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Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. This evening we have with us two gentlemen who were in the American Army, and they were captured by the Germans, and were kept in a prisoner of war camp. We have Morton Brooks and Donald Day. Morton, would you tell us when you were captured?

Yes, I was captured at the beginning of January in 1945, and was a prisoner until almost May '45.

And can you tell us where you were taken?

I was taken near Strasbourg, on the French-German border, and first was shipped to a prisoner of war camp near Frankfurt called Bad Orb. That's B-A-D capital O-R-B. And from there, I was shipped to another camp in I guess would be Eastern Germany. I believe it's now in the East German sector. Berga am Elster, or Stalag VII-C.

How many of you-- your buddies were captured with you?

At the moment that I was captured, I think there were only about six or seven of us. And of course, we were joined with other prisoner of war-- prisoners of war-- because our battalion was pretty well destroyed in the battle.

I see. Don, when were you captured?

December 3, 1944.

It's a date that you don't forget, do you?

No, I don't forget it.

No. 1944. And when were you liberated?

Well, we left the compound where we were in April, I think 23rd or 24th in 1945, and met British troops about six days later.

And how many of your group were captured with you?

There were 13 of us out of a company at that point of 300.

13 out of 300.

Out of 300, right. 13 left.

Oh, 13 left. The others had died. Oh, these numbers are staggering.

Did it make a difference-- was it known immediately that you were Jewish, that-- a Jewish American--

Not immediately.

--to the Germans?

Not immediately. Actually, we were just prisoners of war.

Well, how were you treated as normal American prisoners of war?

Well, we were just herded together and shipped behind the German lines. Initially, we were just placed in like a barn where we were guarded. And I think it was three days before we realized that three days had-- the time had really

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passed. And then we were placed in boxcars and shipped to the prison camp that we were first placed in.

Was it still unknown to the Germans that you were Jewish?

At that moment, yes.

At that moment.

Yes.

When did they find out that you were Jewish?

When we were processed in this first camp. And then the Jewish prisoners of war were segregated and placed in separate barracks.

How many of the-- how many were you?

In this particular camp there were approximately 80 of us.

80 Jewish-American prisoners of war.

Yes, right.

And at that point, were you treated any differently from your fellow prisoners of war?

During the time in that camp, we were not, to my knowledge. I think we got the same food rations and everything else. It's just when they got an order to ship out a contingent of prisoners, all the Jewish prisoners were selected to go.

And the other stayed behind.

A good share with them. Over 400 who were sent. So there were the Jewish group plus enough to make up the 400.

I see. And where were you sent?

And then we were sent to this camp called Berga am Elster, or Stalag VII-C, and that was forced labor. So the others remained in just a barracks situation.

Oh, they didn't have to work? Just the Jewish prisoners had to work?

No. In this camp that we were sent to we all had to work, yes. But as I recall, they selected the Jewish prisoners, and those they-- supposedly who were troublemakers, those who didn't fully cooperate with them, plus enough to make up that group.

Doesn't sound like Hogan's Heroes.

No, it was not Hogan's Heroes. [LAUGHS]

No. That was greatly glamorized. Don, would you tell us your story.

Well, it's a little different. After we were captured, we were interrogated pretty close to the front lines. And I happened to be reading something that I wrote shortly after I came back, because I wrote a series of articles, and I read it just before the interview tonight. And I think it's worth saying because I think it was true. The farther away you got from the front lines, the worse your position was. Much-- the more difficult it was.

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I think the soldiers had respect for soldiers.

Irregardless of nationality.

Yeah, I didn't detect that kind of a problem close to the front lines. But the farther back got, became much more of a problem.

Certainly, in terms of whether they knew you were Jewish, they knew that relatively early in the game because you wore a dog tag. I mean, your dog tag had an H on it, which says that you were--

You were Hebrew.

You were Hebrew.

Right.

Right.

So that was--

And of course, a lot of people, a lot of Jewish prisoners, soldiers or sailors as the case may be, I suppose they had to make a decision as to what they were going to do when they knew they were going to be captured.

Did any of them get rid of their tags.

I'm sure that some people got rid of their dog tags, because otherwise there would be no way of knowing.

Surely.

But anyway, we wore dog tags and so they knew we were Jewish.

I was sent to a number of different places, actually. I remember the first place, we were walked-- we were marched through Dusseldorf to the train station. And we had-- we went through a bombing there. American planes, as I recall.

