

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edward Novikov, conducted by Gail Schwartz on September 22, 1996 in Washington DC. This is tape number one, side A. What is your full name?

Edward no middle initial Novikov.

And when were you born?

April 9, 1926.

And where were you born?

In Roxbury, Massachusetts. Boston, a section of Boston, Massachusetts.

Let's talk about your family, your parents and who made up your family. Who were your parents?

My father came to this country, to Boston in we're not quite sure, but I think it was either 1912 or 1913. Arrived at East Boston, which was an immigration station in those days, similar to Ellis Island. And he met my mother in Boston, who would come at about the age of 16 from Eishyshok by herself and settled in Boston. And they met and married-- I think they got married in 1916.

Where did your father come from?

He came from a place in-- near Kiev, Russia, in the Ukraine. And he was-- it's a curious thing. He didn't speak Yiddish. Why? My mother daughter-in-law found out for me. He was a tailor in a Cossack town. And only the tradesmen who-- he was a pants maker. His father-- his father was a pants maker, and they made Cossack uniforms. And therefore he had no contact with other Jews, really. So he never learned Yiddish.

But he left with a younger brother of his and came to this country in 1912 or '13. I'm not sure which day it was.

Did he talk about his experiences in the Ukraine?

Not really, not too much. He was only, I think, 18 when he left Russia. And I hardly remember his background, really. Except that his father was a pants maker. And he brought us-- when he got here, he brought over his whole family, because he got a job as a tailor, and became a prominent naval tailor in this country. That's how I started off my life, because of him, in a way.

And did your mother talk about where she came from to you?

A little bit. She talked about Eishyshok and what was happening. Don't forget, I was pretty young, and I didn't comprehend. And I don't whether she did, or not be as we don't have communication like we have today. But she used to talk about her mother. Her mother ran a general store in Eishyshok. Others who are more familiar with Eishyshok can fill you in better than I can.

My grandfather was a redheaded fiddle player. And some people have told me he was sort of like the Fiddler on the Roof. But my grandmother ran the store. They were fairly prominent in Eishyshok.

What was the family name? Pochter. P-O-C-H-T-ER. Pochter. So that's mostly what-- and then during the early parts of the war, you know, 1941, 1942, she was getting disturbing letters about what's happening in Europe. But I really didn't comprehend what was happening, like most people in this country didn't.

Any other specific things that she said about Eishyshok, any other families or--

Well, didn't she-- the reason-- I always used to know, why did you come when you were 16 years old? What made you

pick up and leave? She says, because I didn't want to marry a non-Jewish man. And so she came to Boston, where she had some aunts, and was living with them. She had a lot of guts, my mother. She's no different than the modern day woman today. I mean, she had a tremendous amount of guts. Wonderful woman.

And so she left, and she met my father. And I have an older brother, another sister in between, and me.

So she didn't leave relatives back in Eishyshok.

Oh, she left the whole family. She left everybody there, as far as I know. Her father, her mother, brothers and sisters. I mean, I really have no recollection of this. All of whom, as I understand, went in a pit one night in 1944. Why she left in 19-- a young woman of 16, why she left I don't know. But whatever she did, she did it for me.

[CHUCKLES]

And your father left relatives in the Ukraine.

Yeah, but he brought them all over here. He brought a father, a brother, and I think six brothers and sisters. So they all settled in Boston.

Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Yes, I have an older brother, who's eight years older than me. I have a sister who's three years older than me, and myself.

What language did your family speak at home?

Only English. My mother didn't speak too much Yiddish either. She didn't speak Yiddish at all that I know of. I don't know why, but she didn't. My father went to East Boston High School the day after he got off the boat to learn English. And in those days, if you spoke with a broken language, so to speak, you were a greener. They used to call you a greener. And my father didn't want to be known as that. So we only spoke English in our house.

Now let's talk about your education. Where did go--

I went to grammar school and high school in Brookline, Massachusetts. I actually graduated the Browne & Nichols school in Cambridge, which is near Harvard Square. And then I enlisted in the Army.

OK, we'll get to that in a moment.

I never went to to, answer your question.

Let's talk about how religious your family was.

Semi, semi-religious. My father always went to temple on the holidays. And you know, he made yahrzeit and all that. He was not really a religious Jew as we know them today, as we used to. And my mother [YIDDISH] on Friday night. She was a cross-- it was a cross between an Orthodox Jew and a conservative. We were basically conservative Jews in that area.

Were your family Zionists?

No, not really. I don't think so.

Was it a very close family?

Oh, yeah. My father and mother, the greatest. I mean, they didn't have a lot of money, my father and my mother, and

they struggled. Because all the money that he made he sent to Europe to bring his family in. And my mother must have been a jewel to go along with it. Because she suffered, and she was a sick woman, very sick. She had a leaking valve.

And the noted heart specialist, Sam Levine, who wrote the book on cardiology at Harvard Medical School, was her doctor. And he says, I wish we could replace the valve, but we can't. But now you could. She would-- so she died at age 59, relatively young, a young woman.

How would you describe yourself when you were in elementary school and high school? Were you very adventuresome? Did you take risks? What adjectives--

To be honest with you, I was not a good student. I didn't like school. I couldn't concentrate on books. I mean, I was more interested in just doing something. So I was not a great student. I would have gone to college if I wasn't for the war, I'm sure. But I didn't. I really wasn't interested in school at all. But I was typical of that, my group.

