This interview is being taped on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is with Jack Reuben, R-E-U-B-E-N. The interviewer is Nancy Alper. The date is February the 23, 1998. Tape number one, side A.

Jack, could you please tell me your name at birth, including a Hebrew name if you had one, your date of birth, and place of birth?

My name is Jack Reuben. On my birth certificate, it shows Yaakov, but then it's crossed out and Jack is put in there. So that was my Jewish name at birth. I was born December 8, 1921 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

How long did you live in Cincinnati?

We lived in Cincinnati six months, and then I was brought out to Los Angeles, and we lived originally in the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles till I was about six or seven years old, something like that. I was in the first grade when we ceased living there.

Did you have siblings who were either born in Cincinnati before you were or after, or did you have other siblings born when you moved to Los Angeles?

No, I was an only child. I was the only child in my family.

Why did your parents leave Cincinnati?

I have no reason why they left Cincinnati, except that I have an uncle, an uncle Joseph [? Kanter, ?] who had moved to Los Angeles prior to that time, and I believe they moved to Los Angeles to join him and his family in that area.

Now, the area that you mentioned that you moved into it first, what was the reason for moving to that neighborhood?

Gee, I really don't have any idea why they moved in there. That's all I know is that there was a rented unit. It was like a fourplex, two-story home, and we had one of the units on the bottom floor. We rented them on the bottom floor.

But it wasn't a Jewish neighborhood.

Oh, yes. This was the Jewish neighborhood at that time in Los Angeles. And it remained the Jewish neighborhood till about the 1940s or '50s when it became a Spanish American neighborhood, and I think now it's mostly Spanish American neighborhood.

What were the characteristics of that neighborhood that you remember that would have led somebody to know it was a Jewish neighborhood?

I remember my mother taking me down Brooklyn Avenue, and on Brooklyn Avenue there were the poultry stores with the shkhite, and the shkhites would hang the chickens up and slit their throats and let the blood drain out. And I also remember the big pickle barrels that used to line the streets, and you'd go along and you'd plunk your hand down into the brine in the pickle barrel and take out a pickle, which you got for a nickel, I think, or something like that.

And that's what remains in my memory about the neighborhood. And my mother worked at that time. She was a garment worker, and I was at a child care center, and I stayed at this child care center, which was within a couple of blocks of where we lived.

Was this a neighborhood that was mixed in the sense that there were observant shomer Shabbos Jews, as well as Jews of other persuasions?

Yes, it was a very mixed neighborhood. There were synagogues there that were conservative synagogues and, along with the other end of the spectrum, the Jews who did not belong to any temple at all. And we were amongst that group.

Why don't you describe what you would characterize as your parents' particular involvement in Judaism?

My parents were active Jews. They did not prescribed to the Jewish religion in any degree. I don't remember attending any cheder or any shul or anything of that nature up to that point. And they were very much involved in the Workers Union in the Labor Movement.

My mother was one of the original organizers of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in the Los Angeles area. She worked down on 9th and Los Angeles Streets in a garment factory there. And I can remember her taking me down and going inside the factory and meeting the people and things like that. She was very active in the union and a very strong union member.

What about your father?

My father originally sold fruits and vegetables from a horse cart in the area. I can remember going down to the stalls and renting a cart with him and then going up and down the streets, and he would first go buy the fruits and vegetables wholesale and then would try to sell them on the streets roughly around the Brooklyn area but in that neighborhood.

Did your parents come from New York originally?

My parents came from Russia, and my mother immigrated in 1907/ and I'm not sure when my father immigrated here. My father left us when I was about six years old, so that would have been about 1927, 1928, and I lost track of him. I have no idea where he went or what happened to him.

Did either of your parents-- and you may not remember since you were so young when your father left, but did either of your parents speak of their Russian experiences or their immigration to the United States?

They did amongst themselves. My mother and my uncle both came from the same area, [? Misto Slavo ?], in Russia, and they would talk about these things. But I never got into many of those conversations. I did not learn much about them at all.

What other sorts of Jewish knowledge or cultural affiliation did you have, for example, in learning Hebrew or Yiddish?