And then, ultimately, we were put on a train, and we were on a train for five days in cattle cars. Ended up in a stalag by the name-- in New Brandenburg.

In those cattle cars, in those boxcars, did you get water and food?

They gave us a loaf of black bread, and some Limburger cheese, and said, it'll be five days. And five days later they opened the doors. And that's what it was.

So I was in New Brandenburg for a while. That was a stalag in which there were multinationals. There was a lot of Americans. There were English. There were Poles. There were French. There were Serbs.

I'll never forget that stalag, because that was the place where they used to take the Poles out, and the Russian prisoners in particular, and use them for target practice. I mean, that was a--

And that you.

--that was a daily occurrence at the stalag.

There was some interchange between the compounds. I was in New Brandenburg for a while, and then I was moved from New Brandenburg to another stalag, which was very close to the Polish border. And that was the stalag where we

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had some problems.

In that stalag, they separated-- that was a working stalag. All the enlisted men under the Geneva Convention were-- you could work them. You couldn't work officers, but you could work enlisted men. So we knew that we would have to work.

But in that stalag, what they did is they separated the German prisoners. They took 12 of us. They moved us out of the stalag.

You mean, the American prisoners.

Yeah, Jewish-- American-Jewish--

American Jewish prisoners.

--prisoners, right. They moved us out of the stalag and walked us to a compound in a little town near Austerlitz, I think it was. And the 12 of us lived there during the winter with two guards on a farm. And we chop beechwood. That was reserved solely for the Jewish prisoners.

Was that very long? Were they long hours, normal hours?

Well, they were long hours. We got up early in the morning. It was cold because this was in northern Germany.

What kind of clothing did you have?

We had the clothing that we were captured with. Had no coats. They had a-- I had a-- I had, like, the British equivalent of the Eisenhower jacket, which I had traded with a sergeant from the 1st British paratroop division, who had been captured at Arnhem, when they dropped in Arnhem in Holland, and they had that disaster. A lot of those fellows were captured. I met some of them at New Brandenburg. And so I wore that kind of a jacket all winter long.

Why did you trade your jacket for his, though?

Because they had an escape kit in their jackets. They had German Marks and German maps sewed underneath their stripes and underneath their identification. They had divisional identification. This was 1st British paratroop division.

And this fellow who I traded with, he had lost a limb, so he wasn't going anywhere, and he knew he wasn't going anywhere. He knew he was there for the rest of the war.

In any event, I guess the question you asked, was it tough. Well, we got up early in the morning. They'd march us out into the woods. We were not allowed any fires. The only fire we were allowed was a fire a half an hour at noon. And they brought you a thing of soup at noon. And you either ate that or you ate nothing.

And they let you have a fire for the half hour at noon. Then you'd go back to work, and you'd work until nightfall, and then walk back. They'd march you back to the barracks, that was the end of the day.

And the barracks were cold, I presume.

We were allowed some heat in the barracks at night. And we were also allowed, from time to time, Red Cross packages. But that was very intermittent. We did get some Red Cross packages during that period of time.

And these two officers who guarded you, do you think they treated you deferentially because you were Jewish?

Differently or deferentially?

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Well, anyway you want to answer that.

Differently. We weren't there because we were American prisoners. We were there because we were American-Jewish prisoners and they never let us forget it. And of course, we were obviously very conscious of it. You get in a group with 12 American Jews and you know why you're there.

They were not very nice people, the two guards that we had. I can still remember one of them very well. If they felt they had to exercise force and restraint they exercised it, and because they had no inhibitions. There was really nobody over them.

So they could do whatever they wanted to.

They were operating almost completely independently of the stalag.

No one came to supervise or to inspect all that time?

All that period of time.

So they could have killed you if they wanted to--

They could have.

--with any kind of excuse.

Yeah, they could have. We had one guy who was-- one of the boys who was pretty badly hurt who was taken back to the stalag. And I assume he got medical treatment there. At least, I think he was taken back to stalag. I really don't know.

Did you bond closer? Or I shouldn't say closer. Did you bond to each other because you were 12 Jewish men under surveillance and had no way to escape?

Well, obviously, under those kinds of conditions, you make-- you develop relationships that have a depth and a nature that you really-- very difficult to emulate under any other kinds of circumstances. They were very close and very intense.

I was a young-- I was a young kid at the time. I think I must have been 20 years old. Yes, I was. I was 20 years old.