I mean, when you go into high school-- and one of the reasons I went to Browne & Nichols in Cambridge is because I wanted to be able to have something outside of a-- it was a possibility that I wouldn't have graduated Brookline High in four years. So my sister said to me, hey, why don't you go to Browne & Nichols? And they'll give you personal attention. There was only like 96 kids in that school. It's a very famous prep school in Boston today. It's called Browne & Nichols Buckingham now, because it has girls.

And so I just graduated on schedule. But I really was not a good student. I wasn't interested. That was my problem.

And then you graduate from high school.

I graduated Browne & Nichols in 1944. Well, I wasn't there, but I got the degree. The date's '44, but I actually graduated in '43.

And what happened when you finished?

Well, in those days, we were all patriotic. And I decided that I wasn't-- partly patriotism. But the Navy and the Army had programs, where they would take enlistee kids at 17, send them to college, and then they would go on to become officers eventually, but at least they would finish college while the war was still on. And so I joined-- I couldn't pass the physical for the Navy program, so I passed-- but I did pass for the Army program. So I enlisted at 17 and went to the University of Maine for three months.

What month did you begin?

I enlisted in December of '43, and I must have gone to Maine sometime that spring. And I did one semester. That I remember. As an engineering student. And then--

At that point, did you know-- how much did you know that what was happening to the Jews in Europe?

Very little. Frankly, very little. The media in this country didn't play it up very much. And I was in a high school-- in a college that's sort of isolated. University of Maine's in a town about 12 miles north of Bangor, Maine. Orono was the name of it. Most of the students up there at the time were either in my program, what we call recruit-- I think it was A-12, they called it. Or they were from Maine, children of Maine families, and they were sort of out of the mainstream. You know.

So I didn't really know that much. Except when I went home, my mother would cry a little bit about what she hears about what's going on in Europe and so forth. That was about it.

And did she have any contact with people back in Europe?

Very little. There was no mail that I know of. Every so often she'd get a call from somebody, saying that somebody got

a letter or somebody got this, got that, and that her family was in trouble. And that was about it. In those years, '42, '43, I don't think she had much contact. And I think she had a problem, because I don't think she could write Yiddish. So I think that was partly the problem, but that's a supposition on my part.

OK, now you're at the University of Maine.

Right.

And then what happened?

Well, then the war in Europe was going badly, because D-day was in June of '44, as you know. And they were losing a lot of men in the infantry, the ones who actually do the fighting. And they've closed the program entirely, and they took all of us, and I went to a place called Camp Landing in Florida, to become an infantry replacement. From there, I went to Fort Meade, Maryland, which is just around here. And from Maryland, I went as an infantry replacement, I landed in Marseilles, and I ended up-- I'm trying to abbreviate this for you.

I ended up as a rifleman-- 745 is the designation-- in the 90th Infantry Division, which was a National Guard unit from Texas and Oklahoma.

This is where you are in Marseilles, this is what--

When I ended up-- and they were at that time on the Saar River, just south of what we call the Bulge now. And they were just in sort of like a holding pattern, because it was the middle of the winter. When I got there, it was Thanksgiving, a little after Thanksgiving.

So we're talking about November 1944.

Right. And then the Bulge started. I don't know if you know the history of the Bulge. I'm sure you do. Matter of fact, I just showed a tape of it, showed it to my kids. Unfortunately, I ended up in an attack company of the 90th Infantry Division, which went in from the south. We were mobilized one night, we went north to relieve the 101st Airborne in Bastogne.

And I don't want to go into it, because I cry when I hear about. Bastogne-- the Battle of the Bulge was the bloodiest history-- fighting history of the US army in history outside of Gettysburg, I believe. And I think we had 80,000 casualties that winter.

I was very fortunate. I'll be honest with you. My company was wiped out, literally. Figuratively wiped out. I was the only one who walked out. I had minor shrapnel bruises and cuts on my back. But I walked out. And I so I had a bad experience in the Bulge. I really did. I don't think this interview is-- but it was terrible.

So you are 18 years old now.

I'm now 18 year old, and I'm living in the ground like an animal in the middle of a winter, being shot at. I mean, it's hard to explain. It was a terrible, terrible experience. I mean, it couldn't have been worse. I showed it to my kids the other night. I have a tape by-- I think it's the American Heritage Foundation of the Battle of the Bulge. It was terrible, terrible. I mean, I can't tell you how bad it was, but I lived through it. Somehow I lived.

What was it like for a young 18-year-old to see all that death around you?

First time I saw somebody-- don't forget it was snowing. And blood turns dark in the snow. You know, old blood. And to see what body, corpses the way it stiffened up? I mean, it just was terrible. I mean, it couldn't be worse.

So I was brought from a child to an adult in about 24 hours, I'd say. Or less. It was a terrible, terrible experience.

Were there many Jews in your unit?

I was the only one. I don't know how. I mean, I think I was only one in my com-- I went through the whole war without any contact with Jewish people. I'll be honest with you. I think I met a rabbi once at Christmas time. They were having services. There were some rabbis and priests came around. But when you were in the infantry in the Bulge, you're not in this world anymore. You don't know what's going on, except somebody's shooting at you, and somebody is telling you, let's go, we're going this way.

I mean, you're disconnected from the real world. And so I don't think-- there were certainly no Jews in my company. It changed. I mean, every day let's say there were 30 people who started the day in my platoon, then maybe 18 at the end of the day. Then the next day, we'd get four recruits.

