unit was ready to go into Cologne-- I mean Dusseldorf, but we didn't know if the infantry had been there.

So Flo and I were told to make a recon and take off towards Dusseldorf. And we did.

OK.

We got a Jeep. And we got to the outskirts of Dusseldorf. And what happened was, we got a flat tire. And it was-- luckily, there was a Esso gas station, Esso gas station right there. And as luck would have it. And we limped into the Esso gas station.

There was nobody around, but there was a house in the back. We went to the house. We got the guy who was the owner of the gas station. And we told him about the tire, gave him a pack of cigarettes-- "Can you fix it and switch the tires from the spare?" He said, "Oh, of course."

He was happy as heck. We said, well, "Have you seen any Americans?" He said, "No, no, you're the first Americans." This is all in German, of course. He was astounded that he's talking German to us, of course. And he has this guy with a Berlin accent and me with a Silesian accent, I guess, talking to him. And we're in American uniforms. I think he may still be shaking his head if he's alive.

Anyway, we got a little bit worried that he hadn't seen any Americans. So we proceed further. And now in the distance we see all kinds of white sheets hanging out from the houses-- from the apartments that we see in the distance. And we get a little closer, and we see a roadblock. And we see a lot of people running around the roadblock.

And we look at it a little bit longer. And we realized, they're not making-- they're not putting stuff on the road block, they're trying to remove the roadblock. So we drive a little closer still. And when they see us, everybody takes off. Nobody around, just to the roadblock.

And we could see, hey, we are now liberating Dusseldorf and this is not our mission. So we turn around-- after having liberated the gas station-- we go back to the headquarters. And said, "Hey, wait another day or so, because at least from this direction, nobody's in Dusseldorf yet."

OK.

So we [AUDIO OUT]. And one of the-- of course, I don't remember all these targets that we had, but a couple of them stand out. The first one that will stand out was a conglomerate. It was an international [GERMAN] [?stahlhoff?].

OK.

Bigger than US. They controlled steel all over the world from Dusseldorf.

So you're saying, bigger than US steel?

[GERMAN] [?stahlhoff?]

Yeah, OK. OK.

Yeah. We get into their building. Of course, there's nobody around, but we catch the janitor. And we ask the janitor, "Do you know how to get any of the directors in?" And he said, "Yeah, I have contacts." We said, "Well, we'll come back this afternoon. Can you see if you can get any of the directors to talk to us?"

And we looked at the building. It was pretty well destroyed. But they had a board room that was in perfect condition. The table, and the chairs, as if nothing had happened. And yet, around it, everything was in ruins-- amazing. All these things are amazing.

Well, certainly, in that context at that time, it sounds bizarre.

Yes.

Well, from the picture that you're painting with words, one wouldn't expect to see something intact like that.

That's right.

Did she come through? Were they actually there?

Well, what happened was, we come back in the afternoon, and there were six of them that had been assembled, six of them. They're sitting on the chairs around the table. And they left the two [INAUDIBLE], two stools, two chairs, easy chairs at the front for us.

At this time, I'm not with Flo. I'm with a CIC agent-- that's Counter-Intelligence Corps agent.

OK.

And I'm there as an interpreter more than anything else. This is his-- this is his target.

OK.

And well, the first thing is they present us with cigars. The smartest thing I did was I declined a cigar. Because I never would have lasted through it. I've never smoked a cigar in my life.

OK.

As a matter of fact, I wasn't even smoking in those days. Well, actually, I never smoked really.

OK, and so, was there any intelligence that came out of that meeting?

Oh, yes. What happened was that, we said-- I'm translating, of course.

Of course.

I tell them that, "What we need to have is a report of your assets by tomorrow morning." And they tell me, "To get an accurate report of our assets would take at least six months." I said, "No, we need it in 24 hours. So we'll give you another day, and we'll come back, and you give us what you can get."

They said, [SPEAKING GERMAN], almost saluting me. Because they're discussion is with me. And here I am, as far as Germany was concerned, I have a seventh grade education.

And the terminology in German that they're using now, because these are economic terms, and I recognize the shortage that I have in terms of education, basic education. And the shortage I had in terms of the six months that I didn't get trained as an intelligence agent.

So I feel very inadequate. And I'm very happy that I only have to do translations. And I did as best as I can, particularly when it came to technical terms, which I had to talk around because I couldn't get the exact terminology. That all sticks in my mind how inadequate I felt at that point in time, which didn't happen in other-- at other locations and in other areas.

But in this one, I felt completely inadequate with all these big shots from-- German big shots, which I was controlling--

Yes.

--in a sense. And yet, I wasn't really up to it like I should have been.

Do you think they noticed?

I don't know. They must-- well, I would think they did. I mean, a 19-year-old kid talking to them. And these are all 50, 60-year-old economists working with this corporation, an international conglomerate that was, as I said, bigger than US steel. These were high ranking people. They must have known they were talking to a pipsqueak, you know.

Well, on the other-- on the other hand--

The other agent was a little older, he was-- but he was still young compared to them. He may have been up to maybe 30 years old at the most. So he would-- they knew they were talking to people who really didn't know what the hell they're talking about. But they were very careful with us, very careful.

OK. Did you come back in two days and get anything?

Yes, we went back. And we got the report. And we turned a report in. And all the six were there the next time, greeting us, as if we were old friends. And again, with the cigars, which I declined. And I think they even brought me some candy, if I'm not mistaken. So they knew, they knew what the situation was, that we were definitely not in their league.

Yeah, but-- yeah, but it is, what it was.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah, and it also is something that you pass up the line. And somebody that you pass this information to up the line will understand its significance.

Oh, absolutely. The report was valuable, I'm sure. Because they could exploit that. And then they would see where they still have connections with the-- with countries outside of Germany.

And they could see where the other assets were in Germany. So they got good information from that report. I barely looked at the report, but I could see that they were mentioning various locations and such. So this was valuable stuff, I'm sure.

Did you stay in Dusseldorf for a long time?

Pardon me?

Did you stay in Dusseldorf for a long time? I take it this happened in Dusseldorf.

I think maybe four days may have been the maximum. But here is another story with Dusseldorf. And this is now our fourth priority target. So it probably was on the last day that we were in Dusseldorf. It was the telephone exchange.

OK.

Now, they didn't think the telephone exchange was a big deal anymore because of all the destruction and whatnot. So Flo and I go into the telephone exchange. Fourth priority, Flo and I are together to check it out. The captain doesn't even bother to come.

And we go in, and Flo, with his Berlin accent, and trying to be funny. And walks in. And he sees that there are a lot of people in there. And they seemed to be working. So he says, "Can you connect me with Berlin?" And the girl says, "Oh, yes, of course."

And Flo and I look at each other. And he says, "Well, do it. Do it." So he gets on the phone with a Berlin operator and starts shooting the bull back and forth. And it took quite a while. And here, this city is destroyed. I mean, Dusseldorf is flat. And here we find a boardroom that's in good shape. And we find a telephone exchange that is still workable, that is able to communicate not only in Dusseldorf, but even with Berlin.

Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh, how surreal.