I learned Yiddish because in our family, if it was all right for me to know something, they would speak Yiddish, and I learned Yiddish. But if they wanted to say something that they didn't want me to know, then they spoke Russian. And I never learned any Russian at all. And when we went back later on in the mid 1980s, I just found that I had no knowledge of the language at all.

Did you even go to the so-called high holy day services each year?

No, we did not. We did not go to any of the high holy day services. We did not join any temples, reformed or otherwise. I think if the reform movement had been in existence at that time, it would have been more compatible with my mother's ideals. But only having the conservative movement, this was not the way that she felt, and she didn't subscribe to it.

Do you remember celebrating Passover?

No, we did not celebrate Passover. We do now.

One more question on that subject. Did you keep kosher?

No, we didn't keep kosher at all.

Why don't you describe to me your education, your early education, both in that neighborhood and where you moved subsequently?

I started out at the Breed Street School, which is a school in the Boyle Heights area. I spent, I think, the first-- my kindergarten and the first year of school there. At that time, I developed some kind of an eye problem. My eyes crusted over. Looking back at it, I think what I had was an allergy, and my eyes crusted over to the point where I had to lie in bed. My mother soaked my eyes with boric acid and attempted to use that.

And because of this, they sent me to a camp up in the mountains adjacent to Los Angeles, and I stayed up there for about a year. And by the time I got back, my father had left, and my mother didn't feel that she could give me the proper care that she needed. So the Jewish organization for young children took me in, and I was placed in foster homes.

And I spent all of my youth up until the 11th grade in the foster homes throughout different places in the Los Angeles community. But I spent my week there, then I'd go home, and I'd be with my mother on the weekends.

And so I started originally at Breed Street School. Then I went up to this camp in the mountains, and I spent about a year there. Then I finally after living in Maywood for a year, I ended up going to school in southwestern Los Angeles, and I completed my schooling there.

And finally, I ended up with a family on 90th and Avalon Boulevard, and I went to junior high school in that area. And I went to Fremont High School for one year. At the end of that time, my mother rented an apartment near Broadway, 60th and Broadway. And I completed my education, my regular high school education at Fremont High School and graduated in summer '40.

So you moved some four or five times during your childhood.

Yes, let's see, one, two, three, four, counting moving with my mother, I'd say five times.

Were those difficult transitions for you to make as a child? Or what do you remember about them?

The first three were not very nice. The first three were-- there was nothing wrong. They didn't abuse me. I wasn't persecuted or anything like that, but it just wasn't the feeling of family. The last family that I stayed with that I joined them, I think I was in the fifth grade, yeah, fifth grade. And I stayed with them through the first year of high school.

There was another boy who was about a year and a half, two years older, than I and a younger girl who was about two years younger than I was. And they were a very nice family, and I appreciated very much the help that I got from them. Their name was Schneider.

Tell me your parents' full names.

My father's name was Joseph Reuben. My mother's name was Sarah [? Bosha ?] Reuben.

Do you remember experiencing any anti-Semitism growing up in Los Angeles?

Yes. When we were going to junior high school, I had a very close friend, and I still do. His name is Jack Siegel, and we attended Bret Harte Junior High School together. He was in the same grade that I was in. And one time he got into an argument with one of the guys at school over being Jewish. They were trying to push him around. He wouldn't take it.

And one afternoon, they arranged to have a fight, and the whole school, all the boys in the school circled around and made a ring, and Jack was in this fight. And I can remember guys putting me down and saying things to me that later on I found were very important, but I didn't have enough sense at that time to know about it.

Do you remember what they were saying?

No, I don't. I don't remember now at all.

What was the name of the Jewish social service that helped your mother make these placements for you? Do you remember?

I can't remember right now. If it comes to me, I'll remember it. It was the one in Culver City that just escapes me right now. I just can't bring it up.

Did you know that your mother always intended when her situation leveled off or got better to come and get you and make a home for you?

No, I didn't. I think actually it was just circumstances happened that way that I was just growing up, and the family that I was with, I've been with them for three, four, five, six years, and they were in a position where they no longer wanted to have me with them. And that's all I remember about that.

What was it like when you went back to live with your mother?

I felt very independent. I was doing things on my own. I was going back and forth to school on my own, taking the bus to get to school. And my mother was working, and I'd come home, and the house would be empty. And I would be doing the things that I needed to do for myself.