So now we're at 22. Then at the end of that day, we had 16 again. I mean, there were no relationships with anybody, Jewish or non-Jewish.

Were there any negative experiences you had because you were Jewish? Were you completely accepted?

Oh, yeah. When I was in basic training in Camp Landing in Florida-- I'm glad you asked. That's a good question-- I was in a camp that-- or in a-- I'd guess you call them a hut. There was a 24 room bed hut for training camp. And I'd say 20 of them were from-- were white farmers from someplace like Selma, Alabama or somewhere in that area. And they'd never seen Jews before.

And me, and there was a kid from Worcester by the name of-- I can't remember his name. But it was a nice and Jewish name like Epstein or something like that, and me, who my name is not quite recognizable as Jewish, and an Irish kid from Massachusetts.

The three of us went, were in with these 22 or 21 other white farmers. And they knew that Jews, there was something wrong with Jews. They didn't-- and the kid from Worcester spoke with a little Jewish accent, and he acted Jewish. He was typical Jewish. I wasn't because I wasn't. And they tried to beat him up one night, because he was Jewish. And I stopped them.

And the Irish kid that was with me helped me. And we stopped them. We ended it. So that was the first real experience, but I had it in my life earlier. And anti-Semitism was something I lived with all the time. My father had a store in Charlestown, Massachusetts, which is predominantly Irish Catholic.

And so when I was a kid, I was on the streets of an Irish Catholic community. That's where Jack Kennedy first ran for the House of Representatives. And so I was used to anti-Semitism and having little scuffles with-- being called a sheeny and all of this that goes with it. So I didn't have any problem when I got to Florida, because I expected it. But some people didn't.

But that was-- but once we went to Europe, once I went on the boat, everybody was just interested in living. I mean, in my outfit, in the infantry, we weren't in the Quartermaster Corps. We weren't in Eisenhower's headquarters. We weren't anywhere where it was nice and warm.

We were cold all the time. We were being shot at. And all we wanted to have is to live. And anti-Semitism didn't mean a thing. I mean, I could get in a foxhole and it was 0 degrees with somebody you didn't-- he didn't check to see if I was Jewish or not. We were sharing body warmth. That was the important part of it.

OK. So that brings you to Germany.

I was going to say. But it sounds like you were not a shy retiring young man.

No, I never was, I don't think. I got worse as I got older.

[CHUCKLES]

OK.

And now you're getting to Germany?

Yeah, so then the 3rd Army broke through I guess in January of 1945. And we went to-- we crossed the Rhine and-- trying to remember the name of it. Cathedral-- a lot of cathedrals.

To Mainz? To Mainz?

It could be. Yeah, Mainz. Yeah. And the night before-- interesting-- I went in as a-- I took a combat patrol in, and we brought out 76 prisoners. At that point, we were finding children and old men. But the SS wouldn't let them surrender. So in the streets of Mainz they had shot a German trying to surrender. And he must have been hit in the kidney, and he was screaming, and it was terrible. Most of us were used to it, but you know it didn't mean anything.

And so I crossed the bridge at Mainz. And then we went through Southern Germany generally to Pilsen. We cut it-- the 3rd Army, you can document where we went, but I don't know if that's part of this. But I went across Germany, Southern Germany to-- we ended up in Pilsen. And we were there maybe a day or two, when I guess there was an agreement with the Allied forces, and we pulled back to a place called Sulzbach-Rosenberg.

What was it like for you as a young Jewish soldier to be in Germany?

I didn't like it. I'll be honest with you, I haven't been back since. I hate Germany. Not because of the people are there. I mean, it's just-- the experience I had in Germany, nobody knew what happened. I mean, this is interesting. You know, I was in infantry, so I had contact with German civilians as we went through.

Nobody ever knew about any concentration camps. Nobody never knew about killing Jews. Nobody knew anything. It was like a-- it was evaporating. But when we got to Rosenberg, the 3rd Army had a ruling, Patton, no fraternization with German girls.

So now the war is over, and most of us, an 18-year-old boy. You know, you're out looking for girls. So we didn't really have any contact with the general German population. Rosenberg was a small town that had a steelworks in it. Sort of like a-- well, it was like Lowell, Mass, Lawrence, industrial town.

And so we ended up-- it was a temporary prison camp in Rosenberg for SS troopers. And I ended up-- my duty was to sit up in a guard tower during that period of time. Then in August of-- I'm trying to move it along.

Had you not been to Flossenburg yet?

Well, Flossenburg we passed through on the way to Pilsen.

Well, let's talk. Let's talk. Let's go back a little bit.

Flossenburg was a place we walked through--

This was on your way, you said, to Pilsen.

On the way to the end of the war. You really didn't know where you were. The street signs didn't mean anything. You know, you didn't know where you were. Flossenburg, I remember the ovens as we went through, but there were no Jews, to my knowledge, in Flossenburg. I think Flossenburg was political prisoners, either French, some other countries, some other-- I didn't see any Jews around there at all. And when I asked if anybody was Jewish, nobody was Jewish.

So at this point, you knew about camps?

Of course. I mean--

How did you know?

Smell. The smell. It was terrible. When you got to Flossenburg, you could tell what it was. I mean, that's how we knew. I didn't know until the war actually was almost over. So we went through. I remember we went through-- the Germans were going out the back door, so to speak. And we were coming in the front gate. And I saw the ovens. Some of them were still burning. Some of them in the barracks. You know, the typical German concentration camp, which I'm sure you know of. But then we moved on. We never stayed. We didn't do anything.