But there was a fellow from Minneapolis who was in his late 30s, married with children. Very, very difficult for him. Difficult for some of the other people who had family. I was at least alone.

Did you receive letters via the Red Cross.

No, I never received a letter as long as I was a PW. Matter of fact, I never know whether my family ever knew that I was alive. But they didn't know until April. It was four and a half months later when they received a telegram that I was a PW.

And the same thing with you. So nobody knew, and you received no mail. Did you get any Red Cross packages?

Well, they were going to do an inspection. So they took out some Red Cross packages to-- so it should look good.

To make it look good.

To make it look good. But at that point, we couldn't eat any of it.

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Because you were suffering from malnutrition?

Yeah. You just couldn't eat food already, especially what was in there. Some of these dried fruit and--

Oh, that you couldn't absorb. What kind of food did you get as a prisoner of war?

We had the soup once a day and this loaf of black bread that eight of the fellows had to share. And because I cut the bread more carefully, I guess, and more even than anybody else, I was entrusted with--

You were the bread cutter.

I was the bread cutter.

That's a very dangerous position to be in, is it?

That's right, because one crumb would be argued over.

Were you the youngest?

No, I wasn't the youngest. I think we were all very similar. We had been in an army specialized training unit which got closed up and put into this infantry unit.

Did you ever get Red Cross packages, food packages?

No. And I say, except for that one time.

Except for that inspection time.

Right.

And do you feel that you were treated differently because you were a Jewish prisoner of war?

Well, we were segregated in this first camp and, of course, shipped to this work camp, which was, as I say, to my knowledge, part of the Buchenwald complex. And we were marched down every morning to work in these mines.

Did you wear anything identifying as a prisoner of war?

No, we wore the same clothes that we were captured in.

And did you have warm enough clothes?

Not really, but I guess we managed.

You had to make do.

We managed, yeah. They were the combat outfits that the US Army had supplied.

And in a way, fortunately, they had given us these snow-pack boots shortly before I was captured.

That was fortunate.

So they were somewhat warmer. It was a mixed blessing, because in the forced march, I think it was those boots, because the socks had pretty well disintegrated, and I think one pair that I had was stolen. So the rubbing of the feet against the inside of the boots rubbed a lot of the tissue away. So the feet were pretty raw when I was liberated.

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Before we get to the march, how long did you work in the mines, and what kind of work did you do?

I guess that was February and March. Yeah, that would have been about two months.

And were you treated differently because you were a Jewish prisoner of war?

I think we were all put in the same position. We were in this group in this forced labor situation.

So it didn't make any difference.

No, not at that point.

The guards didn't treat you any differently.

The guys didn't treat us any differently.

How did the guards treat the prisoners of war. You're laughing. That's a strange laugh. How--

Well, I--

You must have had favorite names-- Ivan the Terrible or what have you.

It was not with kindness.

Not with kindness.

No. They had SS troopers who I think were watching. I think most of the guards at that point were the home front people.

So they were either very young or very old, I presume.

Yes, that's right. And they were not in a happy situation. It was toward the end of the war.

Did they ever express the feeling that they knew the war was ending, and not to their advantage?

Not until very late, when, just shortly before we were liberated, they-- a couple of them began talking a little differently. And one thing, they wanted to keep away, because the forced march was back and forth. As American troops approached they marched us in the other direction. As Russian troops approached, they marched us in the opposite direction. I don't know if you had that same situation.

But then they were-- they certainly didn't want to be captured by the Russians.

No. We've heard that story by many.

And I think it was also on that March, I think it was about three days, we marched past the political prisoners in the famous blue and white striped outfits, each one lying along the side of the road with a bullet through their head. And of course, that gave us cause to wonder if that was going to be our fate.

These were political prisoners from what countries?

Well--

Or you just didn't--

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--we didn't know. But they were--

--didn't know they were political prisoners. So of course you were very apprehensive.

--just lined up along the road, as apparently they had marched before us--

Oh, dear.

--and had been--

How long did you actually march, and how many miles?

It was almost a month.

Continuously?

Yes, continuously.

And how many kilometers or miles did you march a day?

Oh, I-- oh, I couldn't--

On the average? 20, 30 miles?

I'm sure at least, yes, because you got up at--

And you showed us a picture where you really look very, very wan, very thin. How much weight did you lose?