When you graduated from high school, what did you then go into? I made an application to UCLA, and I joined-- and I started school at UCLA in winter '40. And at that time, my major was economics, and I was planning on either becoming a member of some trade union in an executive position or teaching economics in high school or something of that nature. I hadn't quite decided what I was going to do.

And I used to travel back and forth from 60th and Broadway to UCLA, which is a distance of a good 20 miles every day. And I had different people, guys that I'd ride with and share transportation with them.

And then about 1941, some place after going to UCLA for about a year, I joined the co-op, and I began to live close to campus where I could walk to and from school in the co-op housing.

Were you working at that time in order to help put yourself through college?

Yes. I worked part time at a loan corporation near 9th and Broadway in Los Angeles. And I would work there Friday night and Saturday when they would have nobody there. I did the books. I did some of the bookkeeping for them at that time.

And how long were you in that position at UCLA? I was in that position until August of 1943.

And then what happened?

August of 1943, I originally wanted to fly, and I had gone to the Army, Air Corps, the Navy, the Marines, and I was unsuccessful in passing the Ishihara color test. And I was very, very angry because it was a Japanese color test. But I just couldn't read the letters-- I mean, the numbers.

In fact, I read some numbers, and the guys would look at me and say, where did you see that? They never heard anybody read the numbers before. And they wouldn't let me fly because I couldn't pass the color test.

At that time, I was going to UCLA, and I was taking psych 1A. And my professor was experimenting with color vision, and he had a set of 100 ribbons, 50 sets of ribbons. And what he had to do was match them, and I matched these sets of ribbons perfectly without error. I matched every color perfectly. And I just never could understand why I never was able to read the letters.

And I still can't. I just looked at a chart a couple of months ago, and I still can't read the letters, the numbers in the chart.

At that point, had you already volunteered to go into the Army?

No, I hadn't. I was still looking to volunteer, and I was-- my number was coming up, and I was about to be drafted. And I heard about this program called pre-meteorology. Actually, it was intended to develop people to become meteorological officers.

So I then volunteered for that program in the Air Corps. This was in July or August of 1943.

If you had been able to attain that position and attain it in the Air Corps, what would you have been doing?

I would have been predicting the weather at the bases, either in the United States or overseas, wherever we would have been stationed. So I volunteered for the Air Corps. I was accepted for the Air Corps, and I was inducted in Fort MacArthur in Los Angeles and sent to Pomona College, and we started in Pomona College in the fall of 1943.

And we stayed at Pomona College for nine months. And so we graduated from Pomona College sometime in the spring of 1944.

Were you able to attain the position that you wanted to as a meteorological officer?

No, I was not. The Air Corps graduated about 4,000 cadets, and they had about 200 openings at the UCLA and at Yale. And so the rest of us were not able to become meteorological officers. We were just set aside. They allowed us to volunteer as tail gunners or other hazardous occupations, but I didn't want to do that.

And so I eventually wound up in the infantry. I wound up in the 89th infantry division.

If you had not volunteered, if you had waited to be drafted, would you have had less control, in theory anyway, over what you wanted to do?

I think I'd have been about in the same place where I was after they dropped us out of the program. We were just wandering all over the place, and we wound up in a repple depple in Oregon. And then from there, I was assigned to the 89th infantry division.

And what was your function and title and the parts of the army that you were affiliated with at that time when you had been rejected from the program at the end of the program at Pomona College?

I eventually wound up in the headquarters company of the third battalion of the 355th infantry regiment of the 89th infantry division, and I was trained there as a code clerk. I learned to encode and decode messages, and I was the only person who dealt with coded messages in the battalion.

Now, by coded messages, do you mean coded messages that would have come through in German that had to be-- and in code and had to be both translated and decoded?

No, these were just messages within the service, within the United States service. These were not foreign messages. These were just the United States. These were orders on how the battalion was to be used, where it was to go, what they were supposed to do, what support we were going to have and things of that nature.

So that the enemy wouldn't know what was being planned, is that correct?

That's correct. Yeah.

You mentioned going to Oregon. How long were you there?

Only for about a month or so. There was just a repple depple. They just took people in and then sent them out where they were requested by the different units.