Do you speak German?

No. I speak a broken Yiddish, so to speak. You know, you can manage.

Did you speak to any of the prisoners at Flossenburg?

No, no. We just kept moving on. We just went through. The system, I guess, in those days was for a political unit of some sort to come in after us and take over the camp and tend to the wounded or the sick or whatever. So we just moved on.

So did you have any duties at Flossenburg?

No, no.

And when were you there? Was it May '45?

Must have been, just about the time the-- just before the war ended. It had to be before the war ended, because we were still fighting until we got the Pilsen. The war was still going on till we got to Pilsen. So it could have been in June.

Did you have any preparation from your superiors about what you may see in Flossenburg?

None. I don't think my superiors knew what they were going to find. And who knew who my superiors were anyway? Every day was a new one. Second lieutenants were cannon fodder. I was a private. I think I made private first class at some point. But everybody was acting something. You were acting sergeant. You were acting this. It's hard to explain to someone who doesn't know what happened in those days.

The officers were fluid. They didn't wear insignia because they would get killed. I mean, it was a different world. I mean, you couldn't understand the-- so no one, I think, was prepared for what they saw. Certainly I wasn't. I mean, to see an oven with a body in it being burned? I mean, the old fashioned coal-burning stoves, you know, ovens with the big doors that open up? That's why when I talked to some civilians, I'd say, how couldn't you know what was going on in there? You can smell the place for five miles away.

I mean, there was an odor. You know, burning flesh has a terrible odor. But everybody said, we didn't know what was going on there. And then the chimneys? I mean, it isn't like today, where we have clean heat. I mean, billows of black smoke used to come out of those chimneys. It was still going when we got there. I mean, the Germans didn't stop till I think the day we came to the front gate. It was still going.

But then most of the camps, where the Jews were, were in Poland, in Czechoslovakia. But we didn't get-- I don't think we stayed in Pilsen that long. The agreement was signed somewhere, and we were ordered to go back to Rosenberg. And I never saw any Auschwitz. I didn't see any of the major camps.

How long were you in Flossenburg?

Probably a day. Got there in the morning, maybe. And we moved on that evening or the next morning.

Did you have any duties to perform at Flossenburg?

None, none. We were just-- Jesus Christ-- pardon me. Look what-- can you believe this? Can you see what's going-- what is this place? You know it, was awesome. I wasn't prepared for it. I didn't know that they were burning people. Nobody knew.

But our orders were to move on. We were to just keep going. Because the 3rd Army tactics, Patton's tactics was to keep moving fast, so that the enemy didn't know you were coming. Surprise was the main element. So we just kept going. Sometimes we rode on the tanks. Sometimes we rode on trucks. Most of the time, we didn't have to walk anymore.

What were the reactions of the other soldiers when they saw Flossenburg?

The same as me. I mean, how can you believe? You couldn't believe what you got to see. Whether you're Jewish or not, I mean, look, my god, look what they did. Pile of shoes over there. I mean, I don't remember. You know. I think my memory got blocked. You know?

So I mean, everything the survivors have told you is true, and even more so. But this is what we found, and it was shocking to us to see this. Boys from the United States of America, who are living in a different world, all of a sudden coming and people are being murdered. Nobody was-- nobody was prepared for it, I'm sure.

I remember seeing a movie with Eisenhower when he first-- he couldn't believe it. I mean, nobody could believe it. And I'm sure he knew what was going on. I don't know what Roosevelt at the time knew, but I'm sure he knew what was going on, too.

But to the ordinary Doughboy or GI Joe, as we were called, we didn't expect. Couldn't. Who would comprehend it? It isn't like going to pick up a copy of The Washington Post and reading a story about what's going on in some town today. You know, there was no communication. We didn't know what was going on in the world. The world could have come to an end as far as we were concerned.

All we know was, we wanted to get a hot meal once in a while. We couldn't get any hot meals. I don't think I had a hot meal for months. You know, they couldn't keep up to us, the kitchens, the food. But I don't know whether you want to hear about all of that.

So now you go from Flossenburg to Pilsen.

Pilsen and then back to Rosenberg, Sulzbach-Rosenberg.

And what happened there?

Well, I was a tower-- a guard in the tower at a temporary SS prisoner camp in Rosenberg. And I was living in an office building not quite far away there. Were two or three of us in each office, sleeping on the floors. I don't know what we were doing. And then one morning in August, there was a bulletin posted that the following men are being transferred to the 1st Army-- the 1st Infantry Division to be out on the front of the barracks in front of-- at 8:30 in the morning or whatever.

I didn't know where I was going, but 12 or 14 of us got in the back of a two and a half ton truck. And we knew we were going East. You know what direction you're going in. We were going East, and we ended up in Furth, Germany, which was a suburb of Nuremberg. We were dropped off in front of a building that said headquarters, A company, 26th Infantry Division-- 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. And that's it. We went in there the next morning.

OK, before we go on to your experiences at Nuremberg, I want to backtrack a little bit to Rosenberg. Can you describe the prison to me?



Well, it was just a big camp. It may have been some sort of a training camp for the German army. I don't know. But it was nothing-- we were in an office building, and we just walked over to this field where there was barbed wire and there were towers and we could watch the prisoners.

This is tape one, side B. And we were talking about before you went to Nuremberg, how you were in Rosenberg. Now, you were specifically guarding whom?

