United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Richard W. Peterson
April 6, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with Richard W. Peterson, conducted by Gail Schwartz on April 6, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's volunteer collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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RICHARD W. PETERSON
April 6, 1999

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Richard Peterson,** conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on April 6th, 1999 at the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum. What is your full name?

Answer: **Richard William Peterson**.

Q: And where were you born and when were you born?

A: In **[indecipherable] Iowa** on September 29th, 1925.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your childhood and your family. Who made up the members of your family?

A: My father, **Henry K. Peterson** was a lawyer. Mother, **Laura May Peterson.** I had two – two others, my older sister **Josephine,** who was 11 years older than I, and my brother **Robert,** nine years older than I.

Q: And you spent your childhood in this one location?

A: Exactly, yes.

Q: What were your interests as a young child?

A: I had, oh I think a variety of things. One thing I think Mother and Dad encouraged a lot of reading, we did a lot of reading at home. The usual childhood sports, I think. I think beyond that also Mother and Dad encouraged collections of

things. Stamp collections, that sort of thing basically that was of interest. Music was always a part of our home. Mother sang beautifully and she played the piano, we had that sort of thing. Interestingly too at home, I think though, we had quite a bit – because on my father's side, Danish background, as the name indicates. On my mother's side the family went way back from **New England** Yankee people. So on Dad's side we would have my grandparents who lived just a block away, we'd be often times in their home. We learned little bit of Danish, used some Danish in the home place, and my father had not spoken English until he was five. On Mother's side we had a lot of Civil War background because she had three uncles who were in the Civil War. We had a lot of Civil War songs and a lot of that sort of thing basically. So there was a kind of a developing interest of history as well too, during that time.

Q: What kind of physical condition were you in? Were you a healthy child?

A: Yes, yeah. Oh I had the usual, I think, childhood diseases basically and the scrapes and bruises, that kind of thing. But no, nothing unusual. It was – it was a good – good childhood, healthy-wise, you bet.

Q: And were you small for your age or tall for your age?

A: Right about average I would think, yeah. I think average.

Q: Uh-huh. And did you have any religious training?

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

A: We were Baptists. The Baptist persuasion is that there is no baptism until you reach what is called the age of believer. I was baptized when I was nine years old after some instruction, basically. And of course in the Baptist church that's by immersion. Mother – D-Dad was very active. Not only his profession but in community life and religious life as well too. He'd been the past president of the **Iowa** Baptist Association. Mother was even a stronger Baptist than he was. She was what was called a deep water, loud shouting Baptist and she enjoyed the reli – so we had – we had a – a good – good – good religious background.

Q: Did you have many friends? Were you a social child?

A: Yes, I think so. Neighborhood friends, quite a few of those. The neighborhood quote gangs, end quote, I suppose. Then farther along in school we lived just within a – oh, a block or so of **[indecipherable]** school where I attended, and we had a lot of friends at school, I – I think so, yes.

Q: Mm-hm. Was your family a very emotional family? Did they encourage you as a boy to show your emotions, or to keep them in?

A: There was never direct lect – any – any limitation of – of showing emotion. Dad was quite serious just by his demeanor basically. Mother – Mother had more expression I think basically and she enjoyed things more. She was a – a – a delightfully humorous person, a lot of fun to be around. Dad, as I say, was more

serious, but he was a very, very, very fine person. And looking back, too, in the home, as I said, it was a lot of encouragement of reading and a lot of encouragement of motivation to do things. Dad was very active community-wise and he urged all of us to – to be involved in high school activities, other activities as well. An interesting thing about the family, though, you see, we're almost rather like two families. My – in the sense that my sister was 11 years older, my brother nine, and I, as Mother said, the side dish that came on orders was that much younger, you see. So I – they were up and growing, my – my sister **Josephine,** brother **Robert,** they were kind of on a different level by the time I was – I came along. So I was home quite a bit myself, in those later years.

Q: When did you start becoming aware of **Europe**?

A: I think because of the interest in reading we had, we were really quite young, because Mother's two spinster sisters had both been to **Europe**. Quite unusual at that particular time is these young women, they were teachers, basically, they had both been in **Europe**. My Aunt **Agnes** had – had been in **Germany** a number of times and studied there. Aunt **Belle** had been with her also. But we would have, when Aunt **Belle** and Aunt – Aunt Agnes were there, talks about **Europe** and visiting about **Europe**. So really as younger people we were aware of at least **Europe.** Not the rest of the world, but **Europe**, certainly. And I'm speaking now

of – of ages probably of 10 and 12, maybe eight, we were aware of **Europe**. News-wise, later though, because it wasn't of course until I was getting into later grade school that the world news became more and more important.

Q: Did your parents talk that over with you? How aware were you of the situation getting worse in **Europe**?

A: We were aware because first of all we had the "**Des Moines Register,"** the state paper that the folks read avidly, they would discuss it. We had radio news basically as well, too. So I think probably as – as things were beginning to develop, I remember discussions of the Spanish Civil War, that would be what, in the late 1930's. And then of course when the war itself began in the first or second of September 1939, why, we were much, much aware of it.

Q: What was your personal reaction when – in September '39? Do you remember that?

A: Yes, I remember quite clearly because that morning, I remember coming into the kitchen, the paper was there and Dad was very disturbed, having read the – the war that – the word had come that – that of course as we remember, **Germany** had moved into the – in-into – into **Danzig**, and then that the British gave the ultimatum and I remember the talk, we all heard **Neville Chamberlain** saying that they were given ultimatum, we have rece – **[indecipherable]** undertaking, so

we're therefore at war. I remember Dad being disturbed, Mother to a degree too, but I-I think – I think maybe – maybe Dad was more evident about it.

Q: And you were in what grade?

A: Well, I would have been at that time, which was 1939, in – I'd bega – I began school as a five year old in 1930, so I – I would have been about the eighth or ninth grade at that time, or in that period.

Q: Did you feel threatened at all by that news?

A: Not really, not really. That came a bit later.

Q: Okay, so you continued to go to school in 1939.

A: That's right.

Q: And your life did not change immediately?

A: Correct, correct, but the real – the real change came in April of 1940, the next spring, during the first **[indecipherable]** of course it was the so-called static war, nothing happening basically. But it was in April, the next April, when **Germany** moved into first **Denmark** and then the Scandinavian countries, and that was very – very meaningful because I remember so well of going over that morning to Grandma and Grandpa's, they're still living. This time they were in – in the 80's. But I can picture just as we talk right now, Grandpa **Peterson** sitting there in the sun in the early morning as if he were stunned. The war did come. And I said in

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Danish, **Bedstefar [Danish]**. Yeah, da – I'll put it sa – put it in Danish again. **[Speaks Danish here]** The Germans have **Denmark**. And then in English he says, poor little **Denmark,** she couldn't do a thing. She couldn't do a thing. And he just – he'd been in the German army, you se – oh, I'm sorry, the – the Danish army. And of course it was a great history in the 1860's when Grandpa was in **Denmark** growing up, of the first – you know, th-the first war with **Germany**. And then of course the World War II is – World War – war was there also, but this was a really traumatic thing for them. And we – we sensed that, we could see that in – in – in their – in their make-up, what was happening.

Q: And did you respond in any way, did you feel threatened then, because of the connection to your family?

A: Oh, I think – I think not too much at that time. We knew things of course were getting much more so because following that of course we recall **Norway** fell, and then of course **Germany** moved into – in to the low countries and on and then of course there was a lot of awareness when the German **[indecipherable]** went through the **Ardennes**, to the great – the great shock and surprise of the French and British. And then of course the – the escape of the British at **Dunkirk** to get across, we – that was a lot in the news, we were very, very aware of that.

Q: So this is a young – as a teenager, you followed in the news.

A: Quite a bit, because in school we would also – not by tha – by this time we're getting into – into – into high school. I would have begun high school – I began high school, it would have been in – it had begun in 1939. I begun just that fall. In high school the current affairs magazines, the teachers were visiting about it back and forth, even though the war was still in **Europe**, of course, basically. But we were quite aware of it, yeah.

Q: Up to that point, did you have any Jewish friends, were there any Jewish families living in your town?

A: Yes. Yes. Polish friends as a matter of fact. I was in grade school with **Marvin Richards,** with **Stanley Krazney**(ph), both of Jewish – and some – and some girls, too. So we – we – we had good friends that were, yes. We were just youngsters, of course, but then on into high school we – we had number of Jewish families in **Council Bluffs**, yes.

Q: And did you read anything in the newspaper about what was happening to the Jews in **Germany** in the 30's and so forth?

A: To my recollection, nothing that I recall, no. Although I do recall Dad brought ho – brought hom – brought home a story once from the office, very facetious, a fun story. He had some Jewish clients and th – interestingly enough, h – Dad represented one side, the other attorney in his o – the other people, and they were

visiting back and forth, the Jewish gentlemen ga – came quite involved back and forth. And finally as they left, the first group left, Dad's client remained, leaned over and says, can you blame **Hitler**? Can you blame **Hitler**? But that – that was a kind of a – of a joke sort of thing. But there had been word obviously at the time that things were happening in **Germany** as far as anti-Semitic things basically, but no greater awareness at the time, I would say.