And then what was your next training location?

We were then sent to Camp Butner, North Carolina, where we got our major part of our training as an infantry regiment, and we did our live fire program there. We did our marches. We did all of our regular infantry training in that area. We went through the course where they fire live ammunition over your head, well, not so far. But we were under fire, so that we would know what it was like to be under that kind of condition.

Before you went to North Carolina, were you at a different camp after being in Oregon?

Yes, we were part of Camp Roberts. And we were one of the outlying camps from Camp Roberts.

Was that the Hunter Liggett reservation?

That's correct. I couldn't remember that. It's Hunter Liggett military reservation, which is an outlying camp, which has no permanent facilities. It just was an area that the unit was located.

What they did is they took all the corporals and below out of this unit, sent them overseas as a replacement in replacement camps. And we were then brought in to fill these positions. All the upper non-commissioned officers were very angry with us because all their friends had been taken away, and for the first six, nine months, they didn't like us at all. We had a very difficult time getting along with them.

What was the difference between the training that you received at Hunter Liggett and the training you received at Camp Butner in North Carolina?

Camp Butner was much more organized. When I joined the battalion, they had no heavy weapons equipment at all. They only had two Jeeps, and one of the Jeeps belonged to the chaplain. We had some machine guns, but that was the extent of our heavy weapons equipment. When we got to Camp Butner, North Carolina, we were then given the additional heavy weapons and augmented the firepower of our unit.

Did you know either when you were at Hunter Liggett or when you were at Camp Butner where you were destined to go and watch your function was going to be?

No, we did not. We were very apprehensive that we were going to be sent to the Eastern theater rather than the Western theater, European theater. And we were just hoping that we wouldn't have to go there. We wanted to go to Europe. We felt that would be more the better for us.

When did you complete your training at Camp Butner?

We completed our training in Camp Butner probably around October or middle of October, beginning of November 1944.

And then what happened? Then we were shipped to Boston, and in Boston, we embarked on our transport on Christmas Day of 1944. And we progressed overseas. At that time, we were told, and I never was able to verify it, that there were six divisions on the high seas at that time, and we landed in Le Havre, France on New Year's Day of 1945.

This concludes side A of tape number one.

This interview is being taped on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is with Jack Reuben. The interviewer is Nancy Alper. The date is February 23, 1998. Tape number one side B.

Jack, we were talking about your leaving on Christmas Day 1944 for the Western theater and arriving in Le Havre and maybe you could tell me what your first impressions were when you arrived there.

We were-- it was very, very cold. It was very, very windy. It was snowing, and it was just a miserable situation when we got in. The boat docked, and we were sent to a villa in the area around Le Havre, a castle where some duke or somebody had lived. And we were housed in the servants' quarters or any place that we could get in that area. And our battalion was sort of the center of all the activity that went on, and we operated a great deal with battalion autonomy from then on.

What was your purpose in staying at this castle at that time?

It was just to get organized, to get our equipment together, to get our armaments to develop a sense of being there in cohesion and just the sense of getting to-- stabilizing ourselves.

You were then given instructions or information about what you were going to be doing or what you were preparing for?

Not really. We didn't know what we were going to do. While in the United States, we'd heard about the terrible Battle of the Bulge and everything that was going on there, and we were concerned that we were going to have to go into the Battle of the Bulge and fight that kind of a fight. But the more we learned about it, by the time we got there, the battle had-- and were equipped and ready to fight, which was probably around February, the Battle of the Bulge was pretty well over, and we didn't have any problem as far as that was concerned.

Did you have contact with the French population while you were there?

Not there, not originally near Le Havre. I had studied French in high school, I had taken three years of French in high school, and I have a working vocabulary in French so I can discuss and talk to the people in French, and I did later on when we went into the field. I was able to act as a liaison with the French people and the officers in our unit.

Were you assigned to a different battalion or division at this time?

No. We were always part of the 89th Infantry Division, although our regiment was located some time in different areas than the other regiments would be. We were always part of the 355th. And we would take assignments under that category.

How would you characterize your regiment? What kind of regiment was it?