On the other end, [INAUDIBLE] finds out that this-- she's talking to an American. And the minute she finds that out, the plug is pulled. And the connection with Berlin is forever cut, at least for the war.

Whoa.

And we went back and we report what we find. And therefore, for the next city, the telephone exchange became a first priority target.

Wow.

They made a mistake on that one.

That's interesting. That's interesting.

Yeah.

And it took a while for the operator on the Berlin side to realize that she's speaking with an American.

Yeah, she's talking to somebody with a Berlin accent. She had no idea she's speaking to an American.

Good god. OK, so from Dusseldorf where do you go?

We stayed in the Ruhr Valley. I think there was a town by name of Hagen. I remember Hagen specifically, because there I captured around 50 Germans single-handedly.

How did you do that?

What happened was, we're at night, we're making a patrol. I guess it was also curfew patrol. And all of a sudden, in the distance we hear a the click, click, click-- the boots of the Germans had metal-- metal prongs on the bottom.

OK.

And there were very distinctive, that there was marching troops. But we couldn't see anything. And we hear this coming on the road that we're on. I tell the driver to stop. And they're coming closer. And I'm running-- I'm yelling in German, [SPEAKING GERMAN].

And does the [SPEAKING GERMAN]?

I say, "One guy, come forward for identification." So one man, a non-commissioned officer, a master sergeant, I guess he was, he comes forward. And he salutes me. And I said, "What do you got here?" And he said, "We're the Volkssturm." Well, the Volkssturm were the people who were drafted at the end of the war as a last resort to stop Germany being overrun by the enemy.

So they took people over 50, or anything over 50, and anything under 16, I think it was. And they were conglomerated as the Volkssturm. And here, this NCO tell me he has 50 people. And they had left their weapons in the forest. And they came here to give up because they were hungry. They wanted to eat.

Oh.

I had seen a POW camp just a mile up the road. And I said, "OK, no problem. We'll get in front. You get in front of your troops and march them right behind our Jeep. And we'll get you to the POW camp. And they'll feed you there."

And you didn't eat any-- you didn't have any thought that they might shoot you from behind?

No, not at all. I could tell right away. I went and took a look to see what he was talking about. And they were all old and young kids. And none of them had any weapons. And in these circumstances, you just take a chance and that's it.

So they follow my Jeep. I get to the POW camp. And there's the guard. I said I got 50 POWs for you. He said, "Well, I'm sorry." He said-- well, he doesn't know my rank. I got USUS, so he doesn't know if I'm an officer or what I am.

And he said, "I'm sorry, you can talk to my lieutenant, I can get the lieutenant out. But we don't take any more POWs.

There's another camp three miles down the road, you have to take him down there. I said, "Oh, my god, what am I going to do? I'm in charge of them, I can't just let them run around loose."

So went three more miles down the road. Now, this is the whole night practically now, that I don't get any sleep, no nothing. So when we get close to the other camp. I could see the camp in the distance. I tell the driver, move up quickly.

So we move up to the camp, to the entrance. I say, "There are 50 POWs coming down the road, they're destined for your camp. They were just sent down from the other camp. And I got to get back to my unit. So take care of them." And we took off. That was the end of it. That's how I finally got rid of my great imprisonment of--

Well single-handedly, single-handedly rounding up 50 people.

Single-handedly, yes.

That don't happen that often.

So that's what happens in the war. You never know from one day to the next.

Yeah, never a dull moment.

That's all I remember from Dusseldorf. There was other stuff, but I don't remember. But then the next--

OK, I want to anchor this a little bit time wise. Are we still talking March 1945, or are we already into April 1945?

This is '45, and yes, it's April '45.

So the war's almost at an end, not quite, but it's--

Sure.

Yeah.

Whenever Dusseldorf fell, we were there the next day. Well, I was there on the day it fell, actually. We could probably check that on when Dusseldorf fell.

OK, but as far as the war as a whole, if we're talking April, then the war ends May 9th or May 8th, something like that. So it's just another month until the war ends.

Yes, but they're still fighting. The Germans are still fighting. Because the Fuhrer is still determined to stop not only the Russians, but also the Americans and the British.

OK.

So what was your--

And of course, there was some--

What was your next-- what was your next target?

Frankfurt was the next city.

OK.

Frankfort, two things that I remember offhand. The first one that I went was a building target, which was the I.G. Farben

building.

That's huge.

The I.G. Farben building was destined to be SHAEF headquarters, the headquarters for Eisenhower, for all of Europe. And this was one of our first priority targets to make sure we can safeguard the I.G Farben headquarters. Because the bombers that were bombing Frankfurt, and they did a pretty good job of wiping Frankfurt out, had orders to avoid bombing the I.G. Farben building. Because they wanted that intact.

And why? Tell people why was this an important--

They knew they were going to make that the headquarters for Europe.

And why would I.G. Farben have been the headquarters? What about it makes it desirable for that.

I'd guess that it had all the accouterments for a-- an ability in one building to bring all of the staff of the headquarters into that building. It just suited the-- and it was located in Frankfurt, where they wanted to have the seat of the occupation.

I see, OK. And do you remember what it looked like when you went there? Was it one building? Was it a series of buildings? Was it like an industrial park? What did it look like?

It was a big building. It had roughly six floors or more. And it was not touched by anything. And when we got there, it was a mess. What happened was, when they captured the city, they were also capturing a lot of the forced laborers and DPs, displaced persons.

And the combat commander didn't know what to do with them. And he shoved them into that building. He didn't realize that the building was earmarked for SHAEF headquarters. When those people got into the building, they were ranting against the Germans. And they smashed all the windows, took all the furniture and threw them out of the window. And the whole thing was a mess.

And when we came in there, we just shook our heads. Because this was not a building that could be occupied right then and there. That had to be cleaned up. And we had to get all the people out of the building. I don't even know where they took them. We had military police come and clear the building out.

And then we had a demolition squad come with us. Went in the basements to blow up the safes in the basement. We knew we couldn't get anybody to open it, I guess. But they blew the safes open.

And the first thing we did is we took all the documents and safeguarded the documents. And then, there were industrial diamonds in the safes. And the EOD squads, the demolition squads, they took the diamonds. And then there were bales of money, of marks.

And we thought the marks were worthless. I know I got a whole bunch of marks. And when I went back to the headquarters, the people who couldn't go in the field, I gave them batches of marks, here, for souvenirs, souvenirs. This was thousands of dollars that I was giving out. And I had no idea that it was worth any money.

But was it still? At that point, was it still--

That's how well trained we were.

But was it still worth anything--

Yes.

--for a weeks more?

The mark was about \$0.25 for the mark. And they had devalued the mark by about a quarter. So a mark maybe was nickel or so, what I gave away. This money was later changed into the mark published by the occupation, by the German government of the occupation.

But they were able to get money out of it by exchanging it. So I don't know how many thousands of dollars I was giving out. I never kept any of it.

And can you tell us, also, for those people who will be listening to this and don't know, what was the significance for I.G Farben for the Nazi regime?

Oh, well, of course, the I.G. Farben made the gas that was used in the concentration camps, among other things. And they were all involved in the-- in arming the Wehrmacht, the German police, as well as the SS and the Waffen-SS, which was the elite force of the German army, that was the party.