Well, that's when I--

Oh, here's your picture.

That's when I-- that's when I was better.

That's when you were better.

I was better.

And you said before you weighed 85 pounds.

I had been flown out of Germany, and I was in a hospital in England for about three weeks when that picture was taken.

You mentioned you were a stretcher case, so you barely made that march. If it had lasted a little bit longer, you might not have made it.

Yeah, there weren't many-- that many left that-- when I was liberated. I think about--

How many of your group died?

About 20% of the group was-- survived.

20% survived?

Yes, of the 400.

Why do you think you survived and the others didn't?

I don't know. We always wonder about that.

It's a difficult question. I don't know. How do you answer that question, yeah? [LAUGHS]

Did any of the--

Fortunate, I guess.

Mazel, mazel, mazel.

God works in strange ways.

Strange, yeah.

Absolutely, yeah.

Did any of the guards run away toward the end of the march?

Well, the day or the morning that we were liberated, we had marched quite a long time the day before and were really exhausted. And those who were left of us were put in this barn. And in the morning we could hear some gunfire in the distance. And then some of the guards came in and wanted us to get out and start marching again.

And that little group that was left at that point decided that we really couldn't go on, and maybe this was it. And so we just said we wouldn't go. And they tried to force. They butted some of us with their guns. But the group just decided that that was it.

So they ran away at that point?

So the guards then-- and then somebody yelled in, and they began to run off.

When you were put in the barn when you were being marched each day, where did the guards go? Were they in the barn with you?

They stayed outside or--

Nearby.

--they had their own place. Yes. They didn't stay in. I guess whatever place that was nearby that they could keep an eye on them.

And what kind of food did you get while you were being marched?

Not very much. I guess whatever they picked up. They would give us some kind of water with some turnips in it or something, if they had it.

You sometimes hear from those that were being marched from the concentration camp that they ate grass, or herbs, or whatever they could find that was just wild.

Well, I do recall that some people saw egg shells, and picked them up, and licked them. I guess I had dysentery or diarrhea.

That was a common thing, I understand.

Yes, and I guess I was always fearful of illness, and did whatever I could to avoid anything that would contaminate myself.

So you were very careful. Who actually liberated your group?

The 11th Armored, an American army.

Would you describe that scene? It must have been an unforgettable scene.

Yeah, that was kind of unforgettable. I recall that, as I said, the guards took off. And we stayed there. And the firing continued. And then there was a quiet period. And someone of our group looked out and yelled at the Americans.

And so then we went out to see if it was clear. And we began running toward them. They were on a road that ran below this higher ground that we were on.

And they sort of grabbed us, and we loaded on to what equipment they had. I recall one of them gave me a little cheese, a C-ration cheese, and I tried to eat it, and I couldn't eat it. [LAUGHS]

They must have been shocked when they saw your appearance.

I think they were.

That's a day you don't forget.

Mm-hmm.

What about you, Don. What kind of scene did you experience when the British liberated your group?

Well, we had-- I had been on a forced march also.

How long was your forced march?

It was a number of weeks. We had--

Was that just the Jewish POWs, or all the--

Now what happened-- OK, what happened, I tell you, I was in that small compound with 12 other fellows. We were there for weeks. And then, in about March, they moved us out, and we joined a group of about 300 walking west, because remember, I was close to the Polish border, and there was a general Russian offensive at that time. And we walked, I would guess, probably 400 or 500 kilometers at least, I'm sure.

In how long of a period?

Oh, it was a number of-- I think we averaged-- happened to read it-- some days 25 kilometers, some days 55 kilometers. It varied from-- varied from day to day. You either kept up with the group or they didn't. If you fell behind, they'd butt you.

Did anybody die along the way?

Yeah, there were guys who died along the way, and the guys who were shot along the way?

Just at random?

No--

At a whim?

--if you couldn't keep up, you weren't going to make it. So it wasn't much choice. You kept up.

They put you in barns at night. And you're right. They used to serve what they call soup. It was hot water with something on it, and that was it.

What was your morale like-- yours and generally speaking as a group? Yours and the group?

I think you grew up fast in those days. I don't know any other way to say it.

You have to understand, I think, the feelings of the time, that it's very difficult to sit here today and project yourself back, because you were trained to be a soldier. You were trained to kill. You had killed. And you had seen people killed. And it was an everyday occurrence.