Ours was a conventional infantry regiment. We had three rifle companies, one heavy weapons company, and one headquarters company. And the heavy weapons company included automatic machine guns and weapons of that nature. And then we had artillery support from the regimental artillery.

Would this have been characterized as a light regiment?

Not any longer. We were a regular infantry regiment by that time. We had vehicles, and we had equipment. We had messenger vehicles in our unit, and the other units had the trucks and that kind of thing. But we did not have any tanks or any armored vehicles of any nature. We just had regular trucks and Jeeps.

Were you at one time a light regiment?

The unit was a light regiment before we joined it at Hunter Liggett, but at Hunter Liggett, we converted into a regular infantry regiment.

And you continued in this decoding function.

Not only that, as we got into combat, not only did I have the decoding function, but I also had the messenger coordination unit, and I used to coordinate the messengers both to the companies and to the regimental headquarters. And it was my function to see that the messages got through, either through the radio, which we would then delegate that to the radio communications platoon, or if that wasn't possible, then to get it through by messenger one way or another, even if I had to be the messenger.

How many vehicles did you have assigned to you, and how many messengers were working with you?

If I remember correctly, we had three Jeeps, and we had three or four messengers that were assigned to us, but I don't remember that very clearly at all.

What was your rank at this time? And did it remain the same throughout your tour of duty in Europe?

Well, by this time, I was a PFC, and then I got promoted to the magnificent stature of T5, a technical corporal, because of the encoding and decoding. And that was my ultimate rank was T5.

Did that give you the additional responsibility for the other messengers?

Yes, it did. I was in charge of the message center, and I worked under our communications sergeant, who was in charge of the radio group and all the other groups in there in the platoon, in the communications platoon.

Jack, at that point in time, before you even left for real combat to engage in real combat, was information received through these messages within the Third Army that were telling you or was telling you other things that were going on, say, the Soviets moving from East to West that didn't strictly have anything to do with what you would be doing next?

No, we didn't. We didn't get any of that message at all. The only way we learned about what was going on was through the stars and stripes. We did get periodically get issues of the stars and stripes, and through the stars and stripes, we learned about what was going on or with communications with people in the United States, letters from our families and things like that, that would let us know.

I didn't tell you that I had been married in 1944 while I was at Pomona College and that I communicated with my wife by letter, and this is-- we found out as much from that as anything else through the communications. And we also found out through the stars and stripes what was going on, but we didn't hear very much through the communications at our level because we were-- this is at a very, very basic level. It doesn't go any lower than this, and we were just engaged in troop activities and instructions of what we were supposed to do, not major activities on the front.

Were the letters that you received and the letters that you sent censored at that time?

Yes, they were. The outgoing letters were censored. The incoming letters were not censored, but the outgoing letters were censored, and some of them were-- I know after I got back, I saw them. They were cut up pretty badly because I mentioned names of cities that we'd been in and things like that. And those were all deleted from the letters.

And what kind of information were you getting through the stars and stripes?

We were getting really good information, information telling us where the different divisions were located, what the situation was on the battlefront, where the Allied forces were, and what was happening in different areas. It kept us pretty well informed as to what was going on at that particular time.

Wouldn't the stars and stripes have been available to the German army as well?

Hopefully not. Hopefully it was just confined to our area. Maybe if they would have captured one of the units, they may have gotten it. But I don't know. We never thought about that.

At the time that you were on your way from Le Havre to wherever you would be going next, I assume there was no indication of any sort of camps, concentration camps or death camps that were being discovered as the Allies were moving West, but more importantly, as the Soviets were moving-- as the Allies were moving East and the Soviets were moving West.

You're absolutely right. I look back on it now, and I can't believe the absolute lack of any indication whatsoever about the Jewish situation, about the plight of the Jewish people, about the death camps, about the concentration camps. We had no information at all that I knew about. Maybe some of the other people knew about it. But personally, I had no information at all as to what was going on.

I had a general idea from the time that we were in the United States about the persecution of the Jewish people, but we did not have any specific information about the concentration camps whatsoever.

Where did you get the general idea of the persecution of the Jewish people?

Oh, just from the papers in Los Angeles, the work that was going on at UCLA in the student lounge, they have information posted there. And when we would come there to eat lunch, or we'd be going by there, we'd stop in and look and see what was going on. And this was my best source of information. Maybe I didn't pay enough attention to the papers or anything like that, but it really didn't strike me as being readily available to the people here in the United States.