All of them were, of course, beholden to the Fuhrer. They had to swear allegiance to the Fuhrer. But I.G. Farben was right in the middle of everything in the industrial support of the German armed forces.

So it was a key industrial player.

Yes, a key-- and that's why they fingered that building. They weren't going to give to that company-- they're going to take that building away. The heck with them.

I see, OK.

So that was probably another reason why they chose I.G. Farben, because of the--

So it was for symbolic as well as logistical purposes.

That's right. So of course, the gas and all that, that was not manufactured in that building.

No.

That building was strictly an administration building of the corporation that was I.G. Farben.

Was it cleaned up so that Eisenhower could move in?

Oh, yes, that was all cleaned up. And it probably cost a million bucks to put it back in shape. But that local commander really-- I don't know if he knew what kind of a boo-boo he pulled. That was terrible.

So what the planes avoided was done on the ground by ex-- by ex-prisoners, and DPs, and forced laborers, and so on.

Oh, yes, they had plenty of labor to bring in. The labor wasn't going to cost them anything. But the furniture, that was going to cost them. And I'm sure it did.

Did you have any other targets in Frankfort?

Oh, there were lots of targets. But I don't really remember too much. Except I did find a Jewish family in Frankfurt. Well, it was a partial Jewish family. The father was Jewish. The wife was Christian. And they had a couple of kids.

And the kids had been taken away from them. And one of the girls had somehow come back home with a baby. And the father of the baby had been one of the SS guards in a concentration camp. But I guess he had enough influence to save her life and let her go back to her family with the kid.

Was her father also alive?

Yes, her father stayed alive. And it was because he was married to this Christian woman. And somehow, they were able to shelter him. And they never really came particularly for the Jews that were married to Germans. They were of a lesser priority. If they ran into one, they put them in prison. But they didn't go out hunting them down like they hunted down all the other Jews. So somehow, he was able to escape.

That's interesting.

At least, that's how he explained it.

OK, so they stay alive basically, though they took their daughter, who was half Jewish. And she was put in a concentration camp.

Yes. Well, she was, because she was a young girl. She was desirable. She was taken away as a Jew.

I see.

But in retrospect, it didn't make sense that he stayed alive that way. Because I don't think they made any exceptions if they knew he was Jewish. Maybe he was able to somehow show that he wasn't Jewish. I don't know.

Well, it depends also sometimes how prominent a person might have been. If they had protection, if they had cover, if they're also married to a Gentile. And if that non-Jewish spouse refuses to divorce them.

I've had testimonies from people who were from such mixed marriages. And sometimes the Jewish partner is taken away and never heard from again, or dies in custody, or so on. The children maybe sometimes are arrested, maybe not. If they're more prominent, then it could be that they were not-- they were on a list, but it hadn't been their turn yet. They weren't the first targets.

That's right, they weren't the first targets. Now, he may have had some time in the concentration camp, I don't know. But somehow he got out.

OK, OK. And were they-- did they seem well to do? Or did they seem like a very--

They were not in dire straits. But we gave them cigarettes. And that's all they needed, was cigarettes. And they could exist on the black market.

Sure.

They probably were hard up, because they were very happy to get the cigarettes. I gave him a whole carton, my ration at the time. Because I didn't smoke, so it was not a problem. I just gave them whatever cigarettes I had. And that was plenty for them.

Well, there's currently. That replaces the reichsmark.

Yes, they were very happy to get it. No problem.

OK.

Yeah.

So the route you're going, nevertheless pushes you further and further east. You start at Aachen. You're in Cologne.

That's right, we were--

Then in Dusseldorf.

We were right behind the troops. They'd captured these cities. As we were moving east, that's where we went in. The next one was Wiesbaden.

OK.

Now, Wiesbaden was also interesting because we liberated a Russian prisoner camp in Wiesbaden.

A forced labor camp or a slave labor camp.

It was not purely a forced labor. What we found out as we got in there was that half of the people had volunteered to work for the Germans. They were pro German. These were Ukrainians. And they loved-- they loved-- some of them loved the Germans. But the Germans didn't necessarily return the love to the Ukrainians.

They still treated them crummy. Which was a bad mistake on part of the Germans, because they could have had some allies. But they found, with their racial theories, the Ukrainians were like the Russians. They were a step below-- below the British or the French. They were the Russians down there. And then, of course--

Well, they're Slavs.

the last were the Jewish and the Gypsies.

Yeah. I remember-- they were Slavs. And I remember many Poles would-- those, for example, who worked in the Polish underground, and who informed the British about the existence of the concentration camps, even if they didn't know the secret plans of the Germans, they said, well, it's the Jews today and it's us tomorrow.

Yeah.

And they were very accurate with that. It was a racial ideology, a racial hierarchy. And the Slavs were just a cut above Jews and Gypsies. But they were next on the list.

Yeah.

And, of course, with Ukrainians, there was also, who do they love less? The Soviets, the Russians, or the Germans?

Yeah.

And they often loved the Soviets much less than they did--

Yeah, the Soviets were the bigger enemy, as far as they were concerned.

Yeah.

But--

But what did these people look like? Did they look starved or did they look fed? Were there conditions halfway decent? Or were they miserable?

Say that again?

Well, I'm trying to get a sense of what did this liberated Russian labor camp look like?

Oh, I--

Did the people look like they had had food? How were they dressed?

Well, they were not starving. They had fed them because they were engaged in some labor projects that Germans were very interested in. And they didn't want to exchange those laborers. I guess they trained them to do whatever they had to do. So they didn't want to lose them. So they fed them.

OK.

And we were trying to distinguish between the volunteers and the forced labor. But it was a hopeless-- a hopeless task, because everybody was pointing the finger at everybody else. And there were personal animosities and whatnot. And we just gave up on that. And we just treated them as liberated and to heck with it.

But I met one cute girl in there, a Russian girl. Well, she was actually from the Ukraine also. And so after the war, I went back to the camp. And I found out that there was a Russian mission that was put up near there. And they were trying to convince all those people in that camp to go back to Russia.

And of course, [INAUDIBLE] took them up on that. But one girl somehow managed to escape. After she had gotten back to Russia, she escaped back to Germany somehow. And told them that when they brought those people back they considered all of them as traitors.

The girls, they immediately shaved their heads, with the hair off their heads. And the men, they imprisoned and put into their concentration camps. And when the girl came back and told about that, the Russian mission wasn't able to convince anybody to go back to Russia. They all started-- they all stayed in Germany.

And so this is after you return later.

After the war was over, yes.

After the war is over. Well, that was a common policy, wasn't it?

Yes.

Yeah.

Yeah. They thought all those people were traitors. And it was not fair, because some of those were really forced laborers who were taken out of-- against their will.

Yeah, yes. Stalin considered his own son, who had been shot down and taken prisoner, as absolutely useless because he allowed himself to be captured.

Yes.

So if he's that way with his own son, then-- this is a surprise to a Western way of thinking, but It was not a surprise if you consider who was running the Soviet Union.

The only surprise we had in Wiesbaden was that Wiesbaden wasn't touched. It was in good shape. It was [INAUDIBLE]. Every city that we went to had been flattened. And Wiesbaden was in good shape.