Q: And no evidence –

A: As far as I would –

Q: – of anti – and no evidence of anti-Semitism in your town?

A: No, I think not. We had at that time a synagogue. The building is still there, the congregation no long – but the – i-it was a fairly active synagogue. And I don't ever, ever recall at home any – any suggestion of anti-Semitism at all. The wa – ma – dad – Mother and Dad were both very, very liberal in attitude, and very, very tolerant. Matter of fact we had Jewish neighbors lived right next door to us. And there – there was never, to my recollection, any reflection about them as individuals.

Q: Okay, so I assume then as things go on, you're a student at school, you're following world affairs and then when – what happened when **Pearl Harbor** occurred?

A: We got the word, of course, that Sunday afternoon at home. They're saying, we interrupt this news **[indecipherable]** and so forth. A great – a great shocking thing. At this time, age 16, realized that not fully as yet, but it was going to affect us. The next morning in the **"Des Moines Register"** there appeared a – a – the name was **Ding Darling**, he was one of the leading cartoonists in the country, and here was this – this drawing. It was of Uncle **Sam** kneeling, holding in his arms a sailor with a knife in his back. And Uncle **Sam** was looking up in fury and anger, shaking his fist at the departing Japanese aircraft. Powerful thing. I remem-mem-member very well, and that's one of the first times I ever remember seeing Dad in tears, at that. And that was now Monday morning at home. At school, **Abraham Lincoln** High School, our principal Mr. **Kern, Gerald Kern**, a – a very fine educator and he ran a tight school. He called the entire school body together, we were in the – the big, large auditorium. He perceived in his wisdom how he'll be affecting us, and he had brought – he brought in a large floor model radio which was up on the stage. And I can see him yet. The auditorium, large but couldn't take all of them, so there were other students in the aisles, the balcony, the whole thing. And we sat there in dead silence, and Mr. **Kern** turned on President **Roosevelt's** war message. And how interesting. I thought about it over the years. Over – over the – the – the stage, on the proscenium of the stage, in large gothic

letters in high school were, ye come to learn, go forth to serve. How rather prophetic looking back, huh, at those times. That was Monday and then of course during the week, difficult. To drop back a bit though, the week before had been a tense week because I remember th-the – the – the **[indecipherable]** this country as we recall, as the special en – envoys, emissaries and there were big pictures of them in the paper, them smiling and very – you know. And then came the word about it. But I remember when, during the end of the week as we're reaching – it would have been in probably December fourth or fifth – third, fourth or fifth, that the word came that they were re-reaching some kind of an accord, they thought – I remember saying to Dad, Dad, how lucky – a war with **Japan** would be terrible, wouldn't it? And then of course, came the events of Sunday and then Monday, of course, war was declared.

Q: And so you went on with life as usual at – in – in high school?

A: To a degree, but it was changing, because we realized things were indeed happening, and they already had, to this extent. The National Guard had been already brought into federal service by that time. I thi – I think that our local unit, which was the 168th infantry of the na – 34th division had been mustered in in January the year before. And we were aware of it because a number of the high school student seniors were in the National Guard and they were gone. And I

remember then, it was in the – May of that year, which would have been 1941, before the war, but here they made arrangements and I remember being in – I was in the band and orchestra, and it was always typical that we would play, the orchestra, we would play – our – our school march was **"The Pilgrim's Chorus"** from **Tannhäuser**. And – and Mr. **Kern** liked it, it was very good. Much better than "**Pomp and Circumstance."** But I remember being th – we were practicing and in came the high school seniors and I remember I was so, as a youngster, moved, because here were four, five or six of the high school students now on active duty, they were there in uniform, they came back to graduate. So that was – so we were very much aware of it. And to drop back to your other question, how did it change? We were much aware, the – the high school paper, "**The Echoes"** began having items more and more of classmates we had, or students who were now in the service, in the military, back and forth. As well, at our high school we had **ROTC,** junior **ROTC**, we were all in it, even band – band people had a military band and the whole thing. So there was more emphasis all the time. I mean that things are going to happen, young people and you've got training that's going on here, it's going to be helpful to you. So the – the high school paper as I said, was carrying more and more news about people who graduated, and where they were training and so forth, so we're very much aware of it. And, may I add,

the school activities began to be directed. Junior Red Cross, for example, was having more projects. As – as youngsters, I was involved with the Boy Scouts, the Boy Scout project even at that time was collecting aluminum, s-scrap aluminum to get for the war effort. So we – were doing, things were happening.

Q: Did you ever picture yourself in the army when you were young?

A: Not immediately. You suddenly began realizing, as the senior class ahead of us graduating, they were going in, that this was going to be happening to you. So gradually we recog – it was a part of it, and we were expected to do it and we knew it was coming by that time.

Q: Was it a frightening prospect?

A: No. I – I think at that time there was so much – so much patriotism. You know, remember **Pearl Harbor** and so forth, and of course **Germany** declared war right away too on this, as you recall – as one recalls. So, I don't think – I don't think wa – it was a fearful project. Our feeling was everybody's in it, we will be too, and it's a part of party responsibility. It's a gr – a gr – a great sense of patriotism at that time.

Q: So would you describe yourself in the later high school years as a mature young person?

A: I think fairly so. **[indecipherable]** to this. I had been the quote baby unquote at home. **Josephine** and **Robert** were up, they were in college and so forth. And of course, you touch upon them actual – the war touching us, brother **Robert** was finishing University of **Iowa** in law. He had finished in 1940. He went into the **FBI** initially, for a time, and then because he had an **ROTC** commission from **Iowa**, he got a deferment and had a special service with the **FBI** overseas, but we were aware of the war going on, very much indeed. So – and – but I, in my situation, Mother always – she was very candid about it, she said that I needed to get out more and so forth. And it – I-I was, I think, a little bit sheltered at the time.

Q: Did you talk about the war with your friends?

A: Yeah. We – we did quite a bit. To drop back now, we're talking now '41, you see the first real involvement that we knew about, was when the Marines landed in **Guadalcanal** in August of 1942. That was the first real, as I recall, over action by the nation as far as being on the attack, that I remember offhand. So we were much aware of that basically. Things were happening then too. And of course, as well, the National Guard unit that I spoke of, the 168th regiment, 34th division was at Camp **Claiborne, Louisiana** and they were one of the first to go overseas, which was a – yeah, they went over, went to north **Ireland,** I think it was in January of '42. So the result is that all the hometown people were aware of their – their –

their sons, their husbands, brothers were – in the National Guard now – now were overseas now, so you began to feel it much more locally, that here were local hometown boys that had already gone over.

Q: Had you heard anything in 1942 about camps, labor camps –

A: Not a bit.

Q: – other kind of camps?

A: Not a bit. As I recall – it's hard to loo – think back on that, and I don't think no-no-not a word about labor camps.

Q: Had you heard about –

A: And even about concentration camps, I don't – I don't recall any awareness of that.

Q: Had you heard anything about ghettos?

A: Ghettos, yes, because of our history study basically that we knew – we knew historically, I mean, of the – the existence of the – the older – the European cities of – of ghettos, oh, I – I think particularly in – in **Germany**, the German ghettos. The **Rothschilds,** it was a wonderful, interesting, th-the **Rothschild** family. The film, **George Arliss** was in it. They – we're talking the mid 30's now. And that began in the story of a – in – in, I think a ghetto in **Frankfurt**, I'm not sure, but it

was new then, but we began reading about it, so we were aware of it on the matter of – matter of what it was, what they were.

Q: Okay, now you're what, a senior in high school? And anything special about that year?

A: Junior, I mean basically then, I would have been, you see, a junior – yeah, I would have been a senior, you're right in 1942, because then, all into the rest of the year and then graduated 1943. I became – yeah, 17 in September of '42, that's right.

Q: And what was your senior year like?

A: We were getting closer to graduation obviously. I think, looking back, the courses that we had, there was a real awareness of maybe boning up on your mathematics and so forth, that kind of thing basically because you might have military. In the **ROTC** units, as I recall having a lot – a lot of training. If nothing else, we learned at least close order drill and the manual of arms, if nothing else. So that was it. And also, in school we were getting recruiting requests from the navy, the army and so forth to get signed up to take tests basically, see if you – if you could qualify maybe for some kind of a – of a – of a military education program, which there was a number of them. The navy had them, the army had

them and so forth. So we took tests now during that year to see if you could qualify for that. So we were heading in that direction.

Q: And did you qualify for any of that?