Do you recall whether that information that was posted at UCLA was posted by Jewish organizations for Jewish students?

No, I don't. I don't remember who posted it. I don't remember how it got there. But I do remember that there was one area in the student union where we would go all the time, and there would be bulletins and some information about the situation of the Jews in Germany and what was happening there.

And this wasn't, for example, information that was posted at some sort of Hillel foundation or organization.

It could have been. It very well could have been. UCLA was relatively small at that time, and there was a Hillel house across from campus, just east of the campus. And they were active, but I was not involved with them.

When you were about to leave Le Havre, where did you go next, and what, if anything, were you told to expect?

Our first area of combat was in the Moselle River Valley. We went to the Moselle River Valley, I think it was in the latter part of February or the very early part of March of 1944. And we engaged in combat in that area. And that was our first experience in the combat situation.

Where was the Moselle River Valley in relation to the Maginot line?

Jack, the tape was just paused. We were talking about, I believe, your moving into the Moselle River Valley and engaging in combat for the first time.

Yes, that's where we had our initiation into combat, and we were there to develop a bridgehead across the Moselle River for the Allied troops, and we stayed there a relatively short period of time until we were able to pass the troops through the bridgehead and across the Moselle Valley.

What kind of fighting was going on there and how intense was it?

It was very intense for the frontline troops. We lost quite a few men in the rifle companies, and we called for additional heavy artillery support. We got some, and we were able to make the crossing of the Moselle River and able to develop a bridgehead across there so that the troops could get across. We didn't see too much from a headquarters company standpoint from back in the communications platoon, but there was quite a bit of fighting in that area.

Did you have air support at that time and how were the Germans fighting at that time?

We did not have any air support that I remember seeing. The Germans were still fighting very, very hard, and it was very resistant. It was very slow moving kind of activity, and it was done on foot. There was not a lot of vehicular transportation.

How are the Germans equipped as far as you could tell?

As far as we could tell, the Germans had very good equipment. They had plenty of ammunition. There was no hesitancy to use the ammunition, and we received a lot of small arms fire, a lot of machine gun fire, but we did not receive a lot of heavy weapons fire. We did not have cannon shells, howitzers, or anything of that nature. We were just mostly small arms fire.

How did you know that you had been able to accomplish that bridgehead across the river, and therefore, I assume that you were victorious?

Well, when they came along, and they told us we were going back into Germany to regroup, well, then we knew that we had accomplished our mission, and somebody else had been passed through us. I don't remember which division it was. And we were then called back, and we regrouped, and I don't remember where this was, and then we started out on our major campaign.

Why don't you describe to me how you knew that was a major campaign and how you were preparing for it at that point in time?

Well, the reason we knew it was a major campaign was because they were concentrating a great number of troops in the very small areas, and we were getting all the equipment that we needed, and we were also seeing boats being brought into the area. They were Naval boats, wooden boats from Naval ships, more like the emergency landing craft that are on Naval ships, and they were being brought into the area by truck.

And we were kind of wondering what the heck, what they were doing with these boats inland, and we had no idea what was going on or where we were going.

How long, if you can remember, were you in that fighting in the Moselle River Valley and then how long, if you can remember, did it take you to get to your destination, the next destination?

It wasn't very long. I think we were only there a couple of weeks, and then when we were pulled out, we were pulled out in another week. So it was around the end of February sometime when we were getting ready to start our next campaign.

What was the weather like then, do you remember?

It was snowing. It was snowing. It was cold. It was miserable. And we were camped out in canvas tents, and it was a really very, very terrible situation as far as living in those conditions.

And maintaining records and doing coding and decoding, it was just a very difficult situation.

How did you pass on messages after you had decoded them? How did they get moved around within the Army?

That's what we used our messengers for. We had the people in our platoon who we would then tell them to take this message to so-and-so, such and such a unit located so-and-so, and we would then use them to disperse the messages and forward them to whatever unit, whatever company they were assigned to.

And you were still receiving the stars and stripes at this time?