SS-- former SS troops of various kinds, I guess. Not the Wehrmacht. There was a difference within the Wehrmacht, which was the regular army, and the SS. And I was-- my function was just-- my work was just to sit-in the guard. I don't remember what the schedule was. Sit up on the tower, and we'd just watch them.

It was right like three weeks after the war. When war ended, it was sort of a fluid situation. And we were just guarding these prisoners. I don't know what they did with them eventually, but that's what I was doing when I got the call, the orders to go to Nuremberg.

And again, were you the only Jewish guard?

Yeah, as far as I know, the only. I met very few Jews in my travels, except for a brief period while the war was going-- well, the Bulge was going on or right after the Bulge. I was treated for a trench foot, and the doctor was Jewish. That was probably the only contact I had with Jews from November of '44 till the war ended.

How did you feel as a 19-year-old Jewish soldier guarding SS officers?

Well, you get a feeling of power, obviously. I mean, you know, these people are-- you're carrying a rifle, and they're not. How did I feel? The bastards, these are the guys who killed my friends when I was in the army. I mean, how did I feel? I hated them. I mean, I'd like to kill them, but these are the ones who shot my friends. Whether they were friends or not, but they shot American soldiers. I mean, they were the enemy. Period. So that's how I-- you know, but what are you going to do? I mean, the war was over, and we're feeding them now.

And again, you said you did not speak German, so you didn't have any--

Yeah, it was hard. You know, Yiddish is sort of a broken German. So I was able to-- I was able to talk. I think I had a-- I met a German nurse in Rosenberg. And I tried to talk to her, find out what went on here during the war. Rosenberg was a backwater town. It was not a metropolitan area. And she was sort of a farmer's daughter. She was a farmer's daughter.

And I think I went to her house a couple of times. And her father used to beg me to get him beer, because he couldn't get any. And chocolates and cigarettes. You know, the usual thing that you've heard about. That went on, but not much for me, because I was not in a position to get chocolates. And I think I saw the Red Cross once or twice with donuts and coffee.

Most of what-- when you're in the infantry, you're out away from everybody. Nobody want-- you're like a leper. Because where you are, you can get killed. Where they are, they don't get killed. So nobody-- nobody came to see us. We didn't get any visits. You know, it was just, you're out there.

How long were you in Rosenberg?

I'd say I was there about six weeks. About six weeks. And I hung around. Not a very interesting place. It's like visiting someplace in the Virginia Blue Ridge Mountains.

Had you heard more, anything more about what happened to the Jews?

No, but I used to ask questions about it. I mean, anybody I saw, I said, what the hell's going on? I mean, where were these camps that they talk about outside? I only saw Flossenburg, but where are the others? Well, they're on the other

side now of the so-called Iron Curtain. We're not allowed to go over there.

Most of them, I think, were in the British sector. So I think the English liberated most of them. The US Army was basically south of there. And so I really didn't know. You'd read something in the Stars & Stripes, maybe, which is the Army paper, but there were no newspapers. I mean, the German press wasn't--

See, this is what I never understood, because I didn't understand. The American media, there was no television, obviously. But the American media didn't really cover the war, in my opinion, or cover what was going on. You didn't read about it.

I mean, today if somebody kicks somebody and says "you're a Goddamn Jew," there's a story in the newspaper about it. But no, you didn't hear anything about it. Millions of people are getting killed, and the press isn't reporting it. Why? I never could understand that. It's an unanswered question to this day, what happened to the media who should have-- and our State Department, and all the government function, I mean, they had to know what was going on. Let me tell you, they had to know.

And they could have stopped the concentration camps from operating even while the war was on by bombing the rail lines that went in there. I mean, they couldn't function on their own, either. But most of these camps, from what I understand, I didn't see all of them. Flossenburg was still operating when we got there. And I would assume some of the others. They could have stopped it by bombing.

Sure, they would've killed a few Jews, killed a few people, but they would have stopped-- the operation would have been crippled. Like they stopped building submarines or anything else. They could have stopped it. From February to the end of the war, you never saw a German plane. Very seldom. The Germany Air Force was gone. And all you saw was American planes up there, all the time. And they were going some way to bomb. Why didn't they bomb them? Good question. I can't answer it.

Now, you are in Nuremberg, and this is August of '45.

August of '44-- '40-- yeah, August '45. They dropped us off in front of this building. And we were greeted by American Army, who gave us a briefing on what our function was going to be. We were going to become members of the international military tribunal, which was at the jailhouse in Nuremberg. Or Furth. I'm not sure. There's I think a border there. Sometimes they said it was Furth. Sometimes they said it was Nuremberg.

And this colonel told us that we would be guarding the prisoners on a one-to-one basis at the beginning. And it was a good deal, because we only had to work six hours out of every 30. In other words, we get 24 hours off between each. And that was the usual briefing of an army officer to enlisted men.

And this was a bombed out apartment house. There was no heat. We fixed it up a little bit, so we could live in there. And it was the headquarters, as I say, of the 1st Infantry Division, A Company. And every division has three regiments. This was one regiment, and this was A Company. And they were the responsible for the guard detail at the jail. They were the mechanism, the institution to run the guard detail.

The jail was in another building?

Oh, yeah. The jail, we had to go by truck. They had to drive us there. And I remember, it wasn't very far. It was a five ride. So the first time I went on duty at the jailhouse was the midnight shift.

Who did they tell you these prisoners were?

