

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum oral history interview with Milton Shurr. Jason DeRose, interviewer. Today is July 16th, 1996. This is Tape 1, Side A. Can I get you to say for me your name and your date of birth? I'm just going to get a sound check.

Yeah. I am Milton Shurr, Milton L Shurr, S-H-U-R-R. And my date of birth is January 28th, 1911.

OK. Can you tell for me when you first started to hear about what was going on in Europe around the time of the Second World War, and when did you really become aware of what was happening?

In the general press, there was indications of what Hitler was doing, and so on. And being Jewish, probably I was a little more sensitive to being concerned about that. And I recall, from time to time, we met some German-Jewish refugees who had left Germany. Some were going back again. And so we got a little bit of a flavor that things were becoming difficult. There some news of the general press about the burning of books, the breaking of store windows, and things like that.

But this is what the general population had. Well, I joined the field staff of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in, I think, 1941. And my job, after about three months orientation in New York City at their offices, I then moved out to first Minneapolis, first Milwaukee and then Minneapolis, to get some orientation from some of the directors of those particular Jewish Welfare Funds.

What type of information were you getting?

Well, how they organized, how they fundraised and some of the problems. The big problem was always fundraising there, the budgeting process, in which money was probably distributed to local, national, and overseas Jewish organizations. So there was a good deal of information that the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds was providing, probably still provides, about what was going on and the various groups that were being subvented through the fundraising process.

And I knew a lot about the whole question of how to work within a community, because I had been doing that since, oh, 19-- when did I finish Michigan? Oh, about 19-- let's see. It was '40. It would be about '37 or so. It was the head of the Jewish Community Council in Omaha, Nebraska who recommended me to the Council of Jewish Welfare Funds. And the reason was he felt that my opportunities in the non-sectarian field were limited, which they definitely were at that time.

Well, then there was an opening. Well, I spent some time in Omaha arranging for a regional conference of the Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, which was held. And then I got tired of traveling around, and I had just married in 1941. The problems are traveling in the Midwest by bus, train, and so on, was pretty enormous.

So at that time, I looked very favorably on the possibility of moving to Oklahoma City as head of the Jewish Welfare Funds. Well, my wife and I moved there. It was a very interesting, pleasant community. And there was a tremendous amount of overseas information arriving in the mail that was sent to all federations by whatever process.

We learned about GDC, HIAS. We learned from both the orthodox side of concern about problems, as well as the more conservative areas. And there was also news concerning the camps, people being moved to camps, and so on. Of course, even so, you didn't have the horrible exposition of problems that we had. But yes, sure, we were aware of things going on, probably more than the general community, which didn't have access to such information.

During that particular time, I raised money. I directed a campaign and we were very successful. I raised about 33% more monies than they did the previous year. And the whole budgeting process in that community had been rather a fierce contest between the reform, the conservative, and the orthodox wings of Jewish community. Everybody budgeted on the basis of what was appropriate and what the consensus was among the cities in the southwest, from anywhere from St. Louis, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and so forth.

So there was a very good feeling of community. We had a few of itinerants, who mostly were [HEBREW] who were allegedly raising funds for various yeshivas in the United States or Israel.

And part of my experience was to deal with these people and try to ascertain if it was a real deed, and at a minimum, providing them with bus or train fare to go to the next town. And the people were pretty satisfied with me. Then I was drafted. The power sources, the Jewish power sources in the community, wanted to keep me in that area.

And they had devised that, and they thought they had the means of doing it by having my wife take my place, and they would keep me at Fort Sill, Oklahoma at the reception center. And that's where I was for a few months. Meantime, I had taken the general army classification test and qualified with high enough grades so I could apply to one of the various Officer Candidate Schools.

And meantime, I was interviewing people, classifying them as to which branch of the army they'd be sent to. And it was pretty [? miserable. ?] I never did basic training and I was just thrust into that job. We're talking about the months of July and August, and so on, where the temperature was over 100, and living in a barracks with 40 other people. So it was hardly a salubrious thing.