A: Yes, the way it worked, graduated in June of 1943. We'd heard nothing back from the tests at that particular time. Some of our class, for example had already done – signed up for submarine officer training and so forth, some for the air force. I did not. I went to **Drake** University in June, just after graduation for about – it was about a month, six weeks. **Drake,** because it had been Dad's school, it was a good school in **Des Moines**, and Dad's thought was, get as much education as you can before the military, which was exactly right. And then, after about six weeks there, I got word that I would be eligible for the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program, **ASTRP**. Reserve being for those who had not yet attained age 18 and you could go into the enlisted reserve, start off. And then, after finishing one's first term, and when you reached your 18th birthday or past it, then that term would stop in school, you would be s – be – you would become a part of the army itself, be sworn in, have your basic training, then the program would come back to school afterwards. All right, to drop back now, my particular group that I qualified for, we were – I was still in **Des Moines, Drake** University. Down, I remember going downtown at the direction, and I had all the papers and so forth, I – in –

went into the enlisted reserve, took the oath basically and so forth. And then terminated my work at **Drake,** went home and oh then two or three weeks afterwards reported to then **Fort Crook** for induction into the actual – the actual service itself. Our group went to **Kansas** University at **Lawrence, Kansas.** And we began our first tour of **ASTRP**, all reservists, we had – we had uniforms, **ROTC** uniforms basically, the first part of August and we were there then with the first term of just basic engineering beginning supposedly, until we'd accomplished our 18th birthday. Mine was September 29th, you see. So I finished the first term, and then those of us that had reached age 18 then went home for a brief furlough, we reported to Camp **Dodge** in **Iowa**, then sworn into the army itself, huh, and then began our real army experience, because after the initial beginning in the army you have just your uniform, your shots, your medical, the whole thing, **[indecipherable]** orientation, then you are sent to a basic training camp. And that would have been then – that was just about the middle of November of 1943.

Q: And wh-where were you sent for basic training?

A: **Fort Benning, Georgia.** That was the training – th-the training camp. First of all, that was the so called infantry school for the **United States**, th-th-the – for historically that had been the – the headquarters of infantry training basically and General **Patton** had been there basically, earlier years, quite well known. We went

there and began our basic training then, that would have been the first part of December of 1943.

Q: And still, had you been aware in the previous spring, the **Warsaw** ghetto uprising in April ’43?

A: I don’t recall it at all, no. That was in the spring of ’43? No, I don’t recall.

Q: Okay, now you’re in **Georgia**.

A: Yes, ma’am. Yes.

Q: And can you just tell us a little bit about that.

A: It was cold and damp, I recall that quite a bit. But it was something else because now we were in uniform full time. We began our actual basic training which at that time was a 17 year – a 17 week course. You begin the whole thing again. Now, we’d already had, to a degree we’d had some military training at – in high school we had some, w-we had – we’d had some at **Kansas**, **KU**, at **Lawrence.** So we had the basic, we had alr – been through close order drill, we had the manual of arms degree, but then you go through the whole thing and now for the thirst – the first time you’re in the barracks and so forth. Non-coms were okay, we were learn – our training company was in the area called the **Harmony** Church area, which was the training area that we had for the **AST** people. We

were there and week by week the training went on basically, and we got underway in pretty good shape.

Q: And then when you completed basic training?

A: I had a mishap. I'll tell you. Measles was quite virulent. I never had measles. And I remember I got we – I – and this – we were pretty well down the line, we had – we had – we had got rid of our training rifles, we had our new **M1s**, training further with them. And then the next – the next program was that we would hike out to, call it **Caramouche, c-a-r-a-m-o-u-c-h-e** range. It was a – oh, about a 10 mile hike. We hiked out and we had a week tha – actually I think a week on the range itself. And we had just finished – a week or 10 days – we had just finished the last exercise, which was the infiltration course, where you crawl, you know, under the – the firing machine gun bullets and so forth. A lot of very vigorous, you know. That next morning I woke up and I was just speckled with **[indecipherable]**. And I remember th-that my non-com was there, I se – I s – I said, corporal, what – he says, **Pete**, you got measles. Into the hospital. Now the rule was that if a person, a trainee lost five days or more of basic training, he had to go back into an earlier training cycle, of people who had begun later, you see, to pick up the time.

End of Tape One, Side A

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Richard Peterson.** This is tape number one, side **B.** And you were talking about the measles during basic training.

A: Into the hospital, a fairly high fever, but I made it by about four days okay, back in, but because of technicality I had – I was told I would have to go back into an earlier cycle. I was devastated. Here I was, I'd been with these – most of them my friends from **Kansas** and all fellows I'd known basically now – in basic, literally, for over the last 10 weeks or so. And it was very – a really tough growing up process because these are the folks I'd come to know and so forth, that I was taken aback. But anyway, transferred back into another – another group basically, and we completed it. But then, the next thing that happened was this, we were just barely finishing it up, word came from **Washington** that the **AST** prog – **P** program was being eliminated. They needed people carrying guns, not books and the result was that not only the **ASP – TP** was being washed out, but also a number of Air Force cadets that had only gotten to a certain level, were also into the infantry. Result was then that we were much – a lot of turmoil what's going to happen. Mother learned about it, she was terribly upset, she wrote the congressman and so forth, as if anything could be done. But that's the way it was

and so we got packed up, we had finished pretty much of our training and we were then shipped to the 86th **Blackhawk** division, then training at Camp **Livingston, Louisiana.** So the trip then was from Fort **Benning** to Camp **Livingston.** There we were met and greeted basically and then – and then began our training with the 86th division.

Q: At that time you s – obviously spoke Danish, did you speak any German at that time?

A: A little, not – not much. My – my – actually, the few words I had I learned from Aunt **Agnes** who had been a German teacher, as I mentioned. My really second language if I have it was Spanish. Because I'd had – well, first of all, I had two years of Latin, wonderful background and then two more years of Spanish in high school. So I could get along to a degree. My – and my Danish, I – I was rapidly forgetting, because that drifts away.

Q: Okay, now you're with the 86th in wa –

A: Yes.

Q: And you were trained to do what?

A: Infantry. We were assigned to **A** company 342nd infantry. We were a – wh- which is – which, as I should add, a rifle company. To explain a bit further, in a division, infantry, about 15,000 men, one-half of those are infantry themselves, in

the form of three regiments. We were in 342nd. The **Blackhawk** had regiments 341st, second and third. And every regiment then would have three battalions. A battalion would be composed of a headquarters company of the colonel, lieutenant colonel ba – of the lieutenant colonel basically, of the – of the battalion. The headquarters company had staff and there was a reconnaissance patrol and some other service. Then, in each – in each battalion beyond that, there were three rifle companies and a weapons company. And I – and I give this because it gives a better background for the future I think, too. A rifle company had approximately, in what was called the table of organization, **TO,** about 180 men commanded by, normally, a captain. And then there would be a lieutenant, who is called the platoon leader, for each of the four platoons. The – the three rifle platoons and the weapons platoon. And sometimes there would be another – another officer who is – be assistant – the assistant company commander. In our company it was Captain **Mitchell**, and then we had the – th-the – the four lieutenants. Basically – trying to recall base – the names we had ba – there was Lieutenant **Hess,** Lieutenant **Budman**(ph), Lieutenant **Greenburg**(ph). And those were basically the officers that we had. Each platoon, rifle platoon was composed of three squads of 12 men each. Was the platoon sergeant, a platoon guy, like an assistant, the assistant person. And then, for each squad, the squad leader was a staff sergeant, which is

the three chevrons and then the rocker underneath, an assistant squad – squad leader, who'd be regular **[indecipherable]** and then the balance of the men will be 12 **[indecipherable]**. Be two scouts, two patro – two **[indecipherable]** of two squad scouts, a **Browning** automatic rifleman basically and other riflemen down the line, too. So therefore each – each rifle platoon had those people. In the weapons platoon. separate, those – those were the light machine guns, and there were two sections of those basically, with machine guns each and also mortars, which is 60 millimeter weapon, the tubes that fire the rockets, those thi – that would be a rifle company. There was also each ra – in each battalion, a heavy weapons company, which would be the – would be the – the – the water cooled heavy machine guns, and the 81 millimeter mortars. And so that was basically the structure of – of a regiment. And then we were **A** company of that, and I was in the first squad, third platoon. I was a scout, okay.

Q: And so then you were trained to be a scout and then you continued on to where?

A: Exactly, we finished training, provisional training in February, March. Picture changed because all of us recognized there were more people. Air Force people coming in that had been washed out of – ne – not wa – that's the wrong te – but they – they've been transferred out of the infantry. So we began getting a lot more

people in and really the company was pretty much complete, the way it stayed pretty much through, by probably May, June. We were then **Louisiana,** Camp **[indecipherable]** until – through July, went on maneuvers for the month of August and then the word came down that we were going to be transferred probably out to **California**, the whole division for amphibious training, and that's what happened.

Q: And?

A: To **California** in September, we had about – been probably a span of two months of amphibious training, which was getting us ready for the south – the **Pacific**. There's the small landing craft you see in the pictures of basically, you know, like fre – quite a bit more. So we had a training camp, complete amphibious training. We finished that training at **San Luis Obispo** by mid-November.

Q: 1944.

A: 1944, exactly. Waited and then back after **San Luis Obispo**, we've been in southern **California**, basically in **San Diego**, December 17th began the Battle of the Bulge, which changed the picture tremendously. Word came down we were going to probably be going to the east coast, going to **Europe**. The requirement was they needed more troops in **Europe** because of the impact of the bulge.