Occasionally, late, late, late, late. The thing I remember about the stars and stripes after we started our major campaign into Germany, at one point about-- I think it was someplace in maybe mid March or the end of March, we got a stars and stripes that showed us, showed the 89th division as the most furthest advanced point into all of Germany. We were at the head of Patton's Third Army going into Germany, but that was a little bit later.

So you were proceeding, and you see these boats coming in, but you're not sure what they're going to be used for. And then what happened next?

Then we were told that we were going to make an assault crossing of the Rhine. And this was our position was North of Frankfurt, and we were stationed north on the west side of the Rhine north of Frankfurt, and we were able to get-- well, we were given-- not given, but we had some heavy support, a very heavy artillery. And the artillery bombarded the east bank of the Rhine very ferociously.

And then they brought the boats down to the water. We got on the boats, and we went across the Rhine in an assault of the Rhine. And the thing that made it so difficult is the Rhine is like an indentation in the ground. There's high banks on both sides, but the Rhine River is very, very low.

And so the people on the other bank shoot down on you, and as you go across the river, there at a very great disadvantage because you don't know where the fire is coming from. You can't see where the fire is coming from. They also shoot over the embankment from the other side, and you don't know where those weapons were.

So we lost quite a few boats going across the river, and then we finally got across the river, and then we went up the side of the-- east bank of the Rhine and got to the top, and we managed to extinguish most of the areas of fire that were coming from us. But that was a very, very difficult assault crossing that we made of the Rhine River.

But you had air power support, and I assume they were trying to knock out the Germans who were on the other side, the east side of the river.

Yes, we did. We had very good air power support, and that was one of the things that saved us, I think, because as the further we got in, the more they we could tell them where the fire was coming from. And then they would attack that particular area. It was very, very good support. We had excellent support.

Now, during that time in fierce battle, you were presumably trying to get messages out to various units of what's going on and what they need to be doing.

Yes, because we were the central command point for the Lieutenant Colonel who was in command of our battalion and all of his orders when he wasn't-- he was a great guy. He was in the field all the time, but when he needed to get communications to the company commanders, he would have us take the messages to them and tell them what he wanted to do and where he wanted them to go. And some of our messengers would be assigned to the colonel, and they would go with him into the field.

And where did that place you in terms of being on the front lines? Did that place you up at the front or somewhere else?

No, I was not up at the front. I was in the first line behind the front because it was my job to make the messengers available, to handle the messages, to relay any firing our heavy artillery weapons commands or requests that the colonel wanted and to coordinate all of the activity that was going on that he wanted to see coordinated when he wasn't actually with the companies.

How wide was the Rhine River? Do you have a recollection of that at the location where the heaviest fighting was?

It was miles wide. It went on forever. I thought we were never going to get across it. But I don't know. I guess I'd estimate something around maybe half a mile wide, something-- maybe --, I think but for-- when we were going across it, it seemed that it was going on forever. Took us days to get across it.

Did you see the death or wounding of a great many American soldiers?

Yes, we saw -- there wasn't too many fatal casualties, but there were a lot of wounds, a lot of shrapnel wounds and things of that nature. And we would send them to the rear to the hospitals as quickly as we could. We had very good support from the hospitals with ambulances and things like that, and when we'd run out of ambulances, we just put them on Jeeps and send them back with the Jeeps. This was probably our heaviest engagement that we encountered throughout the whole campaign.

And a question going back to an earlier period is before you had this fierce fighting to take to get across the Rhine, had you already seen German soldiers captured? And if so, what was that like?

We saw a few. We didn't see very many of them in the Moselle campaign. I was very upset with them. I really didn't want to have anything to do with them. As far as I was concerned, the quicker we got rid of them, the better.

And I did not have any conversations with them, although my Yiddish was good enough to converse in German, and there was another fellow in our battalion headquarters company who was German. He wasn't German. His family was German. And he could speak German better than I.

But I did also act as an interpreter with the German people as we went through Germany. I didn't see any-- I saw some German soldiers, but I never did talk to them, not at that point.

What kind of condition did they seem to be in when you saw them, and what was happening to them?

They looked a little gaunt. They looked like they hadn't had adequate food, but they didn't seem much too bad as far as the other concerns. I didn't see any of the wounded. I don't know what happened to the wounded, but I didn't see any of the wounded German soldiers.