The major war criminals. All the major war criminals were in one cell block in this old, broken down jail house in Nuremberg.

Had you heard of these people before?

I heard the names. I mean, the names, yeah. Of course, yeah, I heard the names. I mean, growing up in the Depression, I mean, you heard of Von Ribbentrop. You heard of Von Papen. You heard of all these people who were in the news-- those names were in the newspaper. But I didn't know what they had done.

I mean, I didn't know what-- anyway, but we were told that the 23 or 22-- I'm not sure what the number is-- were the major war criminals were in one cell block, and that was going to be our function, to be in that particular guard detail. And in that group-- there were other floors in that jailhouse, but they were all on one floor.

And up above, I know the woman that did the lampshades with skin. She was up there. Olga or Inga or something like that. She was up above. And others. And in another section were the military prisoners like General Keitel and Jodl. I don't know how they differentiated, but the 23 major ones, the ones you see in the movies of the trial at Nuremberg, the 23 were in that cell block.

And so we arrived there. I arrived there one night. And it was a long corridor, and it was of course dark. And it was a long corridor, and all I could see was the backs of guys looking in the windows of cells as we walked down the corridor, and then ended up relieving this guy. He got up.

And the week before-- I'm not sure of the time-- about five days before, whatever, Dr. Ley, L-E-Y, the labor minister, had hung himself in the jail, in this cell block. There was a toilet and a pipe that ran up through the wall, and he actually strangled himself. So now the American Army said every prison has got to be watched on a continuous basis, which meant 24 hours a day. So they put a guard on every door at night and watch them sleep, even. We would watch them sleep, basically.

So this was a solid door with a window.

With a little-- yeah, with iron bars in it. And they had a light, like the old fashioned green lights you see from the old gambling casino. They had one of those turned in, so the room was lit up all the time by that light. And you had to stand there. It was kind of boring, to be honest with you, watching a guy sleep all night.

But six hours, and you were out. So that was my first night.

How did you know who these people were? Were there labels?

Oh, yeah. I'm sorry I missed this. In walking down this corridor, on every door was a white sign that said "Hess, Von Ribbentrop, Von Papen, Streicher, Goring." I mean, this was-- I mean, to me, I mean, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I couldn't believe it. These are the people that ran Germany. I mean, it was this going into a jail and seeing the Congress of the United States in a cell block, or the cabinet. You know, the secretary of state, the secretary of commerce, the secretary of everything in one cell block.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Couldn't believe it. I mean, it was beyond me. Don't forget, I'm only-- at that point I was 18 and 3 months.

19. It's 1945.

19 and three months. It was hard for-- yeah, hard for me to believe what I was seeing. It was overwhelming. And days after that, some of the press would try to find out what's going on in the jailhouse, because we knew. Because we were with them. I'll have to explain to you.

When you were on a different shift, like if you were in the morning shift, you would take them out for a walk or watch them walk, and there was a little courtyard on the side of the cell-- of the jail. So they'd take them out there and let them walk around. Then if one of their attorney or the government's attorneys or whatever wanted to interview them before the trial-- this was all before the trial-- we'd have to bring them over to the courthouse from the jail, which was on the same grounds.

But nobody knew what was going on except the prisoners and the guards. So the guards were popular with the press then to find out, you got a scoop for me, you got a story, you got this? I tried not-- we were told to stay away from the press. You know this is an American institution of justice, and these people came up again in the sense that one night, one of us-- I think I was party to it-- put thumbtacks on our boots.

And I, in an iron grate situation, you can imagine what it sounded like. And the next morning, we got a Colonel Andrus-- I remember his name A-N-D-R-U-S-- called us all in and said listen, these people are-- he didn't do it in a nice way. These people are not prisoners. They have not been convicted of anything. They're detainees in the charge, custody of the United States Army.

Their defense counsel said, you kept them up all night last night. And if you do it again, you're all going to go to the jail-- to the the guard house yourselves. So that was an interesting little tour.

So you put thumbtacks and just marched, walked back and forth to make noise?

Walk on iron with a thumbtack. You can imagine what the noise will be. It was in-- yeah, we did keep them up all night. There's no doubt.

Whose idea was it?

Well, I may have been part of it. But I was a mischievous guy, I guess. But it was-- but it wasn't allowed. You know, in this country, we have a great code of justice. You know. And they weren't proud of it. This Andrus was a regular army guy. I remember him stiff, redneck guy. Regular army who was what they call-- read the book. Whatever he was supposed to do, that's the way he did it, according to the book.

Now, the Nuremberg trials were originally supposed to be held in Berlin, and I know they began there, but then they did bring them later on to Nuremberg. But the prisoners were there in Nuremberg.

They were brought there in July or August of 1945, and assembled them all in that one building. Nuremberg itself had been destroyed. There was very little left of Nuremberg. And most of it was rubble. You know, all over the place.

But the guard house, the jail itself was sort of isolated away from the courthouse. And it was isolated away from everybody else. And maybe that's why they wanted it that way. There were few houses where Justice Jackson, people like that lived while they were there. And then there was the French, Russian, and English delegation to the trials. They were living in houses around.

And matter of fact, there were very few bathrooms with bathtubs. So when we were off duty, we knew that these officers or these officials were at the courthouse, we'd try to sneak in and use their bathtub. I mean, that was just a little-- I don't think I had a bath in months. So anyway, that was what we found when I got there.

And so your first person that you guarded?