Anyhow, then word came from the main post. They were looking for somebody who could type who could work for the Army Emergency Relief in the Public Relations Office of Fort Sill. And every time a student graduated from one of the field artillery classes, a little release was said to at least two papers in a small town. And it was a perfunctory kind of thing, it was a nice change, because I moved to the main post. I was now in large concrete barracks, which are quite comfortable, and had more space. It was quieter, a little [INAUDIBLE].

And I was with a group of much more agreeable individuals. They were all college men. We had our first lieutenant who was in charge of our group, who was a former newspaper man. So it was a highly professional program. Then some months later, a short time later, one of these corporals, who was in charge of Army Emergency Relief, couldn't keep his record straight, and so I was asked to take over it. Immediately I was promoted to be a corporal.

One of the things I did immediately is to meet-- one of the problems, of course, there are many, many young couples who had difficulty getting along on the Army salaries. And wives were stranded at home or they were stranded in nearby town. The costs were very, very high for people who were listed personnel. For the ranks, it was pretty tough going.

Well, I immediately contacted the Red Cross and I asked them to investigate some of these claims of difficulties at home, and so forth, or whether there was an emergency, a matter which required the soldier to be able to go home, and so forth. And that worked very well. The Red Cross did that, and everybody was satisfied. The Army was satisfied. The commanders of the various units were satisfied, because there was no longer-- usually what happened in the past, a soldier would gamble and lose a lot of money and then apply for Army Emergency Relief. So this thing was removed.

And one time, a colonel from Dallas, the Regional Office of the Army, came down. And he tried to persuade me to stay there. That's when he heard I got a notice to go to Officer Candidate School. They tried to persuade me to stay. And I said, well, I'll stay, provided you guarantee I'll never get shipped out of here. Well, he couldn't guarantee that, so I went to Officer Candidate School, which was at Camp Lee, Virginia, a quartermaster training program. And I went through there and went through other programs.

Did your wife come with you?

Oh, yeah, she moved and she lived in a nearby community, and so on. Well, I was there probably-- OCS, what was that, three months, and then I was there for another three months. I was slated to go overseas as some quartermaster depot. They lost my records. And finally, when I said, what's happening, they immediately picked me up and I found my way into-- I was with a unit, the Salvage Collecting Company and Tennessee Maneuvers. And my wife chased around with me and saw it.

Another fellow and I, I was out in the field for three or four days and nights, working with two platoons. And another

young officer, who was a graduate of University of Virginia, had been reading the various news regulations from the Army. Found out they were opening up a school for military government for junior officers. The previous one in Charlotte, Charlottesville, was only for majors and higher, what's called field grade personnel.

So both of us applied. I was accepted, he wasn't. Well, then we were then ordered to Tullahoma to prepare for overseas departure. And I was told I was frozen and I couldn't move. I couldn't be released from this particular company, the Salvage Collection Company. Well, I had read regulations pretty carefully, and I found that any order from General Marshal, who was the chief of staff of Army, superseded all other orders. And finally, I waved this in front of the colonel who wasn't going to let me go, and I was off to school in military government in Fort Custer.

We spent a month there, and then we went to Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Meantime, we all got alerted because there was a feeling that the military government situation would change drastically. I think they had a feeling Hitler would be either overthrown or there'd be some event which would liberate Norway. And we would immediately be thrust into the job.

Well, military government was a group of individuals who were officers, and who some had been commissioned directly from the civilian service. And there were lawyers. There were engineers. There were fine arts and monuments people who came from various museums. And there were technicians. There were young men who were experts on banking, fiscal matters, and medicine, cars, public health, safety, and so on and so forth.

And these individuals were available to move into a community to help get things moving and to get the economy moving, to weed out those who were SS individuals or high-ranking people, people who were doing a good deal of mischief in the community.

Was there a conscious effort to make the team that would go in very, very diverse, as far as bankers, lawyers, architects?