Q: You are now 19 years old.

A: Yes. Important because at that time you had to be 19 to be qualified for overseas training. And interestingly enough, back in June, those who'd already attained age 19 of our group, privates, wer-were transferred out, more people brought in. But that was the rule at the time. So we were 19 at the time, exactly. The division got the information, we were put on a – on an emergency basis of packing. We were put on special details, cutting wood and so forth to get all the crates together, to get all the material crap together, put together. That was finished up by probably about mid-January and we were on the troop trains headed east to our division the end of January of 1945.

Q: And then?

A: And then we went east, and we – our particu – all – all of our regiment, basically, went to Camp **Miles Standish,** which is about 30 miles – was about 30 miles south of **Boston**. Coming from **California,** bright, pleasant, into the snow of **Massachusetts,** quite a change. New equipment, we got some new uniforms, more additional equipment than we had basically. We were there probably staging for about a week, 10 days, and then early in February, onto the trains, down to the port of **Boston** and we sailed from **Boston** in about – oh, th – maybe the second week of February.

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Q: By that time had you heard of anything – any news about labor camps, work camps?

A: Not a bit.

Q: Death camps?

A: Not a bit. On the matter of orientation, we all received from time to time, all of us have, the so-called why we fight series. That was a **Walter Huston**, as I recall, was involved very much in that. And they were – they were – the first was why we fight generally and the whole history basically of the rise of **Germany** and Nazism and so forth. And then they would take it country by country, go into it. These would be a series of documentary films we'd have, as well as other films we were having on training, gas training and so forth, and f – and firing. But this was an orientation series as I read it now, that really had been acted by **Walter Huston**, directed by **Capra, Frank Capra,** he developed the whole series for the army, as I remember. So we learned why we were with **England** fighting, why we were basically the free French, the Chinese **[indecipherable]** and the Russian. And these were all good guys. And then the bad guys, of course, were the Japs. The militarism of the Japanese, and **Pearl Harbor** all over again and then of course in **Germany** the rise of **Hitler** and all the – the nasty Nazis and so forth.

Q: Were you eager to go abroad?

A: I don't know about eager. We were ready. We had trained completely and the time had come. And I don't think that there was any question of eagerness. It was a part of it. Maybe in the sense that we had friends and relatives and my – my situation. My brother was by that time in military intelligence in **South America**. He had acquired marvelous Spanish and so he became military intelligence, however – in the – in the – in the army. So we were ready, let me – let me put it that way. And maybe the time had come, I – I'm not sure. There was a lot of – get a lot of – of patriotism about – to – to a modified degree. We – we were still in the army, we complained and bitched, pardon the expression, but that was a part of it. But our friends were over there, brothers, relatives overseas, so it was a part of it, it was expected.

Q: Did you feel very old then? Older than your years?

A: I felt – I felt more mature. I was no longer the baby of the family. I was one of many, many people by that time, others of my – my – my peers, huh, and I was ar – I think probably more self c – more self confidence in myself and I know looking back that the army made all the difference in the world to my growing up. By that time, we're talking now, as I said, February of – of 1945, I – we had our friends in our unit, good buddies and so forth. There was a lot of togetherness about the whole thing.

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Q: And where did you dock?

A: Our trip over was about 10 day – about 10 days, we – right at **LaHavre.** By that time it had been secured, you see. Earlier it had to be brought in by **[indecipherable]** but this was right – right in **LaHavre** itself.

Q: And then where did you go?

A: We arrived – we debarked late at night, I recall, down onto the dock into great big – big, huge trucks, large trucks. And I recall very well as we came down, we're getting in. I went past the truck we were getting into. It happened to be the one where our company commander, then Captain **Mitchell** was seated. And I recall seeing Captain **Mitchell** looking up at the windshield, there was a bullet hole right through the windshield of the truck. Introduction. Before we had debarked also, the guys, very juv – some are throwing candy bars over, and the soldiers on **[indecipherable]** said, keep your candy, you're going to be dead in three days. Well, ah – okay. All the trucks black at night, we drove over some – this is now **LaHavre.** We went, as I recall **[indecipherable]** and then on north to the area called **Old Gold.** Now there were staging areas in **France** named for – for – for cigarettes. **Old Gold, Lucky Strike**, not as – but a large area. We were in the **Old Gold** area, which was right up – it was north of the town of **Yvetot, y-v-e-t-o-t.** The home of Madame **Bovary** in the novel, hm. Not – not **Proust**, but anyway –

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Madame bo – however, we were about oh, eight or 10 miles north of **–** of **Yvetot** and as – right near a small French village called **Normanville, n-o-r-m-a-n-v-i-l-l-e** in large tents, large, large squad tents, cold and chilling. And we were located there, staging for probably 10 days, two weeks, getting ready to go up to the front. Some more equipment, some more training. As is – as a – as a squad scout I was sent with my fellow scouts up to so called mine, m-i-n-e school, up at **Sassentot, s-a-s-s-e-n-t-o-t** to learn about German mines. The teller, t-l-e – t-e-l-l-e-r mine, that was like a plate **[indecipherable]** plate. The shoe mine, that's what you have a – a variety of them. German explosives, **Primacord**, tetracord. Not th – we would have much, but at – we theoretically, the scouts, you see, go out in front of the squad to study the terrain and so forth and then the squad leader in charge behind you controls your actions. So we had that, we were finishing that up and we got the word, okay men, fold up your tents, we're going back, we're going to be moving out, you're up tomorrow to the front. Back we went, down to **Normanville** and got ready to leave.

Q: And you then went?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: And then you went?

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

A: We left, of all things, down to **Yvetot,** loaded onto 40 and eights, the old World War I style 40 and eights, 40 men or eight horses, yeah. **Quarante hommes ou huit chevaux.** In the boxcars, they were **[indecipherable]** small, strewn with straw, wonderful, because you could sleep on the straw, but there we were. So we left by this – by the train. Some units I guess went by truck, but we went by train, up through **Amien**, on up to **Namur**. Now by this time we're up in – getting up toward **Belgium.** This – this took two or three days, long time. **Namur**, **Liège.** We went through just a very small part of – of the **Netherlands** at **Maastricht, m-**double **a-s-t-r-i-c-h-t**. And then I remember we got really, really something to think about because boy I remember going through **Liège, l-i – l-e-i-g**, I think, **l** or **l-i,** whichever. There on a – on a fencepost was a German helmet, just stuck on top. Hm, first evidence. Then we began seeing signs of – of a lot of damage, either artillery or – or bombing damage of the city. There was – of course, **Liège** was one of the early areas where f – where fighting took place. And then really, because that particular day twilight was falling, we had already gone through **Maastricht,** and were there stopped when there was a – a – at least a false alarm, they thought of a German, an air attack, because our anti-aircraft guns, which were out near the – near the – near the – the – the – the – the train yard – railroad yards, began go – in an action getting – nothing happened, but they – we – we saw they were there.

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

But then at – twilight came and then it became dark and we went through **Aachen**, which had been terribly destroyed. The moonlight, I remember driving on – riding on the train basically, looking out and seeing all of these ghostly white buildings out there, just – just the ruins, huh, of th-the – the destruction of **Aachen.** We –

Q: What does that do to a 19 year old from **Iowa**, to see that kind of destruction?

A: You – it's pretty spooky. That was our first major di – war damage we'd seen. It was pretty spooky. I think we were getting pretty silent by that time, watching what was going past. I was on guard that night, which meant that you – the sentry seated there on the – tha-that open doorway, basically. And I saw a lot of it as we went through and I think we had two hours basically and – but you watched and went through. Still awake and I think it was probably mid-morning, black of the morn – I mean, by – by two or three in the morning. We arrived at the city of **Duren, d-u-r-e-n** in **Germany,** we were in **Germany** now. Off the trains and on the big trucks, which we call six by sixes. Six wheels and all six **[indecipherable]**, th – we call them six by sixes. Out of the trucks and heading then – we left **Duren.** And they pointed out to us as we went through – went through a – a city square, I don't know who pointed out to us, a statue there of a – of – I don't know what it was. But earlier bombardment had been so intense that the statue, the bronze statue had completely turned around. It had been facing one direction and now it

was facing the other direction. **[phone ringing, tape break]** On the statue, which was of a bro-bronze, as near as we could tell, it's s-still dark in the morning, but there – there were – there – there were truck lights. They pointed out the fact that it had apparently originally been facing on – to – t-to the west, but the – the arterial bombardment they had had in **Duren** was so intense that it had just shifted, the statue was facing east. Weird, weird. So here was dark, middle of the morning, cold, chilly. We – we were – we were course in – in-in-in March now. And out of **Duren** we drove, heading east toward **Cologne.**

Q: What was it like to be in **Germany** when you put your foot down on German soil? Did that have any kind of feeling for you?