Did it have any kind of military value? Did it have any kind-- was it a residential city?

It was a-- if you went for the cure, you went to Wiesbaden as one of those places.

So it's like a spa.

It was a spa, yes.

Did you stay there long?

No, just a couple of days or so.

And then what was the next place?

Well, there were some other cities that I forgot about. But there were two more cities before the war was going to be over. There was Magdeburg and there was-- there was Kassel and there was Magdeburg. Kassel was a target. And we took off for Kassel.

And now, we never entered Kassel. Because before we were ready to go into Kassel, we got intercepted and told the orders had changed, go immediately to Magdeburg. Because on the other side of the Elbe River are the Russians. And they have already arrived at the river's edge. And we need to put a posture up on our side of the Elbe River.

So immediately, take off for Magdeburg. So we're diverting to Magdeburg. And here, we're on the Autobahn. And as we drive along, on both sides of the Autobahn, the German soldiers were streaming towards us with their hands up trying to give up. And we could tell the war was over for all practical purposes. But this is still April now. This is the last week of April.

We know the war is over. We have no problems. We don't even have to have the rifles on guard as we went to-- most of the time we always had the car being ready for firing. We didn't even bother with that anymore because the war was over. They wanted to give up. They wanted to eat. And we had to chase them away in order to get through.

They also didn't want to give up to the Russians. If they have a choice, they'd rather give up to the Americans.

Of course, that was one of the points. They wanted to be taken prisoner by the Americans. They didn't want to get clobbered by the Russians. Because the Russians were taking their revenge. And this became even clearer as we got into Magdeburg.

In what way?

We got to Magdeburg. And there, in Magdeburg, the captain receives a map, a top-secret map which shows the occupation zones. And it clearly shows that Magdeburg and areas that we have just come through towards the west we're all part of the occupation zone of the Soviets. The Soviet occupation zone encompassed Magdeburg and the territory that we had come through.

And this is a top-secret map. And he's told to take the map across to see the Russians. Now, this I had to figure out later on because nobody told me anything. I was just a PFC with an insignia that didn't show that I was a PFC.

Anyway, he was told to take the map across and tell the Russians, yes, Magdeburg is really your occupation zone. And you will cross the Rhine. But don't cross it now. Wait till we withdraw and rearrange things in about three or four months from now. And that's when you come across. And you get Magdeburg. And you get all the way down to Helmstadt.

And he's looking for a Russian speaking interpreter. And he can't find anybody. So he turns to me. He says, "Cohn, you're my interpreter. You come across with me." And I'm trying to get out of it. I said, "Hey, captain, I can't help you there. They speak Russian. I speak German, maybe a couple of words French, but certainly, the only Russian I know is [RUSSIAN]."

Yeah.

That's it. He said, "I don't care. I can't find anybody who speaks Russian. Carry the map." So he and I, we get a German to take us across-- across the river to the-- across the Elbe. Now, the Elbe had been designated by Eisenhower as the demarcation line between the Soviet and the US forces. Neither American forces should cross the Elbe, nor should the Russian forces cross the Elbe, because they didn't want the troops to intermesh and get into some sort of incident.

Now, that's [AUDIO OUT] true, apparently, up there near Hamburg, by that part, because the American crossed the-- Patton had always wanted to cross and get to Berlin, but with the Elbe, that stopped Patton. And Patton really was stopped by Eisenhower, by not giving him any gasoline. He couldn't get the gasoline. He couldn't violate the orders of getting across the Elbe.

Isn't that interesting.

But that was another story.

OK.

Anyway, here we get across. Halfway across, the captain gets up to make sure the Russians see this is an American coming across. So we land on the other side. And you would have thought that the captain and I had single-handedly captured all of Western Germany there. Because celebrated with us. They hugged us, and kissed us, and plied us with vodka.

Now, I was 19 years old. I had never had a glass of vodka in my life. And here's all this stuff coming at me. I took one sip and I knew, this is stuff that I better not drink because I know I couldn't tolerate it. So I was lucky to have some cigarettes. And instead of taking the vodka, I give them the cigarettes, and they're happy.

Of course, I'm no help to the captain. None of them speak a word of German. They're all Russian speakers. And they indicate they have to take him to the back. They took the captain and I guess he got himself an interpreter there. But I stayed at the river's edge, useless, trying to communicate with the Russian soldiers.

And there was an NCO. And he said, "Me, Moscow." I said, "Me, New York." He said, "You, come Moscow." I said, "You, come New York." Until the captain finally came. And we go back to our own side of the river. And I guess I tell people-- it was a big deal when we came in. They really celebrated us. But then I forgot about it. It wasn't until years later that it finally dawned on me why we got such a celebration.

Why?

Because for us, the war was over when we went to Magdeburg-- into Magdeburg, we know the war was over. The Russians had to fight every inch of the way, all the way up to the river. Because the Germans weren't going to give up to them. They were too afraid to give up to them. So they fought them.

So when they finally saw an American uniform, they recognized there were no more Germans in front of them. They had survived the war. They were celebrating their survival. And fighting was still going on in Berlin. But that was away from where they were. They had survived. They were--

So in other words, the appearance of you and the captain, for them was the war's over, we've won.

That's correct. That is correct. And it took me a while to recognize that. Because why would they have celebrated us the way they did? They weren't celebrating us. They were celebrating their survival.

Which you represented when you went there. Now, did you ever find out about whether the mission that the captain had was successful?

I have no idea. But it was successful, because the Russians never came across. None of them came across. So he must have convinced them.

When you landed there, did you-- this was-- you cross the Elbe at Magdeburg, is that right?

That's right.

OK.

The first meeting-- the first meeting of Russians and Americans was at Torgau. That was further to the south.

OK.

And we must have done it one or two days later. The first meeting was the 25th of April.

OK.

I know that because the 25th of April was celebrated in Washington at Arlington National Cemetery. Every year, the Russian ambassador has an appearance, a [?playing?] appearance in Arlington National Cemetery at a marker that commemorates the meeting of Russian and US troops at Torgau.

Yeah.

Because I went across the Elbe, and I told them, hey, I wasn't at Torgau. They said, that's good enough for government work. You were at Magdeburg and you went across. So it's wonderful that you can celebrate here. And we always come here to support and show, because it takes two to tango-- the Soviets and us. And this marker, we have to show our side of the story. So we come.

When I went, there were a number of veterans there. And we received a little flower from Russian schoolgirls, who were taking courses in Washington. They were of the diplomatic corps. And they gave us a flower.

And after all the other wreath were laid, the wreath came from all the former Soviets-- what were they-- republics, Soviet republics, which then became separate nations. And the nations that were still on talking terms with Russia came and laid a wreath at the marker. And so the wreaths from all these nations came.

And then the Russian wreath came last. And then we came with a little flower at the marker. And this doesn't seem very proper, because we should have some equal-- some equal stance in this kind of a--

So I wrote a letter to Senator Warner. Now, that's not the current Warner. That's the old Senator Warner, John Warner, who was [INAUDIBLE]. He said, you know, Frank, you're right. I'll have to see what we can do there.

So the next year when I came-- I got a call again. I think you got to interrupted.