Well, yes. The big cities, of course, had a very-- for example, I was I was with a group of officers of various ranks, and we were situated in a little town of Wilton, England, which is about five miles from Salisbury. And we were there was a company of enlisted personnel that provided us with transportation, food, took care of the housekeeping duties, and so on.

Well, there was fine arts and monuments. There was a British older man, a British architect, who was a builder with construction of all sorts, particularly like cathedrals and things. Then there was a young man, a younger man, captain, who worked at the fog museum at Harvard. And there was a major who was a member of the Fabergé family, working in the perfume industry. His job was to go into Paris and help get the perfume industry going again.

And we had a lot of lawyers who were going to be involved in the whole question of setting up legal structures, and so forth and so on. So engineers, former politicians, and so on. They were quite a diverse group. It was kind of like a pool of officers, and we were scattered all over England, waiting for the D-Day, which would then, of course, open up the coast of France.

When did you go to England? What year?

We moved to England-- it was interesting. We left Boston. It was one of the largest convoys. That was on the Empress of Australia. We left on Lincoln's birthday and we arrived in England on Washington's birthday, and this was in 1944.

So between the time as we came to Virginia and the time that you left from Boston, what were you doing? You came to Virginia to go to officers trainings.

No. Oh, officers trainings, excuse me. By the end of the year, the year I went to Tennessee Maneuvers, I wound up in Fort Custer, where we had a month training in military government. And then we moved out into Western Reserve. We were supposed to spend another month there learning languages and other problems.

However, after two weeks, we were alerted, and we wound up in Pennsylvania. Then we moved on to Boston for the

port of embarkation, and we sailed across. When we landed in England, we then moved into Wiltshire, between Swinden and Oxford. And we were there in a British War College that was turned over to the Americans, and we were probably a few hundred officers who were in there. Some were taken to Russia, some were taken to France, some to Germany. Some were taken to politics. Some were running around the country, sight seeing that nobody knew about. So that's where we were.

I remember, particularly, it was cold and damp and the meals were very monotonous. Fortunately, I like Brussels sprouts and lamb, roast, and mutton. Most people didn't. Every weekend I took off to go to London or Oxford or Cambridge or some other site.

Interestingly, one time I was in Oxford. And enlisted men went to the Red Cross to find a place to stay overnight. Officers went to the English-speaking union. And I did, and I was told that, well, we have no room at the moment, but drop in later. I found that meantime, I'd been invited to be a guest of the wife of the warden of All Souls College. Well, I knocked on the door. At the time, I was admitted. And of course, I didn't know what a warden was. I was thinking in terms of the police of jails, and so on. I didn't have the slightest idea what I was getting into.

And I was invited in. The wife was a very distinguished-looking lady, older lady. And I met the warden. He was talking to another man and I was invited to sit in and have tea with them. And it dawned on me that here was the President of the Graduate School of Oxford and he was talking to the person who was in charge of rationing in England. This was indeed very exalted company.

I stayed overnight in a huge bedroom that probably existed since Christopher Columbus's day. I went to the cathedral in the morning with the family, and then they took me on a tour, showing me some of the hidden treasures of All Souls College, which was a very beautiful college. And they invited me back again. I came back again.

He was very injured by training, because while I was at a non-sectarian community organization program, I had been selected of one of 10 persons to have a scholarship in going to Ohio State University and the School of Public Administration, Social Administration. So that was another interesting experience I had. I recall, we knew that D-Day started, because we heard all that night bombarding taking place.

Did the officers who were at that training school with you, learning languages and geopolitics, were you all aware of what you would be going into, or did you have somewhat of an idea?

Well, I knew, but we all knew. We all knew that we were going to be working in our specialty, our background in some aspect. We were going into a community that was completely destroyed and wasn't functioning, and our role was to help pull the town and community together. And this was going to be anywhere from rural to large urban centers, as the case may be. Yeah, we knew that.