A: One had a – one had a different feeling. We were there first time again on re – you know, on – on – on – on enemy soil. Lot of curiosity what it looked like Strangely, in my situation I kind of – could kind of relate back because of the tales of my Aunt **Agnes** and being in **Germany** and so forth and – and – and – and what little German she had, there were the signs and so forth we would see, you know, the directional signs. I didn't know much German at all. I have a little more now, but not that much. Then, of course, in the morning it began getting lighter, you know, eerily morning. And began reli – we were driving through an area now heading east on the – a main, a fairly main roadway toward **Cologne**, which I

think probably was about, I'm guessing 30 - 40 miles east of **Duren**. But here we were, of course, basically in a truck going on east. We had seen, oh, forests to one side and then buildings. Then began to see a lot of bomb damage or some kind of damage to buildings, basically. And then we probably got into **Cologne**, I'm guessing, in the con – with the truck convoy by – by seven, eight o'clock in the morning, I'm guessing. And that was something else. The – **Cologne** had been badly damaged, and yet, way up ahead were the two huge spires of the **Cologne** cathedral. Some damage, but they were standing, they were still there. And then off – truck stopped off into the house, and then in – into houses, apartments where we were being billeted. So then we were there in **Cologne.** Now, at that point something different happened. These were apartment houses, people's belongings, I mean their furniture and so forth. And somebody, strangely enough, began tossing the contents out of the windows into the central courtyard, just indiscriminately. And, was it the result of being in a foreign country, the enemy country? A strange thing but it just seemed to catch on and – and on just a – still I look back and why in the world that was done, but a – just tossed to get rid of it, I guess, stuff out of the – out of the rooms, into the courtyard tha – then emptied the rooms out and we cou – we slept in them. A strange thing. I – I still wonder why it was done.

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Q: Did you see any civilians, any townspeople? Were they affected by the war?

A: In **Cologne**, people were all, I presume had been evicted or gotten out of – before we came in. I don't remember seeing a lot of civilians in ca – where we were in **Cologne** itself. Later, yes, bu-but not in **Cologne** itself.

Q: Okay, and then how long did you stay?

A: We were there, I'd say oh, maybe oh, a couple days. I remember of that that we were begin getting – we getting broadcasts from the **BBC** because their signal – well, we had – some guys had radios, I vi – it was that the – that tune about **Bow Bells**, **bum bum bum bum bum, buddle um bum, bum bum bum.** That was the signal of the **BBC**. **[indecipherable]** the **Bow Bell,** whatever, yeah. And we – then we got the news from **England**, British accents and everything, oh yeah. Getting things ready, I remember basically we were told we'd be there a few days. I remember the day before we left, they took us all up, we went up to the – the attic area, huh. It was a la – fairly large area. And there we were briefed in. We had been designated as taper red able. Taper red able, code word. Taper was the 86th division. Red, the 342nd, able, **A** company, hm. So that was the designation and they told us what to expect. They meaning, I think it was Captain **Mitchell** and na – cap-captain – then Lieutenant **Greenburg**(ph), who we met. We were going to be assigned, said they, up on the **Rhine** river, in of all things, the **Ford** factory.

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Was a major factory before the war that **Ford** had built and we were gonna be sent there as our – as our location up on the **Rhine**, okay. Left fairly – as I remember we – we left fairly early because we went in at nighttime and we relieved the eight infantry division, which was already there, the men were there. And I remember going into the bunkers and we – and – and with – was – was rather wide-eyed because here were their old veterans, I mean you – they'd been – th-the eighth had been in combat quite awhile. And different. They were a pretty rough, tough outfit. And amazingly, the first real eye opener when we got there, one of the medics was there. Now, the medics, every platoon had a – had a – had a medic, hm, and they were not armed, their helmets had great big red – white circles with red cross. The medic that was with that particular group, in the – in the bunker **[indecipherable]** with eight – eighth – with the eighth – of the eighth division, strange guys. Projecting out of his aid kit was – was a bone. Whether it was an animal bone, but you know, that – that – well, really, where are we, what are we doing here? Any event, the eighth then – the eighth – the men of the eighth division pulled out and we were then in place in the **Ford** factory. And that's where we saw our first – the first beginning evidence that we're having and that we're in combat.

Q: And again, up to that point you hadn't seen too many civilians.

A: A – hadn't seen what, I'm sorry?

Q: Civilians.

A: No. Some, but not – not – not – oh, maybe some people walking on the street, that kind of a thing, but no-nothing – nothing to get tha – no, that's right.

Q: And then you stayed there?

A: We were in the **Ford** factory, I'm guessing probably about a week. That's when we first began to realize we were there because the Germans were our – on the opposite side of the **Rhine.** Now we – we're now on the left or th-the – the – the west bank, all right. Germans on the east side. And the **Rhine** at that point, very sizeable. I'd say the **Rhine** was probably maybe a half a mile wide. It was wide. And we could look over and see there was a village over there. And we would go up in the – in the – in the – in the structure of the **Ford** factory. It was just as if the workers had walked away, there were big – there were rather big assembly lines, there were engines on the assembly lines being put together, but they were all gone, but – and walked in, there was a great big **[indecipherable]** inside. **Cologne**, thanks to the second armored division, they'd already bi – somebody painted it up there **[indecipherable]**. We were there, I'd say, about that length of time, but from time to time we were getting artillery coming in, just nuisance that the Germans had put across. Our fir – introduction to the 88, which

was the 88 millimeter ca – a remarkable weapon the Germans had. First of all, it was – it was began, it was ta – it was tested in the Spanish Civil War by the Germans. It was anti-aircraft, could reach way up **[indecipherable]**. It could also be a **Howitzer**, which is a – and a flat trajectory. And I remember that's the first experience, I remember we would – the flat traje – that was really spooky because the Germans would fire in and this sharp crack and that's the first you knew it's – it was there. And it was – it was – it was frightening. That was our first **[indecipherable]** mm-hm. Okay.

Q: And then, to continue.

A: Yeah. We were there for about a week. Then we were told we're gonna be pulled out and indeed we were. We were replaced by the 82nd airborne division, now that had had experience already during the war. And as we – I remember as we were walking out, marching out past the – past the cut – en-entry kiosk they have there, in were coming men of the 82nd, we were on the outside, yes. And I remember walking past, looking up and there was this great big, tall, tall soldier, two big stars. It was General **Gavin – Gavin.** We saw him. Then we were pulled out into trucks and dropped, taken back into a German town some distance back. Now there we did see civilians for the first time. We were moved into the house, we were supposed to be there for a day or so, something, til we're moved on

farther. But there was the conversation, what little German I had with – with one of the ladies there, because she – she was very upset, very unhappy. This is **[indecipherable]** this is your war, this is **nicht unsere.** This is not our war, this is **zine**(ph) war, this is your war, she was saying. But she wa – she was very, very upset about things. We didn't accept it of course, but that's the way it was. We were there a limited time only and then we were take – put – back on the buses – on the bus – on the trucks again, six by sixes, and this was the long trip we had. This was really, now will take us into **Germany** itself, okay. We left that suburb o-of **Cologne**, but not until after we became aware of the first fatality we'd had in our company. We had some injuries because as the Germans were dropping these shells across, one shell I recall, an 88 fell right into th – into the kitchen area and injured, didn't – not badly, some of the cooks, shrapnel. And – an-and you had to watch it because you could sometimes hear the shells coming in and you'd duck. And that was pretty unnerving for – this was our first **[indecipherable]**. But then we had learned and got the whole story, it was a – it was a bad situation, unhappy. Somebody, an officer had determined it was necessary to have an reconnaissance patrol across the **Rhine**. Why, I'm not sure, but there – maybe to make a record or something, but they saw a set up and **A** company supplied – I was not in – **A** company supplied a number of the men, and went off at nighttime, boats, rubber

boats across the **Rhine**. Lieutenant **Henry,** who – fine, he was a good man, of the first platoon, was in charge. The patrol was probably about – I'm guessing probably, I understand about 15 or 20, two boats. They got across and as reconstructed later they came back. Tell – the story came back and we were told that they got over to the other shore, dark. Apparently there was – there had been a lot of firing and there was smoke drifting back and forth. And – and what happened was – was one of those drastic, terrible things that happens in combat. The two scouts moved out ahead. They were probably, as we get, maybe 10 or 15 yards ahead of the patrol itself.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Richard Peterson**. This is tape number two, side **A.**

A: The scouts had gotten out ahead, maybe 10 or 15 yards or so, and as we get the story, the main patrol was behind them. The main patrol saw then, two figures coming at them in the dark. They gave the password. The challenged party is supposed to answer. The parties did not answer. Somebody in the patrol opened fire, only to discover afterwards it was the scouts coming back, our own people. And **Corny Rippons** was killed, he was one of them, the other I'm not sure. They tried, apparently then, to carry **Corny's** body back. They couldn't get it all the way back and they had to leave him over there, basically, back they came. But that was our first – one of – one of those terrible thi – I mean, you know, the matter of the so-called friendly fire. As I think General **Schwarzkopf** said once, once the missile leaves the barrel, it's no longer friendly. But it was a bad thing, so we – on that – on that note then, we learned about that basically. And then – then after that, the next day or so came our continuing trip on into **Germany** farther. To go and pick that up, we left during the day, six by sixes again, the same trucks, parallel down through **Cologne** itself and then on south to **Bonn.** And we're going through