What was done with them after they were captured?

We immediately established holding pens-- holding camps and would have the German prisoners into these holding camps. And we'd turn those holding camps over into the troops who were coming behind us. There would be troops who would be assigned to take care of these prisoners because we didn't have the time, the energy, or the personnel to take care of those camps. They were just there to be held until the troops who were assigned to that function came in and took them. We didn't keep them any length of time at all.

When they were spoken to by other soldiers, what was the interchange like if you saw any such?

It was very marginal. We didn't talk to them. We didn't want to have anything to do with them. We'd just get rid of them. We had other things to do. We were too busy taking care of our own things.

We wanted them out of the way so that we could do what we needed to do to get the troops-- see they were supplied, to see that everybody was doing what they needed to do, see that the fighting proceeded the way that the colonel wanted us to do it.

After you cross to the other side of the Rhine River, what happened?

Well, after we crossed the other side of the Rhine River, we consolidated there for about two or three days. And then liberated a bridge up north of us on the Rhine River. I forgot exactly where it was, and they were able to get a lot of transport equipment across this bridge, and the transport equipment came down, and we were able to then get into vehicles.

And it seems that once we crossed the Rhine River, we broke the last main point of resistance of the German army because from then on, most of our travel was vehicular. We didn't march or anything like that. We'd travel by day in vehicles. Then at night we'd take over a village. We'd kick all the German people out of their houses. We'd take over their houses.

We'd eat from our own mess camps, but we'd stay in houses. we. Were moving at such a fast pace, it was just very-- it was unbelievable how fast we were moving. We moved 20, 3- miles a day through the countryside on the main autobahns.

The Germans didn't-- they left the autobahns there. They didn't blow up any bridges or anything like that. We just continued with our scouts out in front, and we'd come up, and the scouts would move out ahead again.

In that early crossing after that crossing the Rhine River, what was your impression of the countryside, the roads, the people, their homes, what kind of condition it was in?

I was surprised. I was really surprised. The homes looked in good condition. And the people seemed to be healthy. They seemed to be well-fed. There didn't seem to be a great deal of deprivation or anything like that.

It was a relatively unscarred community, except once in a while, we'd see some bombing and things like that, where that community would have been very, very much devastated. But outside of that in the countryside, there was very little evidence of the war having gone on.

Would you characterize the area that you were moving through-- and I know you were moving through rapidly-- as industrial or agricultural?

Very agricultural. It was very agricultural with isolated industrial communities. There was some industrial communities that we went through, but most of it was agricultural.

What was the reaction of the German citizenry to your presence there?

It was unbelievable. When we first would take a village, everybody would be so afraid that we were going to pillage them and rape them and just destroy the houses and everything like that. But when they found out that we really weren't interested in that, what we were interested in was moving on and making sure that the rest of the country was under our control, they would then turn around, and they would start talking to us. And there would be evidence of friendliness and things of this nature.

And it was very hard to pin the degree of blame, the degree of acrimony, the degree of fierceness that we felt because they were very, very nice.

Were they forthcoming in terms of giving you their homes and providing food to you if you needed it or other sorts of supplies?

We just kicked them out. We didn't have-- we just said out. We're taking this over for tonight. We didn't eat their food. We ate food from the commissary that we carried with us, and I'm not sure why, but that's what we did. We did drink their beer. But other than that, we didn't take any of their stuff.

After the crossing of the Rhine River and as you were moving, making this movement east, I assume that you saw more German soldiers being captured and having to be somehow taken care of?

Yes. After we got through with the Rhine and we started moving East at these very heavy rates, we started capturing the Germans, not in tens, not in twenties, but in hundreds. At one time, we were proceeding down the road, and all of a sudden, we saw this whole great big group of German soldiers marching towards us, and we all got out of our vehicles. And we manned our guns, and we were all ready to kill them all.

And what we noticed was that they were marching towards us with their hands in the air. And they were led by their colonel, or whoever was in charge, and they wanted to surrender. It was a whole battalion of German soldiers who wanted to surrender, and we didn't have the time to take care of them. We just said go on, go on, go on in the back.

This concludes the side B of the first tape of an interview with Jack Reuben.