Yeah, a little bit.

Yeah, anyway, the next year, there was a lieutenant colonel in uniform. But he didn't bring a wreath, so he was just another-- one other person that were attending that ceremony. And it didn't make any sense. And the following year was the 65th anniversary of the meeting at the Elbe. So that was 2005.

OK.

And they said, there's going to be a big deal. And I thought, well, they'll have a big deal at the embassy. No. I get invited to go to Moscow.

No kidding.

Because I was across the river-- across the River Elbe. There was another fellow who was at Torgau. And he was a Russian linguist, mind you. Because his parents were Russian and they had taken him to China. He was born in China. And then they came to the United States. But at home, they spoke Russian.

So he was fluent in Russian. And he made all the talks and was fine. And I was just a hanger on. But I was well treated as I came to Moscow. And we had a ceremony there. And we laid a flower at a similar marker in Moscow, at one of their parks. And that was a victory park.

And then they invited me again, two more times-- well, actually three more times, every five years. They invited me for the 70th anniversary, the 70-- and now too-- well, the 60th, the 65th, and the 70th. And now for the 75th anniversary. I had to decline. But they canceled it anyway because of the virus.

Yeah. So this was amazing. And when you first started attending these, were there many US veterans who came to the Arlington one? And were there any Russian veterans or Soviet veterans who came to the Arlington one?

Well, what happened, at the last reunion, they had gotten a Russian soldier who was at the Elbe. And they made us meet. And they took a movie of that whole situation of me meeting him. This was in 2015.

And so this was in Moscow?

This was in Moscow. And they have a whole movie of him and me. And each of one of us telling the story of how we were at the Elbe River. Of course, we were not the two who had met at the Elbe.

Of course, of course, but you had just been there at that time.

That' right.

Had he crossed to the American side?

No, nobody crossed to the American side from the Russians.

OK.

At Magdeburg, at Magdeburg. At Torgau, they did. At Torgau, the Russians were on our side the river.

OK. And you said, earlier, as you were proceeding to Magdeburg, you could see-- you could see there was a difference in the zone of occupation, that is what would become-- what would become the Soviet zone of occupation, or maybe even in Magdeburg itself. I'm not exactly sure of the geography, where you were able to be in the city. But was there something that you could see that was a marked physical distinction?

No, there was no particular marking. The only thing was, and we didn't even think of the occupation. We were just thinking--

Of the war, of course.

--the war's over. They're giving up, they're giving up. The war's over.

OK.

That was our thought. So when we entered Magdeburg, we knew that this was no more enemy territory. This was people who have given up.

OK.

And I say enemy territory, I meant unfriendly enemy territory where they shoot at you.

Yeah.

We knew nobody was going to shoot at us. They were very happy to give themselves up to us. And for the military, they loved it, because we fed them. The civilian population, they were on their own.

This is true.

Yep.

So where were you when the war actually ended? And how did you find out?

Well, in Magdeburg, we stayed in Magdeburg for quite a-- for all that period of time. So when we got there the last week of September, all of October--

No, no--

About half of our [AUDIO OUT] we spent in--

No, no, no, we're talking April. You're talking the last week of April.

April.

Yeah.

Yeah. And May is the-- the war was over.

Right. So you were in Magdeburg during that time.

I'm not sure what I'm saying here. But I'm talking about how at the end of April, when we came in, and then half of May, we stayed in Magdeburg. And they told us the war was over. And that was just another day, nobody give a darned about if the war was over. Nobody said, "Oh, hooray, hooray, the war is over." We knew the war was over. It was all anti-climatic at that point for us.

Now, they were celebrating in Times Square. But they weren't celebrating in Germany. The war was over before then as far as we were concerned.

And when did you leave Magdeburg.

It must've been around the 15th of May. We went back to Wiesbaden, because the T-Force headquarters was in-- not T-Force, but 12th Army Group headquarters was in Wiesbaden. General Bradley was in Wiesbaden. And we dissolved at that point in Wiesbaden.

And I was then ordered to Oberwesel near Frankfurt, which was all in that area, an intelligence center that was being set up. And I was going to be assigned to the intelligence center.

And when did that happen?

That happened at the end of May.

All right.

I guess the intelligence center was probably set up in June. We helped set it up.

OK, and what were your duties there?

Our team was broken up. So all the people in the team were not in the intelligence center. I don't know where Flo went, but he didn't go to the intelligence center. They put him some other place. So we had some intelligence requirements at other places.

OK.

As a matter of fact, Flo, after I got married, we spent a week of honeymoon at his farm in Utica, New York. He had a farm. He invited us. So I met Flo again. And we had a good time talking about old times. But I lost track of him after that.

And so you are then in-- excuse me, I'm looking here-- Oberwesel intelligence center. And when it gets set up, what are your assignments?

OK, they-- there was a lot of action going in support of the pending trials in Nuremberg. This was now 1946.

The trials, yes. OK.

Yeah, the trial is-- wait a second, I think the trial was in 1947.

OK, but when you first start working, I'm thinking even way back, when we're still in '45, and the war is only over for a couple of months--

Yes.

--what are the sort of things that you were doing?

Well, this is June '45 now that we're talking about. And they assigned me to a place in Fechenheim, which is on the other side of Frankfurt. And they gave me a Jeep. And I'm driving every day across Frankfurt to Fechenheim, where I got a squad of prisoners of war.

And in Fechenheim, I think it was another i.G Farben installation. And they had a warehouse where they shipped all the documents that they found in the various German cities. And we had to-- and I had to have the POWs crate those documents up and stamp them to go back to the States.

And I shipped them out back to the States for them to examine the documents there in leisure and select anything that could be used in Nuremberg for the prosecution of the war criminals. And these were crates, and crates, and crates of documents that we shipped back over the whole period that I was there, from June of '45 till May or '46, when I went home.

So in that time, when you're there during this time, do you find out, finally, what was the full extent of Nazi war crimes?

Definitely not, no. No information of that type of catastrophe that happened became available to me. Because the documents I had I'm sure described all of it, but I was reading any of those. I just read the-- the title. And if the title seemed correct, it went into the crate. And that's it. It went back. I never read any of it. So I [INAUDIBLE] information.

And so, also, there wasn't anything being broadcast, or the American liberation of Dachau or Buchenwald, or any of these places, where-- I mean, there wasn't-- there was no public news of it?

I didn't meet anybody who had liberated a concentration camp.

I see.

Now, there may have been some people in the intelligence center who knew, but they didn't talk. There was no discussion of it. As a matter of fact, when I got back to my headquarters, nobody ever talked about the war, or what they did, or what not.

They all talked about going home and what they're going to do at home. And if they're going to buy a house, or they're going to get married, or they have a girlfriend. Those were the discussions.

Nothing about the war, or what they found in the war, or any concentration camps, or whatnot. I'd never talked about my Russian camp. They never talked about their concentration camps. They may have had all that experience, but they didn't want to talk about it, and they didn't.

OK, OK. That's interesting for me to hear now so many years later, that that was what the atmosphere was. And it makes perfect sense.

Yes.

People are tired. They want to go home. There war's won.

Yeah. They didn't want to talk about it.

Yeah.