I served in the infantry. You go through a town and you'd step on dead bodies. And before we were captured, you were in hand-to-hand combat. And so things became very impersonal. You almost became detached from some of the stuff. Maybe that's the way that you learn to live with it.

In any event, we walked all the way to Schwerin, which was a hospital town, in that there was a hospital there, and it was a town which was not bombed. When we got to Schwerin, they separated us again.

The Jewish POWs and the [CROSS TALK]

They took us, and they put with us about four or five other fellows who had been captured in North Africa. And they had been prisoners since--

For a while.

--1942.

Oh, my.

They had made it almost for three years.

In what condition were they?

They were not in-- we were all in about the same condition by that point in time. It was a tough winter. It was cold. And this was northern Germany.

And we then were separated again. We were put into another compound. And we were again forced to cut wood.

Again. So you were experienced.

Again, I was an experienced woodcutter. I cut more birch trees than you can shake a stick at.

Were these just Jewish prisoners of war now.

Yeah, yeah.

And with new guards. With different guards.

With new guards. We were there for some period of time. We were not too far from a main road, because they used to take us into the woods to chop trees. And there would be traffic moving along the main road, troops moving east and west.

Did anyone try to escape?

Well, what happened to us was that we were constantly being strafed, because they were strafing the roads. These were by Russian planes, primarily, rather than American planes. And we lost two of our fellows one day.

Just from the strafing.

Yeah. And these-- unfortunately, both of these guys had been captured in North Africa.

Oh, they had been through so much.

They survived almost three years, and then they-- and then they got shot by a Russian plane.

And we began to realize, if we were going to-- if we were going to die, there's not much point in dying by a Russian plane or dying layer. So we began to think about leaving.

And one day there was a troop movement of German troops along the row. They're moving from east to west up towards the American and the British lines. Russian planes came over, and they started strafing. Of course, as soon as they started strafing, everybody gets off the road and into the woods where we were.

And I talked pretty good German by that time. I had taken German for six years in college and high school. And there was this young kid who came along and was close to us. We got started talking. He was a young Pole who had been forced into the German Army. That was very typical in those times.

And he was scared of death. And this kid was really scared. And he was-- we'd talk. He thought I was first British, and I told him I was American. When he learned that I was American, he begged me to give him a letter, to give him something to say that he was Polish rather than German in the event that he got captured.

So I made a deal with him, because he gave me a map that he had, and I gave him a letter. And he gave me a pencil, and I wrote him a letter, OK, that to whom it may concern, this is a young Polish prisoner who had befriended an American prisoner of war. And he took it with him, and he put it in his pocket, and he gave me the map, and that was the last I ever saw him.

In any event, we took the map, and we knew about where we were, but we were able to pinpoint where we were. And we realized that Hamburg must have been about 150 miles to the west.

So one night we took off, five of us, and we started on our way to Hamburg. We used to walk the roads at night. We'd spend the daytime in the woods.

Did any of the guards come after you that you knew of?

I don't know. If they did, they didn't find us.

They didn't find you. So you had--

They didn't find us.

--escaped successful--

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There was two of us who spoke German, three of us who couldn't.

But you're all wearing-- oh, well, you're wearing a British uniform--

OK, we're all wearing either American or British uniforms. And one of us who spoke German was in front of the column, and one of us who spoke German was in the back. And we'd move along the road at night. When the moon came out, we'd get the hell off the road and go into the woods. And we'd do that until it got light, and then we'd get out of the woods.

And we did that for six days and nights, until one morning we were in the woods-- and we'd come a long way by then. And we heard what we thought were Churchill tanks. I don't know whether-- I was in the Ninth Army. I think you were in the Third.

Third.

Third Army. I was in the Ninth Army. The Ninth Army was made up of both British and American troops under the command of General Simpson. And so we were supported by British Churchill tanks.

They had the weirdest noise in the world. They were terrible. They had a horrible noise. You could hear them for miles.

So you recognized them.

And we prayed when we were on the line that we wouldn't get supported by British Churchill tanks, because every time they came up they drew fire. They draw the mortar fire and the artillery fire. Nobody wanted a German. They'd be supported by British Churchills.

Any event, we were in the woods that morning, and we heard what we thought were British Churchill tanks. As long as you'll live, you'll know how a British Churchill tank sounded.