A few of the officers who were political appointees, and so had a lot of political power, they got bored sitting in this place and shivering in this building. So apparently, they contacted members of congress, and so on. So Eisenhower came out, and he gathers us around a tree, a big tree. Oh, it must've been a few hundred

Of us. And he smoked with us. He said, well-- he said, I can assure you, from seeing what some of your fellow civil affairs officers did in Italy, they were working day and night and accomplished a great deal there. And he said, take advantage of the time you have here to rest up, because when you are going to be busy, you're going to be very busy indeed. And that took out some of the heat. And of course, the effect of this man's personality, calling it such, that he just charmed all of us, and the malcontents quieted down and we waited.

And then shortly thereafter, we were broken up into probably 30, 40, 50 different groups scattered throughout England. And we were all in a little holding areas, being taken care of, as we were, by a little company, and provided three meals a day and all the other things. And that's what happened. Well, when D-Day arrived, we knew about it because we heard the thundering of the vessels, battleships firing in England, bombing.

What city were you in on D-Day?

We were five miles from Salisbury, England. We were alerted, of course. Well, we were always alerted. But we were told that sometime we'd be called. Oh, we were slated. Our group initially was slated to go in, oh, probably the first week after D-Day. But the weather was so unpleasant and the perimeter that the Americans and the British had liberated was such a narrow area, there wasn't much for anybody to do. And it was much more important to bring ammunition and fighting men across than having a bunch of civil affairs officers cluttering up the countryside.

So we got in. We went over a landing craft, and I recall arriving at night. It was the evening of 4th of July and there were fireworks going on. Some of it was military, some of it was fireworks display. And we moved inland.

Where did you land?

We land at, I think it was Omaha Beach, right near the town of Isigny in the area of Normandy. Things were quiet, although the Germans would run some planes overnight. But the Americans had command of the air. Daytime, it was perfectly safe. There were a lot of scares, and so on, some false alarms on gas attacks, and things like that.

So finally, we were moved in the middle of a field, a typical field with the hedgerows, and so on. Each officer had a pup tent, and so on and so forth. And we were in a pool of officers, two for First Army. Oh, I gathered there may be around 50 officers. And interestingly, Senator Strom Thurmond, who was a judge from South Carolina, had been a volunteer in the glider. And he landed in the glider. These gliders would just sort of crash. He broke his arm, and he was wandering around with his arm in a cast.

So that's where we were. Then, apparently, First Army G5, which was military government of civil affairs unit, requested me, probably because I was available second lieutenant, to do some running around for them. They were particularly interested in getting some medical supplies that were being thrown on the beach.

In other words, as the stuff came off of ships-- it wasn't particularly well-classified, except for munitions, which had its own place-- but all the non-military equipment was scattered around a perimeter, maybe a 10-acre lot. And the only way to find out what there was is to walk around and see it. So my job was to find anything that could be used by civil affairs, military government, and hospitals.

So you'd walk up and down the beach, looking for--

No, no, no. They would give me a Jeep and a driver, and I'd drive around and just drive slowly, go around, and indicate where there were cots, where there was some medicine, where are some bandages, where are some other things.

Would you collect them or would you--

No, no. I would just identify them, and then they would know where to go and get them. Well, that was very good and everybody was pleased. Then there appeared to be a shortage of water cans. Normally, in a company, a company would have about two- to five-gallon water cans. You can have a lot of gasoline, but the water cans were hard to get.

And when they set up a number of these refugee centers, displaced persons centers, one of the big problems was a lack of water cars, a lack of cooking equipment, and so on. And so I went into a number of German dumps, where they had ammunitions.

For example, one area I ran into had-- I was looking for anything that could be used by a displaced persons. Well one aspect I found that I could make use of, a marine shell container that held four shells, and it had a ga--

This is Tape 1, Side B. Interview with Milton Surr.

Well, by providing displaced persons with a screwdriver, we could get any number of these water cans some aid. And that was a big coup and everybody was very happy with it. Well, then I noticed that the German troops used a lot of two-wheeled carts, which had sort of a cooker, a pressure cooker, on it. These probably would hold maybe 50 to 100

gallons of liquid. And they would start a fire with coal or wood, or something, in these two-wheeled carts, and they'd cook soup, which was very, very common.