I don't remember who was the first one that night. It may have been Streicher. Because I have a vivid memory of this guy. This Streicher was probably the biggest bastard that I've ever-- I mean, just look at him. Streicher was-- I think his whole being was hating Jews. Just hate Jews. That was his whole life-- hate Jews. He was a-- I don't want to use swear words. But anywhere, he was a--

How did you know that? Or did you know that at the time?

Somebody told me about him. I said, who is this guy, Streicher? You know, somebody, I don't remember who, he's the guy-- and I was told that he was the guy that wrote all the articles for a newspaper in Munich or someplace. And but then I tried to talk to him. Now, he didn't speak too much English. Streicher didn't. And the other prisoners would tell you stories about their colleagues, so to speak. That's how you heard a lot of things.

For instance, Von Ribbentrop was a charming guy, spoke with a little English accent. And he was always asking. And I remembered the other night when I was reminded of that interview, he was always asking, what should I say in my defense--

He was asking whom?

Me, and everybody else. I think he had a habit. He'd say, what do you think how I should react-- when like I'd say, I was taking him over for interrogation to the jailhouse. So he would ask-- because he spoke English flawlessly, you know.

And how would you answer him?

Why are you asking me? I mean, I'd say, what do I know? These are the American judges, English judges, French judges. I says, I don't know what to tell you. Why don't you talk to your attorney? I mean, what do I know? I'm an 18-year-old, 19-year-old kid. But he was charming, that Von Ribbentrop. Von Papen-- but they all--

Did they know you were Jewish?

Oh, yeah. I made that clear. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm running ahead of myself. The first day-- the first night Streicher was sleeping, so I didn't really talk to him. But the next time I had Streicher or Von Ribbentrop, or Von Papen, the first thing I would say, "Ich bin a Juden, you son of a bitch bastard. You killed my family." Whether they understood it-- because Von Ribbentrop understood, and I think Von Papen understood, because he spoke English.

But I made it very clear that I was the only Jew in this detail, and I hate you. I'd kill you if I could. I'm serious. And I was serious. I'd shoot the bastards. But I couldn't.

How did the-- the ones who understand English, how did they respond?

They just looked at me with a blank face. You've got to remember, they're now in prison. All these guys that had all these great power are now in prison. And somebody is giving them a tin plate with food on it. They were all sullen, or they were detached. And all of them said that they did it because of Hitler. Hitler told us to do it. What did we know?

I mean, Frank, the Butcher of Warsaw, was there. What do you mean? "We were ordered to do it. This was part of the government." And that's part of the German mentality, too, to take orders and do. So I let everybody know I was Jewish. I mean, I made no bones about it. But they didn't-- they didn't react too much. They just looked at me.

Did the other American soldiers with you acknowledge the fact that you were Jewish?

Yeah, I mean, they all knew I was Jewish. I mean, everybody-- the typical American youth, a lot of them went around looking for interviews themselves or autographs. A lot of the guys in my detail got autographs.

From the prisoners?

Oh, sure. I didn't. I didn't want anything to do with them, the bastards. But a lot of them went. Because one night, we were back in the barracks or whatever, and one of the guys said, did you get Goring's signature? Did you get his autograph? There was an interesting side story to that. But I didn't. I just didn't-- I didn't see the value of having the autograph of a murderer. And that was-- it was probably a mistake, because I'm sure it would be worth a lot of money today if I had 23 autographs, OK?

Let's talk now about some of these specific prisoners and what your recollections are.

Well, first of all, I told you, they all blamed Hitler. Schacht was sort of-- I remember he was tall, very gray haired, and he was a banker. So I don't know much about his role in the-- and I didn't then, except that he was a financier of some sort. And he was sort of-- some of them, including him, was upset, because we were heaping all these indignitar-- I don't

think I have the right word.

Indignities?

Dignity-- indignities, I guess you call it on them. I mean, after all, I was a big man in this world. So he was not happy about that. And I think he sidestepped the fact that he was part of the killing team, so to speak. Schiwac-- Schirach, I think his name was Schirach, was a youth leader. Von Schirach, I think he was called. I remember him as-- my thoughts about him, that he was gay. He just-- the way he moved and the way he talked.

And I had very little conversation with him, but I just had that impression, that he was gay. OK. Streicher, I wrote this the other night, but I'm going to tell you. A dirty old man, belongs in the asylum. He should be in a-- they were all psychotic, you know. They were all crazy, these guys.

I mean, you couldn't do this unless you were psychotic, but he was neurotic, this Streicher. I mean, I had a fixation on him. I mean, this guy was really-- he had a face on him that used to drive me wild every time I looked at him.

How would you describe it?

Just a mean-looking guy. I don't know. I just can't explain it. You know how emotional-- you look at someone and you hate him, you look at someone and you love him? I looked at him, and I hated him.

And a couple of times I did talk to him, he talked about the purity of the race, that the Jews were going to spoil the purity of the Aryan nation. In that vein, you know, he believed in the purity of the blood, so to speak.

Would you respond?

Well, I'd say to him, "Ich bin a Juden. Do I look any different than you, you bastard?" I mean, but that didn't mean anything. I don't know if he was even listening. I mean, the guy was a mental case. He belonged locked up in a block ward. I mean, all of them. I mean, I can't describe a guy I hated more. But that was him.

And he stirred up probably the public with his writings in the newspaper. And I think he was an advisor to Hitler on Jewish relations or whatever you want to call them. And I think he was probably more responsible for the Final Solution probably than any of them, even though he didn't actually turn the gas thing on. But he got the cauldron going. OK.