So we ran out to the edge of the woods. And sure enough, we were up on top of a hill, and we saw below us-- it must have been about a half a mile-- three tanks coming up the road. And they came up to about, oh, I would say a half, 3/4 of a mile from where we were, and they turned around and went back.

And about two hours later, a tank column came up the road. And these were British tanks. So like you--

So it'd just be an advance unit.

We went helter skelter for that tank column. And as I told you earlier, one of the interesting things-- and it's a moment, obviously, that you'll never forget in your life-- was, as I remarked, I was wearing at that time a jacket from the 1st British paratroop division. And that tank column was a column of the 1st British paratroop division. And they thought that I belonged to them. Well, they didn't belong to them.

But obviously, they were very kind. They took us in, the five of us. They gave us food.

What condition were you in?

Well, I was less than 120 pounds at the time, which is somewhat less than I am now. All things considering, I was not in very bad health. I made it, and that was important thing.

And what we did is we commandeered a German touring car, one of these big open cars. And we decided, since we weren't attached to anybody or anything, we were going back to Paris. And we did. We got in this car, and we started heading back towards France. And we'd come to a-- it was easier to get something to eat. It was easier to find some place to sleep.

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We got far as back one day-- and one night, as far as the 82nd Airborne Division. And they were back there in a rest area. And they agreed-- some of these guys agreed to put us up that night. So we left that touring car out there. And we went to sleep. We woke up in the morning, and our touring car was gone.

So we were young, brash kids. We asked to see the colonel, the regimental commander. We were going to put in a complaint that they stole our touring car.

We went back there, and he said-- he started asking questions. What outfit you attached to? I'm not attached to any outfit. And he asked us where we came from, and we told them.

And he said-- don't you think-- we never even thought about it, I tell you. Don't you think it would be about time that you went back and reported in at least to your families that you were alive? And that made us think. And that was the end of our trip back to Paris.

That was the end of your escapade. What happened to the rest of the prisoners of war-- the Jewish prisoners of war that you had left behind? Did you ever find out?

Yeah, some of them made it and some of them didn't. I did meet some of them after the war.

Did you have a reunion?

And we were friends for a long time after the war. I recently, I've looked up one of the fellows in Minneapolis who was there. So there's some of them didn't make it. But I heard from some of them. I heard from some of the people that I had met in some of these stalags earlier. I

Told you, I got the star when I was in the Stalag XI-B, I guess it was, where they had taken our pictures. And because they always took your pictures, and they gave your PW number, like your serial number. You know yours like I know mine.

And I had a-- you had to take your picture with your number. It was just like a convict. And somebody sent that to me after the war. That stalag was liberated by the Russians. And somebody put it in the mail and sent it to us. We recognized it.

Oh, so you recognized the people with whom you were for some time.

Yeah, yeah. That was a long time ago.

Sort of block out these black times, don't you?

Yeah, you do. I didn't talk about it for a long, long time.

Did people--

I don't think it was that painful. It was one of those things that you just don't feel like sharing, particularly.

Did you talk about it when you came back, Mort?

No, I really didn't.

You wanted to block it out. But of course, your physical appearance probably gave credibility to a little bit different treatment.

Yes. Well, I had an uncle who was a major. And he was glad. He was stationed in the United States. And he was glad to

see me when I came home. He got my parents in when we arrived in Fort Dix. So they were able to come in. And I was able to leave a little bit sooner because he had the right connections. And they processed the papers, and I was sent on a recuperation furlough.

So when did you actually get out of the Army?

Well, I got out at the end of December, because, well, I went-- at the end of the recuperation furlough, I went to a recuperation center. I was back in the hospital because of my physical condition. And I never left the hospital. I was eventually discharged from the hospital.

Do you have any lasting effects from this--

Well, I do have--

--period of time.

--yeah, intestinal difficulties still. Certain things will set off my body system, yes.

Trigger that-- periods of time. Those were different experiences than most Americans went through. What are your feelings toward the Germans of that period-- not of this period?

Of that period? Well, I remember writing that you couldn't hate enough. It was a very difficult emotion to maintain. And I've always believed that you can't-- it's not fair to charge the sins of the fathers on the children. So I think you have to differentiate.

I didn't go back to Germany for many, many years. It was just an experience I guess I just wasn't ready for. I did go back, I think, about eight or nine years ago. I still found it rather traumatic.

Hearing the language all about you, I suppose.

Well, just looking at people's faces and wondering.

Where they were and what they did?