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Bonn, later of course, the capitol of the west – **West Germany**, a ba – interesting old town. I remember from Aunt **Agnes' [indecipherable]** that was the birthplace of **Beethoven**, here are these things coming back. We wound up someth – south of **Bonn** and then onto a pontoon bridge to cross the **Rhine**. We crossed the **Rhine** then at a pontoon bridge. We could see to the south what were called the **Drachenfels,** that's part of that – tha – of the other Wagnerian business. And there were – there were – there were barrage balloons farther south. We learned later that's the point where the first bridge had been captured across the **Rhine** at **Remagen**, it's quite a way south, but we saw the balloons. Then – now by this time we were really now on the east side of the **Rhine** and moving deeper into **Germany**. We crossed several remarkably interesting roads, because they were **autobahns** that had built, you know, by the **Reich** in – and the Germans in the 1930's as – as big work projects. We crossed them. So we got the ti – we got the word **autobahn** right away. But farther into **Germany** we began seeing more signs of combat. There were destroyed tanks, American tanks and **[indecipherable]** tanks, too. We went through, oh I would say some 60 miles or so east, a major town called **Siegen, s-i-e-g-e-n**, and then we turned north up into what was called the **Ruhr** pocket, called that because about a week or 10 days before, two major American armored thrusts, armored divisions had moved east

parallel to each other, about 60 - 70 miles apart, between them being the German **Ruhr,** which was the great industrial area, and is, actually. **Düsseldorf, Duren, Essen** and so forth. Then, as these two armored thrusts went east, they began to come together in out at area called **Paderborn, p-a-d-e-r-b-o-r-n-e**. They joined. That became within that, what was called the **Ruhr** pocket. Then the plan apparently was that they would – Americans, we would bring in reinforcing divisions along where those two big pincers – **p-i-n-c-e-r-s** had come together. The divisions would then, on the south side turn to the north, on the north side turn to the south and gradually converge to come together to eliminate the pocket. We were one of those divisions. Other divisions were the 78th, the men of the eighth division, I'll come back that, that we had re-reinforced – replaced, they come into the pocket. The 97th division was there, on the south side. We were taken to a small town called **Zimmersbach**(ph) **z-i-m-e-r-s-b-a-c-h – z-i-m-m-e-r-b-a-c-h**. Small, tiny, tiny town. We were billeted in a house, a great, huge manure pile out in front, typically of – of a – of a – of a German peasant area. A comfortable house, so we – we – it was good because we – the guys could find eggs and we fried eggs and so we were there a matter of two or three days getting final togetherness and getting things ready. I remember nearby, it was a Sunday, we attended church, and one of the medics we had was a – a very accomplished

organist who played the German organ there. I remember seeing in the front cemetery of the church there was some – some – some graves which had been obviously German soldiers buried there, I mean they **[indecipherable]** where they were buried. Then – then we left that area, April eighth of 1945, we were taken by our six by sixes in the final – the final stretch – or we're – we're hiking, we're – we are on foot, into a wooded area, because we're getting ready to take off, as we say, if we jump off in the attack the next day. So we're rowt – right up – right practically at the front. And spent the night there in bivouac, not tents, we just s-slept outside, basically. And then early the next morning we – we jumped off in the attack. That would have been April ninth now, of 1945. To the north – nor-northwest actually, into the pocket. Then, next several days, our first major incursion into the area, the area was called **Sauerland, s-a-u-e-r-l-a-n-d**. **Sauerland**, one word, **l-a-n-d**, because apparently the soil was – was – of all strange things to know – but it was very rugged country, wooded. I-I-In the infantry we say, excellent defensive terrain for the defender, huh. We moved through it. Not much was happening, however. The Germans were pulling back, there was some occasional firefights there, not much. And I remember several times there, we – we did experience German mortars coming in as they were defending, but not – not a great deal. It was a fast push, because we would be on

the way most of the time. We – at nighttime we'd grab a few hours sleep if we could, maybe in a – in a – in a – I remember sleeping one night on the – on the – on the – on the kitchen floor. Another night we were – and that was lucky, we were in a barn, and they had some straw. But pretty much we were pushing. And that would have been Monday we jumped off, Tuesday that way. And then it was on Wednesday, which was April 11th when we began – I si – remember seeing a sign in gothic print, **Attendorn, a-t-t-e-n-d-o-r-n**, three **k-ms** ahead. And that was when we began really approaching **Attendorn** and that's – that was our first major combat.

Q: And you –

A: We were on the reverse, or south side of a hill, in strength, meaning we were – we were – we were actually well reinforced, the whole thing. We – **A** company at that time was the – was in the lead. To explain, I am the lead. Normally in a battalion, if the battalion, for example is committed, two companies would be side by side, the third in reserve. And the same with two bi – there might be two ba – battalions there, and the third in reserve. At that time **A** company then, we – we were leading in the attack into this town called **Attendorn**. And the result was, up the hillside, I remember then around the c – as we made the curve on a roadway and began working through the trees, we looked across and there was a **treeburst**

on the distant hill. Let me explain **treeburst**. Artillery shells are so constructed, either number one, they're solid shells, or secondly explosive shells. Explosive shells are ones that have a very sensitive tip on the end. And the minute that even touches any object, even a twig, it would explode. Very sen – and in a fa – in an artillery barrage, if the barrage is going into wooded area, as it would hit the trees, it'd break and that's called a **treeburst**. Very, very dangerous because of the – the shell – shrapnel just spins right down. That was at a distance though, but – I'm speaking to you. Then we came around the top of the hill and then ahead of us, red tile roof and so on, was this very sizable town, which was **Attendorn.** We came up through – I si – the company, I mean basically, I remember we're coming past some of the units of our cannon company, the cannon company and – the cannon company is a large, self propelled, it's a one-oh-five. Lieutenant **Greenburg**(ph) of our company at that particular time, was our assistant company commander, but he also has some direction and control over the fourth platoon, the weapons platoon, he was helping on that too. Weapons platoon then began setting up machine gun for so-called covering fire because then we got the order and our platoon, third platoon began going down a rather steep hill on the run, on the double, rifles up well, ther-there ha – we call **porter,** to attack the town. And then we began getting a lot of fire from the Germans 88s. We learned afterwards that

the entire **Ruhr** was so much attacked by allied aircraft that they had a tremendous amount, the Germans, of anti-aircraft material. 88s and 20-20s. When there were no longer these air attacks because the stage the war, they would simply level those and use against the aca – ca – oncoming Americans. So we had a lot of – a lot of 88s coming in, artillery. There was a 20 millimeter **ak-ak**, and as we started down the hill, 3rd platoon began taking casualties. We had a sergeant who was killed, our lieutenant was injured. Several others were injured down the late – way, too, basically. This was, as I said, our first real experience of combat. And it's a strange thing. You're there, it's happening to you, and yet fortunately, because of the discipline you've had, you – you're scared, right down in the pit of your stomach, but – but y-y-you do it, you go on. Then into this house right nearby – I sa – I say, then, a number of us. And then **Dave Sargent**(ph) – Sergeant **Dave,** a sergeant, I remember, was outside, he said okay, because then the next thing we had to do out of the house, **Dave** directed us down the hill, we went on down the hill to cross a river, a small stream, waist high. Cold, though. Up the other side basically and I – I – I'd had – I forgot, basically, but my sergeant says, **Pete**, you're the first one across. So I crossed the river, up onto the other side, cold, rifles held high to keep them dry, and there was sniper fire coming in over the railroad. Then across the railroad, we got across okay, but you get – for the first

time you're getting some vicious snapping – you know, th-the – or sniping, around. Then it seems that the Germans must have pulled out. We learned however, later on, that one of our men, fourth platoon was asked and did, because he had good German, go in with a white flag and their at – their – see if they surrender. The company man who thought they might. They wouldn't. The name was **Bob Oelke, o-e-l-k-e**. The Germans ignored the white flag, grabbed him, tossed him in the cellar. With presence of mind he went into the next room, because they tossed in some grenades after him, he was alright, he later escaped. But that we learned later. Into the town and then we began moving through. We, meaning the third platoon, we were still there. Now, at that time, as we moved along, by this time it's probably three, four in the afternoon. Cobblestone streets, rifles on the ready, covering each other. This is called a mopping up operation. But the Germans seemed to have pulled out – I mean, I don't remember anything more at that time. And it was then, as we were going up this cobblestone street **[indecipherable]** that we approached a factory area. Obviously there was some – and then behind this barbed wire fence were these people, unkempt, dirty, emaciated and **Mac –** I'm sorry, **MacGilvery**(ph), in charge, I was behind him, went up and opened the gate. Now, at this point I must explain that for some reason, for some reason, I do not personally recall **Mac** opening the gate, but I

have talked to him, I say **Mac** is Sergeant **MacGilvery**(ph) of **Dallas, Texas.** He – he had detail – details I'd forgotten. Strange about memory, some things you – but **Mac** is very explicit that he'd opened the gate. The people were in there. They realized apparently we're Americans, uniforms ra – they began crowding out and – and – and – and – and trying to embrace us, and – and – and kiss us apparently. I don't recall that. But one thing that was pervasive apparently, and this was confirmed by – by sar – **Dave Sargent,** there at the time**,** sergeant and later on by Lieutenant – then Lieutenant, now Captain **Greenburg**(ph), horrible, heavy, heavy stench and odor. Again, I – this I didn't recall and I'm surprised because I'm normally pretty aware of olfactory things. But it was there, amb – obviously. What I do recall though now, very clearly, myself. We had gone into a nearby building, because **Mac's** determination was we gotta – gotta watch out for whate – there might be **krauts** around. **Kraut** being the derogative name for German. There might be **krauts** here, they gotta check it out. And I remember stepping into the building now, and I think it – it was a large room, maybe 50 by 50 or so. And I do remember there were – there were some bodies lying around and I remember **Mac** started to walk over across the room. Now, in his detail, Sergeant **MacGilvery**(ph), **Mac** said that there was a skull that he recognized, it – he – he's from **Texas.** It was horse's skeleton. And walked over. This I remember too, beca