Now, you were going around to dumps in France looking for this?

Yeah, sure. And so I would run into these things. I then would drive over to an ordinance depot, an ordinance shop, and try to persuade the captain to give me a driver and a hoist. And then we would hoist two or three of these things, two-wheeled carts, cooking carts, and take them to where there were some of the camps.

Well, apparently, the Army engineers were doing the same thing. They were heating up tar for roads, so they had their own equipment. So I was at a great disadvantage, but I succeeded. And I found food, found other things. Well, the Army, the First Army G5, decided I was using too much-- they could get rid of the Jeep driver by giving me a car.

So they gave me a captured German Volkswagen that looked like a sieve. It had been strafed, had no windshield on top. But it did go. And so I continued my search for food and objects, and so on. And obviously, my work was well-regarded, but I lived in the field. I would shave with cold water, and so forth and so on. Occasionally, do a sponge bath or go to a field, a bath program, and so on.

And then after the breakthrough by General Patton, we then moved out into France. And there, I used to run across various displaced persons. Well, about that time, before we broke out--

How long were you near Omaha Beach looking for supplies?

Well, that was in July. Breakout was in August, or late July. Well, during that time, something happened with the command of a small displaced persons camp that was located in a chateau on the edge of Normandy Coast, right near the invasion on Omaha Beach.

And so another sergeant, who was a refugee and could speak several languages, he and I were detailed to go out there and take charge. So there were about 200 women or so in the chateau and the outlying grounds. And so I got some 10:1 rations, and so forth, and turned them over to a French cook and [? we asked ?] to take care of us, and he did.

So we were there for a few weeks, and then we moved out. And at that point in time, we were following the Army. It was very fast-moving, changing. The Germans are being chased to one place or another. And finally, the first RV moved through Paris.

The G5 Second were camped in the Versailles grounds. And I recall, I had my tent pitched in front of the Petit Trianon. It was a beautiful thing. And I got to drive my Volkswagen into Paris the next day, and had a nice tour of Paris for one day, and then came back. Meantime, we moved on out.

Did anybody ever think it was strange, you driving around in this Volkswagen, a German--

Well, it was sprayed OD and had a star on it and an ordinance. No. Although there were a number of times when I was strafed and had to jump into a ditch, and I never knew whether they were Germans or American planes. But it was identified as American. It had a star on it and OD.

So this continued, and we then moved up. First army moved up into northern Belgium. And it was an interesting experience during that time prior to that. I was asked by the G5 section of First Army to meet with a colonel who was in charge of a military government team that was slated to go into the Luxembourg capital.

And he was particularly anxious to have the crown prince and the premiere and some of the several outfitted American uniforms of American guns, and so forth and so on. And so apparently, there was nothing in the regulations that permits this in the American Army. But they wanted it done, and since I had been so ingenious in doing so many other things, they said, we'll see what you can do.

So I visited with the group in Paris and figured out what sizes they would wear, so I got the first army to sign off on the requisition I had a [? light ton ?] one and a half ton truck with a driver, and we picked up a lot of gasoline. We were out in Normandy to the various depots.

Well, before we got to Normandy, I had to have this countersigned by the 12th Army Group, which superseded the First Army, Third Army, and so on. And the American in charge was a colonel. He said, there's no way this can be done. We don't have any regulations and I'm not going to do it. And finally, I was pretty desperate. I said, oh, well, you aren't going to let those limies put something over on us. They want to put these people in British uniforms.

Well, the British officers were usually so unpleasant to us Americans that this thing really worked. And he finally signed off, and I was off to Normandy and picked up all of the various uniforms, 45s, 10s, equipment, and so on and so forth. Then I was back to Paris, and we were looking for this outfit. They were up in northern Belgium at this time. And when I got to the town-- I think it was Charleroi. It was Charleroi. And nobody would tell me where this unit went.