Yeah. And going places, and just making certain associations.

I think probably the most traumatic thing, experience, I had though, in terms of that, was when I went to Poland last-- this past spring. And with the-- for the 40th-- commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. And I met with so many of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters. That brought back a great deal of it. I almost felt akin to them.

You were captive in one way and they were captive in another.

They were captive in another way. I was a lot more fortunate than they were. Really don't have too many scars to show for it. And sort of felt that it was a maturing experience. Just thankful that you live through it. That's all.

But you did go through, and it could easily have been the other way. Fortunately it wasn't.

Yeah, but hey, that bullet that whizzed by your ear could have been 6 inches to the right instead of 6 inches to the left. That's the way life is. And that's the way it was in those days.

That's right.

That shell could have landed in your foxhole instead of the guy next to you.

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Sure. Mort, what kind of feelings do you have toward the Germans of yesteryear-- not today's Germans.

Well, I had very strong, negative feelings, because the day that we marched out from the camp on the forced march, we marched through the towns. And the-- we were spit on and things were thrown at us. And so I had the feeling that the average German really supported the situation. We were seen as miserable people who were fighting them. And maybe--

And they didn't even know you were Jewish. You were American.

I don't know what they thought.

Well, you were a political prisoner.

Yeah, but we still had the uniform of the American Army that we were wearing. But they knew that we were prisoners. And so they weren't inclined to be kind to us.

And the only semi-kindness was when-- I think I may have mentioned to you this fellow who was a corpsman in the American Army and I were pretty good buddies.

Were you both prisoners of war?

We were both prisoner of war. And when we passed the political prisoner who was shot along the road, we did try to make an escape. We sort of fell back in the column, and sort of fell behind enough, and then took off. But we were recaptured.

And then we were put into a kind of a cellar in this person's home in this town where we were captured. And I guess they saw we didn't look too well, and they did take us to a hospital. And there were-- it was a Catholic hospital. And they did give us some treatment for the wounds that we had.

But they were Catholic sisters who, I guess, would, like a physician, would treat anyone.

Could you have stayed there until you got well?

Well, no, they returned they returned us to the group that we tried to break away from. So we-- [LAUGHS]

So in a way, that was a way of collaboration, I presume. Otherwise, they could have kept you, and nursed you, and gotten you back to health.

That's right. That's right.

But it just didn't work that way.

That's right.

It's not that simple, really. It's not that simple, OK? Really, it's a mixed bag. We had people, I think, who were-- who tried to be kind, and we had people who were very cruel.

I spoke to dozens of survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April. And you hear all sorts of stories. You hear about the little kids who were passed over the walls of the ghetto to the priests, and found their way into the Gestapo two days later.

And at the same time, you hear people tell you-- and I talked to them. I talked to a guy from Houston who brought his children with them to meet a family, a Polish family--

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Who had sheltered him.

--who had sheltered him for two and a half-- for three years, from 1941 to 1944. So it's a mixed bag. There are good people and there are bad people. It was a horrible time in history, and it was-- there was a mania in the world, and there was a maniac in the world.

That's why we're doing what we're doing, to make people, and young people, especially cognizant.

That's right. And there was some very bad Germans, and there were some who were, I rather suspect, who were also prisoners of the system themselves.

I think most are, because I was reading, you know, the free French, I guess it amounted to maybe 5% who really were involved in the free French movement.

Sure. You take-- I mean, you have to understand what happens when somebody has a gun and assumes control. You were in the infantry. I was in the infantry. You're one on one until you take prisoners.

How can one soldier control 30 or 40 prisoners? The truth is, he really can't, if you think about it rationally.

But you're intimidated.

But the reality is that they do.

Well, that's the answer to-- that's the answer to the question, why did the Jews fight back? And they might have been 500 with two or three people with guns. But you are so intimidated, and you just don't know what's happening.

Well, look. The people who have the strength, or the personal inner strength, and the moral strength, who-- to cope with a situation like that are very few. And now, as a psychologist, that experience is very much appreciated. I say it's a $1,000,000 experience. I wouldn't want to do for it $2 million.

No, I don't do it again. I think our time has run out. And we very much appreciate your going back into the past, painful as it is, with the lessons that you've taught us and the lessons that we just have to learn. Thank you very much, Mort. Thank you very much, Don.

You're welcome.

I can't say it was fun or interesting, right?

No.

[LAUGHTER]

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