– he walked over and there was an old – to me appeared to be an old woman, crouched down, holding something. And – and **Mac** was over there, paused for a moment, came back, fury in his eyes and said, now I'm being explicit. Those goddamn fucking **krauts,** look how they treat these poor sons of bitches. The lady is scraping out that horse's skull for food and eating it. Gee, well. He also said, forget about the goddamn horse, they've scraped all the meat off that too. There was a heavy – I remember it now, this at – there was a heavy odor and – and we walked past and – and there was a body. I'm not sure dead or alive, but – but – but **Mac** pointed out the face and he – he – look at that poor son of a bitch's legs, they were – they were apparently gangrenous and this heavy odor must have been putrid-putri-putrefaction, I'm guessing. Back out into the street, fresh air thank God, because all the other – and on back out and I remember we got back out in the street and as our patrol got back out there, somebody behind me was throwing up, one of our guys be – just – just the impact of it. And **Mac** said, and I did remember this, that a lot of – they were laborers mostly, whatever, you know **[indecipherable]** people were out in the street, they just kind of wandered out, the gate was open. A – an officer came along and advised that we had to get them back inside because they needed attention, whatever. And they could not be wandering the street by themselves, so somehow, and I don't recall, they must

have been herded back in, because after that then we – we moved ahead and we were on our way after that.

Q: Let's talk a little bit more about that experience before we move ahead.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you try to talk to any of these prisoners?

A: Not – not that I remember. Now, in my – in – in my notes – and I mention notes because – I-I must go ahead, I'll fast – fast forward a moment. When we had gotten back from **Europe**, we had a 30 day – a 30 day furlough. We were the first division back from **Europe**, big welcome, but we have 30 days. And during that time I sat down and typed out my – a log. Now in – in that log that I have – I-I got it – well, of course, it was so fresh then. I c – I could do it day by day and the towns, the names of towns and guys names. I showed basically in that – and if I may refer for a moment to this. This – this isn't my original log. And turning now on it to April 11th, and here we are at **Attendorn**. I am showing here things that I've touched upon quite a bit before, some other details that don't relate to this, but as to this particular matter, through the houses, as we're going up the street, into the town. Pillbox warehouses, first platoon to our right flank, went through houses, capture of a German **ak-ak** crew in the photo shop. West and south along the **[indecipherable]** past the bridge to the left, with an 88 covering, okay. Through

the factory into – I **[indecipherable]** a Russian prisoner enclosure. Now, whether we were told they were Russians, I have no recollection o-of the – I wouldn't know Russian probably, well if I – you know, I could guess, but – when I'd heard it basically. And I don't recall any conversation with the people.

Q: Did any of them try to touch you?

A: I don't – I don't recall that, but **Mac** in his recitation says that they were trying to grab us and so forth. We probably pushed them off. Again, this heavy, terrible odor, and – and – and Lieutenant **Greenburg**(ph) who was there at the time, and I hadn't realized this, he said it was caused probably, mostly from lot of – the latrines. The latrines were only ditches dug there, said captain, about 30 - 40 feet long, full of excrement and – an-and – and other elimination that caused this terribly heavy odor that was there. But as far as – I don't recall the touching, but **Mac** says that they were trying to grab us.

Q: Were they wearing civilian clothes?

A: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Th-These were not – these were not prison type uniforms at all. They just seemed to be, as I remember, just civilian clothes, but rags – ragged, torn and so forth.

Q: These were men and women. Were there any young people, or mostly –

A: I do not recall –

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Q: – age-wise?

A: – seeing any young people. Now **Mac** mentions that there was an episode, a part of that we left there, said he that there was a woman who apparently it was a – had been a prisoner, who – who apparently was – was getting at and be-beating up a German woman who may have been a guard. Now, as near as – apparently there were both men and women there. Whether they were housed together, I-I have no idea.

Q: How long were you there?

A: Not long. My own recollection was that – that our – our going into the room where the – the horse's skeleton was, probably three, maybe five minutes at the outside, because it was, as I said, **Mac** got right over, saw what it was, and we just left pretty quickly. There were no German soldiers at all to run – there – there – there – the Germans had pulled out apparently – apparently. So we were out of there within oh, I'd say probably five minutes. A little longer, then probably get out of the compound, back out on the street again.

Q: Did you try to feed any of them? Give them any food?

A: Not too my knowledge. Not to my knowledge. The situation has been really defined by Lieutenant, now Captain **Greenburg**(ph) quite well. When, as we look at it in the context of that whole day, we had had a drastic experience coming in. I

mean, the – we – th-the fighting and so forth, and the weaponry. And – and – and this was just one other part of it, and – and it did not really assume any great importance until a more recent time, when we realize now, seeing what was happening elsewhere in **Germany**, the scenes we've seen of the death camps. Now, there were – I'm told – historians – a good friend who's an historian says that there were no death camps up in the **Ruhr.** Slave labor camps only, which – which apparently the Germans had established the industry to set little satellite areas where prisoners would be required that th – th-the labors to build parts or something of that type, which would then be taken in and used by the German industry in the major cities of **Düsseldorf,** whatever. But that was a part of – of the whole program. But, backing into their appearance, there was emaciation basically and – and – and – and – but the – but the – that the clothes, they were wearing rags, tags, but they were not uniforms, as I recall. Just not uniform types.

Q: Was it a frightening experience for you to see people in this kind of condition?

A: Very different. Different. I don't know that it was any more frightening than what we'd already had, I mean in the combat side of it, you know, from the firing and so forth. I-I think – I think it was just, we accepted it, but without really paying a great deal of attention to it at the time. I mean, it was there, we saw, it was there basically it was bad, it was horrible.

Q: Did it make a difference to you that these were civilians?

A: It was different in the sense that the – the – these were not combatants, not combatants, and how they could be used that way, later on upon reflection, you realize, yeah. At the time, that's the way it was, but then you begin to think about it afterwards and yeah, there's a part of the – the incongruity of it, I mean, the fact that they were simply civilians, I would say.

Q: You said when you walked out, one of your fellow soldiers got nauseous. Did you all talk about what you had just seen? Did anybody say anything to the other person?

A: Oh, the usual. The usual oaths and so forth and expressions of you know, to put it bluntly, **Jesus Christ**, what the hell are we seeing, what was – well, all – all – all – all – without going – becoming too explicit, but you get the idea, I mean, gee, I mean, my God, it – it was – it was an incredible thing, yeah. I suppose the – the passage of years puts a – puts a different complexion on it. I know that – that as far as other parts of combat, guys were killed, we recognized it, accepted it. And I realized, it wasn't until maybe after getting home, the 30 day span of time, it really began to come back of what we had been through and seen. I wonder if probably in that situation you – you – you develop a sort of an inurement to that. I-I know that was our discipline, held us together despite the fear, the terror. And – and –

and – and – and to be, for example in a – in a -- an artillery barrage is a – is – is – is – is a gut grinding – you know, experience. But we were there, and – and – and it was a part of it. Some guys – we had a few that – that chickened out, that couldn't handle it. My sergeant – not – not – well, not – not **Mac**, he was fine, but my own squad sergeant, we got through **Attendorn**, if this is a part of what you want, we were talking about, we got through **Attendorn** to the other side, came back on the same railroad again, dropped down to take a few minutes break basically, and then Sergeant **Markson**(ph) from **Iowa**, good chap, and my own sergeant, **George Evans** just flopped down. **George** was ashen. He said, I can't take this shit, he says, I – I can't do it. **Bud** came down pretty – he said**, George**, God damnit, you got the stripes, this is our job. And maybe that did it, but – but – but – but he – geor – he was out of it. Now, I think he got put back together himself a lit – later on. But – but at the time, he couldn't. It happened, and you couldn't – from unexpected persons, it ha-happened. You would have expected some others, who you think might be washouts, did well. It – it – it – th-there's no rule of thumb. But that was a particular experience at that time. You speak about the matter of what we had seen and so forth. I-I don't know, there wasn't a lot of discussion afterwards, we went through it, that was it. Other things were taking

priority. I mean, you know, your own safety and your own welfare and what was going to happen next.