No.

Let's go back to something that's more normal.

And then the other job I got was, once in a while I had to pull-- by now I got all the way promoted to staff sergeant.

OK. Oh, tell me, by the way, what is a POC?

They didn't bother about promotion. I may have gotten a promotion to Inspect 5-- to T-5, I'm not sure. But then, when I got to the intelligence center, it was just one promotion after the other. Because the authorization for my job that I did in Fechenheim was staff sergeant. And they got me up to that as fast as they could. I got one promotion after another.

Now, here, I couldn't use the USUS anymore. And I was very reluctant to put my PFC or D5 stripes on. But finally got corporal stripes. And then I got sergeant stripes. And then I got these specialist stripes, which I didn't like. And then I got the staff sergeant stripes. And I got very proud of my staff sergeant stripes. I was very happy to sew them on.

OK, so when you would say--

As a sergeant I was in charge of the outer perimeter, of which we knew were highly classed war prisoners that were going to be tried. Now we thought we had the prisoners that were going to be tried i Nuremberg. We thought we had Goring in there. We didn't have Goring in there. All the Nuremberg trial prisoners were in Berlin. They were not in Frankfurt.

I see.

We had the people who were tried in the second Nuremberg trial, the concentration camp commanders and people of that level that were being tried and executed later too. But one thing is, we never know who was in there. Security was just excellent. Not even the guards around in this outer perimeter, not one of them, nor me as a sergeant of the guards, knew the name of one prisoner in that camp. It was tight as--

So was this a camp? Or was this a prison building?

Well, it was a number of buildings. We called it a camp.

OK. OK. And it was within Frankfurt itself? Or outside of Frankfurt?

It was in Oberwesel.

Oberwesel.

This is a number of miles outside of Frankfurt.

OK, OK.

And we had lists of people who were authorized to enter. And if they weren't on the list, they didn't go in. And all the interrogations were by specified interrogators, who didn't talk to anybody. And there were on our entry list.

And they were the people who were let in. And they were the ones who interrogated those prisoners. And they were the ones. And they got the lawyers. And they were the ones who then formulated the charges against those people to be tried.

Now, here I have one-- one incident that I always recall. And it was after duty. After duty, there was an NCO club that I now was able to go into because I was a non-commissioned officer.

And there I met some of the people that I had seen in the T-Force. They were not in my IPW team, but they were in other teams. And we talked once in a while when we were in headquarters. And one fellow, who was by name was Mueller-- his name was Mueller, he was of German descent. And spoke German fluently, just like me.

And we were in the NCO club together having a beer. And he had had a few more beers than I had. And then he said, "You know, Cohn, I got to tell you something. You know, I hate Jews." I gasped. What a statement for me.

I'm waiting, what's the next thing. He said, "Yeah, I hate Jews, but you're all right. You're all right. You know, you're so all right, I want to invite you to come to my home in Queens." With the parents, who were a bunch of anti-Semites, obviously, if he hated Jews.

Well, anyway, I didn't know how to handle that situation at all. I just shut up, but I stayed. And I made sure he got home because he had had too much to drink. I made sure that he got home.

But I certainly never went out to drink with him again. And I never really discussed anything with him again. If we had any associations, it was as strictly business. I never brought up his conversation. He never brought up his conversation.

And how had your paths crossed before? In which way-- had you been working together? I didn't quite catch that.

Well, he was in the-- we never even-- we never worked together in any mission.

OK.

He was just in a parallel situation. He was on another team.

I see.

And we socialized afterwards sometimes, a little bit. Until the time that I met him in that NCO club.

Yeah.

And of course, I never-- I never saw him again in Queens, for sure.

Oh, you didn't go visit?

No. But I kicked myself later on as to why I couldn't handle that a little bit better.

Well, first of all, lots of times, people, I think as part of our human condition, is that sometimes when we're taken by surprise, we don't know how to react. And only later do we kick ourselves and say, I wish I had said this, or I wish I had done that.

That's right.

That happens so much.

Caught me by complete surprise. It was the first-- the first evidence of any anti-Semitism.

Yeah. And he was also working in counter intelligence then?

Oh, yes, he was, absolutely, yeah. I don't know what his job was there in the intelligence center. We never discussed each other's jobs. He didn't know that I had a squad of POWs that I worked with.

And by the way, those POWs were very, very reliable. There was a sergeant by the name of ?Kauffman?]. And I dealt with him. And everything went through [?Kauffman?]. And [?Kauffman?], one time, one day, came up to me-- this must have been in '46-- yeah, in January or February of '46, because I had to bring them all back to the POW camp every day, the shift was over.

And he said, "You know, could you spare us for 24 hours one day? Because I think what I can arrange is that we can get discharged from the prisoner of war camp. And I can promise you that every man will still come and work for you.

But we will get paid. And from the occupation, from the German government, working for the occupation, we will all have jobs. And we will work for you and do the same thing that we did before-- if you can spare me 24 hours."

I said, "I'll arrange it." Sure enough, I put him in the camp. And two days later, he came with his squad. They worked, no longer in German uniforms, but in civilian uniforms. And they went home every night. And they all came back. And they were my employees. No longer prisoners of war.

Did you get on with them?

Pardon me?

Did you get on with them?

Yes, very easily. They were happy they could communicate with me. They never asked me why I spoke German. And I never told them why I spoke German. And other people-- my cover story always was, "Yeah, I'm an American, I was born in America. But my parents used to be in the Towson area before World War I. And we spoke German at home. I learned German at home because they spoke German." And that's how I learned German. But I was American.

So this is what you--

And that worked.

OK, OK.

And by the way, I used that story even after the war, when I was an officer and assigned with three tours in Germany. I still hold them I was born in America. I never told them I was born in Germany. I thought I would compromise myself. If I tell them I was born in Germany, they would think that I have some sort of loyalties to Germany.

I see. I was going to ask you what was your thought process for this. In other words, you didn't want to show, or you didn't want to have a tie to this place.

Yeah, I wanted no connection with Germany at all. I didn't mind working in the occupation as a German, and as an American soldier on German soil. I didn't mind that. I was very comfortable. My wife was less comfortable than I was with the Germans. But there were-- I'm sure I met many of them that were Nazis. Because I was dealing with police.

I was a military policeman. So I was dealing with-- particularly I remember, there was one fellow in Nuremberg that my wife really hated his guts. Because she just saw through him as if he was a Nazi uniform. Because he appeared that way.

And he probably had a Nazi past. But I never-- we tried to investigate them, but it was very difficult to find out what their true positions were. They had positions in the German government.

And there probably were Nazi positions that might have even had something to do with concentration camps. But unless we had any proof that they were in concentration camps, we didn't move. We let them stay in their employment on the German side.

So are you talking now about later tours of duty--

Later.

Well after-- well afterwards.

Yes.

And you had mentioned you had had three such tours of duty.

That's correct.

Can you tell me the years that they were? There were three tours of duty, three years each.

Yeah, the first tour was from '50 to '53.

OK.

In fact, that was funny, because when we first came over, and I came over with my wife on an American transport, and she stayed with some women, and I stayed with some men. We didn't get a cabin together. I was a second lieutenant. And all the time we were coming over, she said anything but Berlin, anything Berlin. Because the Berlin airlift had just ended. And she was very much afraid of going to Berlin.