Speer was there. He was the architect. And all I remember about him is, he was sort of quiet and he sat in his cell, minded his own business. He was a fairly good-looking guy. And he said, I had nothing to do with the army or the other thing. And I understand afterwards that he was Hitler's confidante. But I didn't know it at the time.

Von Papen was a distinguished-looking guy. And all he ever had to say was "not me. I didn't have anything to do with it. I was our diplomat. I had nothing." OK. Goring was interesting. They evidently had taken him off drugs previous to when we got to the jailhouse. And he was sort of a walking bundle of slob. I remember he always wore a plush red velvet bathrobe. And he was trying to be friends with the guards all the time.

He was sort of not jovial, but he was sort of susceptible to-- And one night, after I got out of the jail detail, because I left the jail detail at one point, and I went to-- which I can describe to you now or describe to you later, I went to his hunting lodge in Bavaria. New House or something like that. I forget the name of it, really. And I slept in his down bed.

And I came back, and I said to him, jeez, Hermann, you had a hell of a goddamned bed. I've never slept in a down bed in my life. And he laughed, and I laughed. And it was just sort of an interesting thing.

Let's talk about that little trip. Was this your idea to do this?

No, 3rd Army also had a prohibition. Patton had a lot of things that officers shouldn't drive their own vehicles. So I met up with this lieutenant, who was then a liaison to the delegations. And he needed a driver, or he has a Jeep. I don't know.

I don't remember exactly what happened. And he says, well, let's go down to Bavaria for the weekend, because I need a driver. You drive. Because you're private. So we went to-- I think it was New House. And we drove there. It was already like a two or three hour drive.

And it was a hunting lodge in the middle of one of the most gorgeous Bavarian Alps. It was Bavaria. I don't know. I think it was near Regensburg. And it was beautiful. And we stayed overnight, and we came back. We stayed over Saturday night, we came back the next day.

And this was Goring's hunting lodge?

Goring's hunting lodge and Goring's bed.

What were your thoughts when you were in his bed?

Just, son of a bitch. I mean, what could I think? I mean, you know, I'd never slept in a down bed. It's wonderful. It really is. I says, this son of bitch is sleeping in a down bed, and he killed all my people. That's all I could think about.

But he didn't-- when I got back and told him, he didn't-- he didn't care. What did he care? I guess-- I think the drugs had changed his mind. I think the gray matter had thinned out a little bit. So.

Did thoughts of revenge ever cross your mind while you were guarding these men?

Every day, every day. I would have liked to kill them. I kept trying to figure out how I could kill them. How could I kill them? I mean, every day. I don't know about the other guys, but me? I did. But how could I? We were watched very carefully. We didn't carry guns. Because we were always afraid that the prisoners would grab the gun out of your holster and shoot themselves or do something. So we just carried the holster, no gun.

They couldn't go anywhere, anyway, even if they got the gun. So we didn't have any guns. So how could I kill them? I mean, how could I go into the cell and choke them to death? I mean, how could I kill them with my own hands? So that thought was the whole time I was in that cell block. I was, how could I kill one of these bastards? And I don't care what happens to me. But I couldn't do it, anyway. So.

Did you end up guarding most of the 23?

Yeah, I think I, at one point in the 2 and 1/2 months-- I think I was there about 2, 2 and 1/2 months. At most point, I think-- not all of them. Let me see what else. See, I don't remember. The toughest ones were the military guys, like Jodl and Keitel, Donitz and Raeder, you know, the two admirals? They were the tough guys. I remember taking Donitz over to the cellblock, from the cellblock to the courthouse. And while I was doing that, we had to go through a corridor that had a big iron door. You know, one of these big iron door. And I opened it.

And as I went through-- he went through, and then as he went through, he had his hand in back of him, and he pulled the door, and he almost broke my leg. Because the big iron door was moving when I went through it. They were tough.

And Kaltenbrunner was there, too. He was, I think, the replacement for that guy they killed in Czechoslovakia. Remember Heydrich? When they killed Heydrich? I think Kaltenbrunner took over in the administration of the Final Solution. I think he was the chief administrator.

He was there. And see, the problem I had that time, I knew what they had done, but I didn't know the magnitude. I didn't understand. I mean, here it's hard to believe that these are the guys that killed six million plus people in the last 10 years.

Without the casualties in the Army and the Navy and so forth? I mean, it's hard to fathom. I don't I don't think I could fathom it today, and I'm 70 years old now. Let me see what else I can give you as a-- and then of course, you know Newhouse. I wrote it down. Newhouse. Yeah, I found it.

But most of them-- I told you about-- Rosenberg was there. That's right. But I didn't get to talk to him too much. Rosenberg was some sort of a planner of some sort. I think he was in charge of something.

Admiral Raeder?

Raeder was there. He was the submarine guy, I think, wasn't he? Was the head of the submarine force. And he was a tough guy. All I remember-- it's hard 50 years later to remember these guys. There was a guy by the name of Frick there, who was the minister of the interior. I remember that. Whatever that meant.

Jodl, I know, was the military advisor to Hitler. And then there was a guy by name a Seyss-Inquart. He was in charge of the labor camps. You know, the factories, like that made Mercedes? Well, he was in charge of getting the slave labor. He was organizing slave labor. To this day, I won't drive a German car. And I know it's foolish, but it's emotional.