Fortunately, one of the officers had been with me in this particular British army college, and so he knew me and he told me where they went. It was a big secret. They were on the way to Luxembourg City. So the little GI and I in this captured a Ford truck, loaded with equipment, are trying to find our way to Luxembourg. There are no signs. Nobody had any maps. And so frequently, I would ask the direction from some farmer, not knowing whether he was oriented to Germany or France.

Did you speak French or Belgium?

I spoke a little French. By that time, I was getting fairly fluent. I wasn't fluent, but I could think myself it. And I'd have my 45 just below the window in case he turned out to be hostile. We ran into no problems, and we were directed to Luxembourg City. We arrived in Luxembourg City, and it was just like being in Paris the day after the liberation.

Everybody was excited. People were pressing souvenirs on us, and so forth. We finally found our way to the hotel and we delivered the goods. Obviously, the American colonel was very happy about the whole thing and wanted to know what he could do for me. So I said, well, I said, I've been trying to get a promotion.

Well, he said, anything we can do will help. Actually, he wanted me to stay there. Of course, I had no way of doing that, which would have been a very interesting spot. So we went back to Paris and I went back. I found my way back and went back. I picked up my Volkswagen, went back up to northern France. It was northern Belgian, really.

Obviously, the G5 section First Army was very pleased with what I did. And they wanted to know what they could do for me, so I said, I'd like a promotion. Well, you can't be promoted because you're attached to First Army. So I said, well, the next thing is, since I've been in the field of public welfare community organization, I'd like to get some experience in a displaced persons camp. So they sent me to a camp, which had lost its officer. They gave some peccadillo of some kind.

So here I arrive, a second lieutenant, finding some British captains of majors, a French whack team, some enlisted personnel, and a group of probably about 400 refugees in a Belgium convent school.

Where was this?

In Belgium. It's the town of Verviers, V-E-R-V-I-E-R-S, which was probably about, oh, 15 kilometers from Liege, which is a big industrial city. And we were probably about seven or eight kilometers to Malmedy, which you'll hear about later.

And so I took charge. One thing I found, of course, was that meal time, all of the Allied displaced persons people, or Allied countries, would be in line first to receive their meal. And I said, this is the way that we do things in America. And I said, people are going to be served in the order they appear. But this is what the French backs and the British had done.

And we got along very well. One time during this particular period, as the sisters had run out of coal, and it was in November it was pretty cold. Meantime, the Americans, the troops, had opened up a little appendix of Maastricht, which is stuck down into Belgium. And they opened up some mines and coal was being delivered to the city.

So I took one of the corporals of our unit, enlisted personnel. We had a wonderful group of enlisted personnel. They were all college people. This young fellow spoke French, and so he was my interpreter. Using an interpreter gave me twice as much time to think of an answer or correspond to the mayor.

So we met with the burgermeister and told him our problem. We had to have coal and lye and so on. No way. No way. No way. Again, it was one of those desperate situations. And I recall, I was on a track team in college. And the coach, at one time, trying to dramatize a point, slams his just starter pistol on the table, and everybody jumped a mile. So I took out my 45. I slammed it on the table. And I thought the burgermeister would go through the roof, but we got our coal.

Then we were bombed. We don't know if they were bombed by a shell. This was during the period of the Malmedy Bulge. So we really had to dig latrines, trenches. Our group went into an ordinance outfit and brought back a two-wheel cart with about, I think, a 200-gallon water container. And so we did the all those things.

So the convent was bombed?

Yeah. In fact, I was in the courtyard and a piece of shrapnel came within probably a foot and a half from me, cut through a tree, and went into the windows of one of the school buildings, and just mowed down the whole row of things. And I wasn't frightened until after the event, a really close call.

But we got through it. It was very interesting. We were ordered to stay there no matter what happened in this Malmedy thing. And it was, to put it mildly, we were very uncomfortable.

[PHONE RINGING]

So we experienced, went through that Malmedy, the Bulge, and it was very, very interesting. The day before the Germans came through, I went with-- well, just back up a second. We used to go for supplies, food and supplies, into Liege. And in the meantime, Liege was being bombarded by the flying bombs.