So we got orders when we got to bring Bremerhaven to report to the 26th Infantry. And see, the first two years of my active duty training had to be combat branch training. And that was infantry training. So I was in infantry when I went over to Germany the first time. And I was assigned to the 26th Infantry Division. That's the division that was guarding the war criminals during the Nuremberg trial.

OK.

But anyway, the division was in Grafenwohr, Germany. Well it was actually assigned to Bamberg, Germany, with duty station in Grafenwohr. Grafenwohr was a maneuver area in Bavaria that the Germans used and we took over. So when

we got to Bamberg, I dropped Paula. And I got her her quarters.

And off I went to Grafenwohr. So she didn't see me for three weeks. She was all alone in Bamberg. And it was catastrophic. She didn't speak a word of German. She had a maid. And the maid didn't speak any English. The only saving grace was a little dog that she'd-- she bought a German shepherd.

So she was this--

I hear a--

That's probably my dog if you can hear my dog. I wish it wouldn't happen, but she's barking at the moment.

Well, it isn't on my side, so it's OK.

Anyway--

So that's your first tour, from 1950 to 1953.

Yeah, but the funny part was, because I didn't see her but once a month, maybe a day or two a month, the 6th Infantry was formed and Grafenwohr to go to Berlin. And I was put into the 6th Infantry.

So my assignment now became Berlin. And my wife then said, thank, God, it's Berlin. Because she sure didn't like Grafenwohr. And in Berlin, it was 27 days of the month at home and three days in the field, while Grafenwohr was the other way around.

Yeah. OK, so that's tour number one.

That was number one. And by the way, I only had one year in Berlin. And the rest, I had to go back into Germany proper, because Eisenhower wanted to send the dependents out of Berlin. And since I had a wife, I had to go out of Berlin.

Went back to the 26th Infantry. And I was anxiously waiting for my orders to go to military police. And finally, they came. And I went to then from Bamberg and Grafenwohr, I went to Darmstadt.

And then the first division in Darmstadt was the first MP company. And then the division had to move to Wurzburg. And then I spent time in Wurzburg. So I had all kinds of locations. I was in Berlin. I was in Bamberg. I was in Darmstadt. And I was in Wurzburg.

And all through that three-year tour.

Tour. And then the second tour was 1956 to '59. And that was a tour in two places. I had one tour was near Stuttgart. And I was the Provo- Marshal for the 7th Army Support Command. And then I got a battalion near Nuremberg, at Furth. That's where Kissinger came from.

Kissinger kept his German accent because he was 15 years old when he came over. I came over, I was 13. That's why I got rid of my accent.

Well, maybe he didn't go to the movies or listen to the radio as much as you did.

Yeah. Anyway, I was near-- I was in Furth until '59. And I got orders from Germany to go to Vietnam. And I just went back to the States. Got Paula settled near New York. And I went to [INAUDIBLE] year to Vietnam. Then in 1970, I went direct from Vietnam back to Germany. And I had a tour from 19-- it was 1970 to '73-- '74. I came back in '74.

And have you ever been back since then?

Only when we took a cruise that stopped near Bremerhaven at one of the places. And they had an option to drive to Berlin, but I declined to do that. So I really never was back in Germany, not really.

And did you ever have any desire to go to Breslau?

None, whatsoever. Now, if somebody were to tell me that I could just put myself in Breslau, I probably would want to see what Breslau looks like. But I never had any desire to go back to Germany or to Breslau. Particularly not to Breslau. I didn't want to see Breslau again.

OK, OK.

Well, we have yet another part of our interview, but I would like to suggest the following.

Yeah.

That maybe we could continue it tomorrow morning for a short while and wrap things up for today. And the part that we'd continue on would be your post-war involvement with-- not only post-war, but since the museum opened, your connections with the museum, with sharing your story, with Holocaust remembrance. Would that be--

Sure.

--OK for you.

I have a commitment at 1 o'clock, so we have to cut it before then.

So why don't I call you at 10:00 tomorrow morning. And I have--

Sure.

I have a commitment even well before 1 o'clock. I'm thinking this would be only for about an hour, if that much.

Oh, good, OK. Well, to finish. I returned on the 5th of May 1946. And I ended up at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. They gave me some documents to bring back. So I had a very nice passage on a Navy ship. And their mess had the best food you could imagine. Since the whole war and what not, I never ate as well as I did on the trip back from Europe in the Navy, in the Navy mess, in the NCO mess of the Navy.

Then when I got-- when I ended up in Brooklyn, I wanted to take a taxi to go home. And nobody would take me because they had a-- around lunchtime, they made all the money with short trips. And nobody wanted to take a trip into Manhattan. I had to wait about three or four hours before somebody took pity on me and took me back to home.

And I was real anxious to get home. But it was a funny thing--

What?

When I got home, they dropped me in front of my house. And I had a big duffel bag. And I dumped the duffel bag in the hallway of that apartment. That was like a railroad apartment.

Yes, I remember you telling me.

I didn't ring the doorbell. I didn't want to ring the doorbell. I took a walk. I walked through the neighborhood, the old places of all the kids that I knew and whatnot. I looked at those places.

And it took me about an hour of walking until I finally had the courage to get home and ring the bell. And of course, my

mother had been waiting for me, but she had no idea when I was coming. And she was so happy. And embraced me and all that. And then my father came for work. And everything was fine. But it was funny that I couldn't-- I couldn't go home right away.

Why do you think that was?

Block. I don't know. I don't know. It was just a block, couldn't do it.

In the notes that you sent me, you said that you processed Hitler's last will and testament.

Yeah.

When was this?

What was that again?

You said that you had processed-- amongst the documents that you handled in Germany, you processed Hitler's last will and testament.

Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. That was-- that was a funny thing. One fine-- well, there were two things that happened that I really should talk about. The first thing was that I got called into the Office of Lieutenant Colonel [? Grunich, ?] who was the Chief of Documents in SHAEF headquarters in the I.G. Farben building.

And he said, "I have a very sensitive mission for you." And I said, "Yes, sir, what do you want me to do?" He said, "I have documents here that I don't want any German to see, but I need to get 50 copies made of this document. And do you think you can go Fechenheim where they have photographic capabilities and get some German, without reading the documents, to make me 50 copies of this thing? It's got about three or four pages."

I said, "Yes, sir, I think I can. I've met some of these Germans who work there. And I think I can probably blindfold a guy and make him a challenge that he can copy this thing blindfolded." And [? Grunich ?] said, "That's a good idea, you do that. You do that."

And he gives me the document in a sealed envelope. I get to Fechenheim and I unseal it. And I open it, and it's the last will and testament of Hitler. I said, oh, my God, no wonder this is so sensitive. They don't want anybody in Germany to read what that is. And I glanced at it quickly.

I could tell it's the last-- his gripes against the Germans who let him down and against the Jews, and the Jews are going to be wiped out. And it was just a diatribe against the Germans who let him down and all against the Jews.

And was it dated in, let's say, late April '45? Was it dated at all?