And so I would go with a different driver every time, because I felt it was one way of spreading the risk among the people. And yes, we did it. People were living in cellars. Everyone was frightened because you'd hear, suddenly, buzz, buzz, buzz. And then suddenly it would stop and the thing would crash. Some landed where we were living, and so on. But that was that.

Well, during the Bulge, of course everybody was frightened because of what was happening. And we were close. The day before, we had a little van we had picked up from the ordinance. And we moved about three or four French officers to various little towns-- Malmedy, Saint Vith, and some of the other places.

And it was interesting. One German, or otherwise, told us that they had heard that the Germans were supposed to be coming through, going to invade the next day. So I passed the word on to a friend of mine, who was a military police officer in another town, to pass the word along. But this was a period when there was all kinds of rumors, and so on, and the line was very thinly held.

Well, the Germans came through. And at one time, we were practically almost in the combat zone. We'd heard small arms fire. It was that close to the situation. But nothing got any worse. Of course, Third Army made a big [? in run ?] They came through our town of Vervier with these tanks. All night long, these tanks were arriving, coming through.

And the British, apparently, were unable to hold the Germans back, and the whole object. Well, the tide turned on Christmas Day, which was the first clear day. All the other days were overcast. The Germans took advantage of it because the Americans couldn't provide any air protection. So that's what happened. And after that, we recovered.

Shortly after New Year's Day, I picked up a case of hepatitis. It was very, very painful. They sent me to Paris. And then, because they expected a lot of American casualties to be sent into the Parisian hospitals, I was shipped to England. And I was in the hospital there. And here I was lying in officers' quarters with a big ward, with wounded officers who all had been in combat of one sort or another, and here I was sick with hepatitis.

So after a couple of months, I recovered. And they used to give me little errands to keep me busy, carrying orders from one city to another, and it was a way of building up my resistance, or whatever, to activity. And finally, I got shipped back on a landing ship, back to Rome and Paris, and then going through various stages to rejoin my unit.

I wound up in Germany. Meantime, they'd gone out to Luxembourg. My unit had gone out to Luxembourg and various other places. And I finally caught up with our group in at Wetzlar, Germany. In Wetzlar, which is where they make Leicas, they were in charge of a large displaced persons camp at a big former military barracks.

But the group had gone that day and morning. What had happened, they'd been alerted and sent to the Buchwald concentration camp. This was about the middle of April. And so I had to wait for a Jeep and a driver that drove me into Buchwald. And we got there.

Buchwald is a beach force. It's right outside the lovely town of Weimar, which was virtually untouched. And here he arrived at this camp, which looked like all camps. The German camps have had a front gate with a tower and little offices on each side of the gate.

What's the first thing you remember seeing when you arrived?

Well, there was just almost chaos there. Third Army had captured the place the day before, day or two before. The officer, and enlisted men, were just picking up everything they could get their hands on, looting, souvenir hunting. And there were binoculars there. There was small arms. There was one thing or another.

And among the things, being the junior officer in the outfit, the captain had told me to pull the duty officer, and so I was sat in a little office at the entrance. And that first night, things were very, very confused. Bodies, I think, had been first--they ran out of coal. That's why the bodies [INAUDIBLE]. Of course you had all of this terrible-looking things. It was just chaos, confusion, and everything else.

I then heard from everybody that everybody all the enlisted personnel were grabbing the lampshades, which were made out a parchment from human skin, that had interesting tattoos. Hilda Koch who was the wife of the adjutant to Buchenwald, she would ride out to the various onyx quarries that were nearby that the prisoners worked. And she'd see an interesting tattoo. She'd have the man seized and killed and skinned, and she would then use the skin to make these parchments, human parchment lamps.

You found these in her quarters?

No. Everybody was looking for them. These lampshades were all over in the offices of the SS, and so on. And apparently, I found a couple of pieces in this desk drawer that somebody had stashed away. So I immediately felt, instinctively, that these would be of some value to a future investigating group. So I took two or three and locked them up in a drawer immediately.

Well, that was pretty much the thing. I spent the whole night in this thing, and there was people coming in and going out, mostly Third Army officers and so forth, picking up their goodies, and so on. And the next morning, as I recall, the Germans used to appoint a so-called kapo, or chief, of each ethnic group, and they would have a whole barracks to themselves, and so forth.

And of course, after the liberation, they had a new kapos. Anyway, I called all the kapos into my office and say, what are some of the problems? The biggest first problem was food and adequate water. There was some food left, but that was getting to be a real problem. Well, some of the prisoners were physically strong enough to use a motorcycle, or a little car, or whatever they could steal. Obviously, they'd gone into Weimar and got what they were looking for.

And so they were telling me the problems, what's going on. And some said, well, we here in such a such a village, there's a lot of wheat, a lot of flour, a lot of clothing, a lot of whatever. And I had a staff marked Military Government. And we had the highest priority, after the US Army, to levy seizures of goods, food, and so on.

Well, in the meantime, our very sophisticated enlisted personnel had taken over the so-called motor pool, or garage, that the SS used, and they had acquired some olive drab paint. They went out into Weimar, picked up two five-ton German diesel trucks, and other vehicles that they needed.

And our transportation equipment consisted of two Jeeps and two trailers for this elite unit. So suddenly, we're in the big time. From the experience we've had, we were looking for anything that we could use for money. And so I requisitioned a ton of German cigarettes. They were church cigarettes. I got them, locked them up.

And we used about 40 liberated Polish prisoners as a work team, and they were paid in cigarettes. And we used a young Czech fella, who spoke many languages, as the interpreter. And so that was our work group. The sergeant and I would go out of his car or Jeep, or he had a little pickup or a Jeep, and we would go into a town and we would look at SS headquarters or look at a warehouse, and so on.

If we thought we could use it, we would then have our trucks come in and unload, and so on. And when the trucks were on the way out of town, I'd present the requisition to the head of military government, or the burgermeister, as the case may be. And of course, they'd all screen to high heaven.

But that's what we did. And we were there for 2 and 1/2 months, so for a two-month period, we could pretty much hustle between any place between Leipzig and southern Riviera. There wasn't a town that we didn't get clothing, food, or whatever. Somebody told us of a barn full of shoes. So sergeant and I went there. The barn was nailed shut, so we pulled a couple of planks out and went into to look in.

There were men's shoes, but women's, too. We had only men at Buchenwald. But I had a feeling, somehow or other, that we might have a transfer of populations, which is what happened. So we took the women's shoes. In the meantime, the owner of the shoes, who had stocked them up for to make a killing--

Where did he get the shoes from?

Well, he had acquired them. These shoes he came from all over Europe-- Romania, Italy, all those things. Same thing with foodstuffs. The Germans really scoured Europe to supply themselves. And so he wanted the shoes. And I said, I'm sorry. He wanted the women's shoes. I said, we may need them, and anyway, you can't have them. And later on, we did have it. We had Poles, Poles and Russians, displaced persons, who were going to return to their own countries or coming back.

So that's pretty much it. For example, somebody had discovered that the SS had a frozen food, had had a lot of venison stocked in some frozen food place. So that was liberated for the benefit of the personnel. And so I had a whole building to myself. There were three SS, beautiful stone-- [PHONE RINGING] and scoured the countryside. And of course, the place ran itself. Apparently, anybody working in the food area at all, that was one of the ways you could survive. You'd be able to steal enough to get by.

Did you have much interaction with the kapos or the DPs?

I had a lot of interaction with the kapos. That was my counsel I met with every day. They informed me what was going around, in terms of the food supply, problems. For example, one day, they came in very excited. The communists had gotten a hold of some of the keys and broke into the locked areas where valuables were collected from the prisoners, and they had looted a lot of the stuff.

So what could I do? You couldn't shoot them. You didn't know who they were. And so I picked up the rest of the stuff, which consisted mostly of watches, a few rings, and things like that. One situation, we sent them to the Office of

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Military Government, and so forth. But I didn't have time to do it.