Yes, it was dated very late. I don't remember now what date it was. But it was dated late. It was at the end of the war, yes. It was his--

Probably hi very final, final.

He must have been in the Chancellery when he wrote it.

OK.

With Eva, yeah.

OK.

Anyway, I got the German. I gave him the challenge. He says, "Yes, I can do it." And he did. And I counted all my documents, exactly 50 copies and stapled them together like they should be. And I put them in a box. And the German never saw, never knew what he was doing. And I thanked him profusely.

I gave him a pack of cigarettes because it was extra beyond what he's supposed to do. And I bought the box and gave it directly to Colonel [? Grunich. ?]

Isn't that interesting. Now, tell me, what was the technology at the time? Photocopy machines didn't exist yet, did they?

I don't know. They didn't have the ability at the I.G. Farben building to do it. He wouldn't have sent me to Fechenheim otherwise. It just couldn't have had--

So you don't know what technology the man used in order to make the 50 copies?

The technology was much less than we have now. And he wanted to have nice, clear, legible copies.

Interesting. So maybe it was photography.

It was all supposed to look like originals. And that's what I did in Fechenheim.

OK.

Anyway, the next day, The Stars and Stripes came out, last will testament of Hitler. They printed everything that was in that document. What about those 50 copies? Well, he gave it out to all the staff members as a souvenir.

And stupid me, I didn't make a copy for myself. Because I thought it was all highly classified. Had I known what it was for, I certainly would have made a copy for myself, but I didn't.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

This was all of a farce. He gave it all out. He didn't want the word out until he surprised everybody with the last will and testament of Hitler.

Oh, my goodness.

How do you like that?

Yeah, what a guy.

The other story I have is I wanted to get to Berlin about my aunt, to check on her.

Yeah.

So I had told Colonel [? Grunich ?] that if there was ever any chance that-- if he had a need to go as a courier to Berlin, to send me because I wanted to check on my aunt. And [? Grunich ?] said, yeah, he's going to see if he can help me on it. And it was in December of '45 that he called me in his office. And he said, "I have two crates of documents that need to be delivered to the Berlin document section.

"But," he says, "this"-- now, I'm a staff sergeant-- "But I have this T5,"-- which is like a corporal. He said, "I have to put him in charge," [? Grunich ?] said, "because he's got something that he has to take care of for me also. And I want to be sure that you don't start fussing around with him because you have to listen to what he wants to do." I said, "No problem, I'm getting a favor here. And I'll take care of your two crates, no problem."

So I meet the T5 with these 10 crates that he has. And we have a Jeep and a trailer. And he had those crates in there.

And I said I can put mine on top of yours, of your documents. He said, "Documents? I don't have any documents." And I said, "But they've marked the same way as mine, top secret, not to be opened, except whenever-- except by authorized personal. They're all stamped."

He said, "You know what I have? I got black market stuff. I got cigarettes. I got coffee. I've got all kinds of stuff that I'm supposed to sell in Berlin. And then I come back, and I split it with the colonel. And he gets half, I get half."

Oh, my goodness.

So we're going to Helmstadt, where we get into the Soviet zone. And get through Helmstadt. And on the other zone, the MPs are always very alert as to what's coming into Berlin. And I thought to myself, oh, my god, if we get to Berlin and they know what the heck is in here, and I say, I have no idea what's in there, they certainly wouldn't believe me. I'm the staff sergeant and he's the corporal. They'll hang me.

Well, as luck would have it, they saw the top secret stamps. And they said fine. And I had documentation for that, that I can show them for the two boxes. And he had similar documentation for the 10 boxes. So I gave them both the papers. And they just waved us through.

And we get in there. I said, "Hey, corporal, I don't want to see you again on this until you've gotten rid of all this stuff. I don't want to see those 10 crates. I'll take care of mine." Which I did.

And then I found out about my aunt, that she was no longer alive. And then when he came back, he said, "Let me show you something." He had a little bag. And he was on top of the bed, and he emptied the bag. They were all diamonds.

Oh.

And then he said, "Have you got any cigarettes?" I said, "Well, I brought two cartons, because I thought I might have to give somebody to get the information on my aunt." He said, "Give me the two cartons."

OK, so he went out, comes back. He gives me \$300. "What's this about?" He said, I sold the two cartons. They're \$150 apiece. "I said, "They cost me \$1 apiece." He said, "That's right. And you get \$300." And at that point, with what they were doing, I thought, well, I got \$300.

Wow. Wow.

And I took the \$300 home to my mother.

Wow.

How about that.

You paint a picture of what life was like at this particular time in Germany.

It was all [AUDIO OUT] market in Berlin. The black market was thriving. It was-- well, we lost our shirt. The Russians made all the money on the black market. But they finally had to-- had to stop the currency that they were giving out that everybody had access to and come up with separate currency that the Russians didn't get. So that the black market, at least in terms of the Russians profiting, had to stop.

But it shows that lots of people were involved.

Oh, yes. These are high ranking officers in SHAEF headquarters.

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah, terrible. Oh, they also-- while I was shipping documents home, one fine day, I get all kinds of furniture. And a major brought them, a Major Spiegel was his name. Put the furniture up. And he said, "Just let the POWs crate the stuff like they do the documents and I'll put a separate number on it. And we'll ship it back was the documents."

And that's what he did. My POWs got his furniture, and the furniture was taken care of on the other side of the ocean, and liberated, or whatever they want to call it. But it was all black market, all criminal stuff.

But with my-- I figured, hey, this is not my business. If he wants to sell-- send those documents back, it was my POWs who were crating them, OK, but I have nothing to do with it. And I kept my mouth [AUDIO OUT] yeah.

So how did you-- how did you find out about your aunt? And what agencies did you go to? Did you talk to people privately? How did you learn at that time that--

No, it was the Red Cross. The Red Cross had all kinds of documentation and lists. And they traced the name Elsa Liechtenstein to Theresienstadt, and told me it was untraceable from Theresienstadt, but that Theresienstadt was feeding-- feeding--

Auschwitz.

Auschwitz, yeah, this main camp in Auschwitz and Birkenau.

Yeah. Did you subsequently ever find out the documentation from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz?

Yeah, well, they said unless she was on the roster of survivals at Theresienstadt, she went to Auschwitz, and we don't have any documentation of that. But everybody went to Auschwitz from there.

And did you ever find out any further documentation on her in future years?

No, but her son apparently did. He got some documentation that she was in Auschwitz and Birkenau, and she was gassed.

OK, OK. OK, for today, it's a sad note to end up on, to wrap up on. But of course, a very pertinent note, because that's what we're all about. That's what we're trying to document. And your aunt was somebody who didn't make it.

Shall we then conclude for today. And tomorrow morning at 10:00, I will call you and we will take this up again. And thank you so much for everything that you've shared today, for the level of detail.

This is-- this is not often that we are able to get this amount. And you really painted a very vivid picture of the post-war era, the first army of occupation, and what was all involved with that.

Yeah.

So thank you very much.

Good.

And I'll say that for today then we are concluding. And we will continue on tomorrow, which will be June 25th. Bye-bye now.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Tomorrow at 10 o'clock.

Tomorrow 10 o'clock. Bye-bye.