Q: And then what did happen next? You left the town of **Attendorn** and then what?

A: We stayed there that night. We finished through the town probably by six, seven o'clock. We were assigned there and the next thing that they – that the – Captain **Mitchell** did was to establish a guard perimeter around the hills around the town. So the nor – the north hilltop. And Sergeant **Evans** and myself and **Frank Horn** went up to one hilltop and were there that night. And that-that was the night later on that we got machine gun fire in the black of the night and – and in the topography of it, on the hilltop, **George** above me and to the north, **Frank Horn** above me a bit and to the south, and I was down. Machine gun fire, **George** was – was killed almost immediately and **Frank** so badly shot up in the back, he – tha-that – that – back to battalion aid and died several days later, I guess. All I got, a – incredibly fortunate, just a flesh wound in my – in the – my – in my left leg.

Q: You are 19 years old, how did you feel – how old did you feel after that day and that night?

A: I didn't realize what had happened about getting a – th-th-the **[indecipherable]** my leg, until the next morning. We came off the hilltop that night. Our – our – our

medic **Hank Billskey**(ph) was right there, I see him now, he was right there, amazing, after this happened. My captain, Captain **Greenburg**(ph), who is here in **Washington** with me, we've had **[indecipherable]** we talked about that this morning. He was describing some of the things that happened to him, so – these close calls. Friend he had been in **OCS** with was killed with a **treeburst** about three or four feet away from him. And as I told him, I said, Captain, I can – I can sit here and right now, I ca – I can hear – I can hear **George** gurgling as he was dying. I can hear – I can hear **Frank** – when **Billskey**(ph) got there he said, I need a sa – I need a **syrette.** That – that was a morphine **syrette.** An-And **Hank** says my God, he said, good for you. In – in it – he – he co – he could name it **[indecipherable]** right there. So, it could come right back, I don't know that there was any particular sign of aging at the time. I-It doesn't – it doesn't come that peremptorily. You realize after you've gone all through these things that – that – you know, you had them. Bur as far as an immediate recognition, it's just a part of the whole damn thing.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Richard Peterson.** This is tape number two, side **B.** And you were talking about your reaction to the – that day and night.

A: A-As commented, I think – I think that at the time there is a – there – there is an insulation, I suppose, that is given you by your – your discipline that you have, to a degree. Other things become so drastic that you – something I suppose, maybe mentally helps block them out. To get through them you have to. Maybe, as I suggested, it was only after getting back in a peacetime setting like the – our har – our months furlough. And I remember it happened when I was home, after we'd gotten back from **Europe**, th-the month between, we went back several times, I ca – I kind of – and I-I-I know that the death of a couple guys swept back. **George, Frank's** did, some others we had then too, the – just the – the – the – the immensity of it. After those experiences, you're do – you do have dreams and nightmares. I had – it's diminished greatly over the years, but after first getting out of the service, an-and let me just finish perhaps by the German experience, we had that then. Then we also had some more drastic experience. We were the second company, the second American company in the whole army to cross the **Danube** farther south. A company from the 103rd division to the southwest, crossed in the morning of the 26th, and we crossed the night of the 26th, so by – by an English

[indecipherable]. And we lost a number of people there, and a lot of – quite a few wounded. Some wounded. But it's after then as I discovered, getting back over there, I would have occasional dreams that would be quite frightening. I'd wake. They've diminished. And yet even now I do have a recurrent dream which is that – either – I'm either going to be going into the army again, or I'm in the army again. And I find that I have a feeling of concern, of fear, if you please. And terribly glad to wake up to realize that it is not happening again. That i – that has come sometimes. The most drastic thing recently was to have seen the movie "**Saving Private Ryan."** Now, I've talked to my company – Captain **Greenburg**(ph), he's seen it too. Every – every combat veteran I've talked to has had a similar experience, some more, some less, but I remember, to see it, the first oh, five minutes is in the cemetery, but then – then you begin – then one begins seeing the beginning of **D-Day** with the small craft, the landing craft coming in. Now, we were not **D-Day** of course, but we did have the training in amphibious. And it was a remarkable thing because as I watched that in the darkened theater – my sa – **Pat** wa – wife **Pat** did not go. As I watched that and – and – and – and the camera, for those who will see it recall that you saw the boats from the side and then that moved over and panned right into the boat itself, and you're looking at the men. **Hanks,** the captain and the ca – played the part of the captain. I was there again. It

was like it was our platoon going in. The – the roar of the motors, the spray of the spray coming over the top. Guys being – throwing up around you. The gear all just the same, basically. And I began to cry, just this weeps and then when, in the picture, the craft hit the shore, the ramp went down, typical training, and then the German artillery, the mortars opened up, machine gunning the whole – I found myself audibly crying, I couldn't help it. And I – I've – I – I – I have a free sample, Captain **Greenburg**(ph) who you **[indecipherable]** have met said he had the same experience. That he – he had that happen. He – he w – he was weeping. And to drop back to our experience, the lieutenant who had taken the platoon across the **Rhine** that I spoke of earlier, who had both the command responsibility of that group, a terrible burden to take back. After our first reunion of our company, he attended, it was back in – okay, it was **Council Bluffs**, my home. We had them there in 90 – '95 and '97. In '95 for the first time, cap – Lieutenant **Henry** came. Now a doctor in **Dallas**, a – a very, very fine, but rather sensitive. And we visit a lot and he talked about that experience, the patrol across the **Rhine**. I had for Lieutenant **Henry,** after he got back home, a very gracious letter thanking us for – my wife and I. But he went on to say, the value it was to him to visit with comrades-in-arms of years ago, to just hear about, that – that it – he understood things better and that it relieved from his should – from his shoulders

the burden of guilt that he'd felt all these years. One good thing about reunions, they helped. I talked to him, we were at ak – our division reunion in newy – **Louisville** last September and he'd seen the movie and he said it – I shouldn't have, he said, it put me back again. So I think seeing the par – again, after all these years, it comes back. And you wonder – what little I read of psychology on it, they – we're told in psychology that – that these memories are latent, that certain things can trigger them off. Example, the – the – the smell, the odor. I can stand on a street corner today, pass those – a diesel bus and the diesel fumes take me right back to our training days when the – the diesel of the outfit. And yet on the other hand, come back to it, I don't remember anything about the terrible stench at **Attendorn.** Strange. And I don't know. My one thought, it might be that – who can tell about these things? It may have been a reaction to what – that night, later on when we were close to death, or the others were close to death and sa – I – I don't know. I-I – I-I do not have the wisdom to answer that.

Q: Your – you're saying that one may have superseded the – the following?

A: I – I – yeah, I – I – I – I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Where were you when President **Roosevelt** died?

A: Very interesting question because we learned about it, it was the day after the 12th of course, after the night the bad – we were – we were in – we were in – in

reserve at that time in **Attendorn**. And I remember that they – they kind of got us all together basically and we had the – had this word that – that he died, and I remember it was, who the hell is **Harry Truman**? I didn't ta – he's our new president is who he is. We know – we didn't know much about him basically, but it was – it was – you know, it – it was – it was different. Of course you – I've seen – we've all seen the pictures of, in this country when all the – all the – the – the – the – the weeping, I mean, and then – and the – and the sorrow and so forth. I don't think, frankly, it made a lot of differ – I mean, he – so be it, I mean, it happened –

Q: Wasn't a sense that you had lost your commander in chief?

A: No, I – no, no, no. Things were gonna go on, you know.

Q: And then what – what did happen to finish up your experience?

A: We had passed that in **Duren** and then as I said, we were transferred then, the pocket was finished, closed. We went by motor march at night. We were transferred from the first army to the third. And the first night going down in the black of the night, one of the trucks went off the road, not ours. We had several men killed quite a few injured on the **[indecipherable]** down and then we went to – in the area called **Franconia**. Went through **Würzburg** in **Franconia**. We're there and then we – then we jumped off in the attack again. By this time we were

in **Patton's** third army, transferred. Went down through the area, cities of **Eichstätt**, to **Ingolstadt. Ingolstadt** was more trouble, was difficult. The back –

Q: As you were moving, did you see any civilians, any –

A: Yes.

Q: – **DPs**, any –

A: Quite a bit.

Q: What was that like for you?

A: **DPs** as well, too. As we moved farther down and got into **Bavaria**, we saw quite a few more civilians. And saw quite a few displaced persons, as you mentioned. On the roads, moving, traveling, wherever they might be going. At the city, the town of **Eichstätt**, different because our company commander Captain **Mitchell** was ill, and then Lieutenant not Captain **Greenburg**(ph), then age 22 took over the company, and he had the responsibility of 200 men there were **[indecipherable]**. And we had – we had it – a – a bad time at **Ingolstadt** – I take it back, at **Eichstätt.** Got – got quite a bit of – of resistance there. Then on down towards the major city of **Ingolstadt,** which we were told was the hometown of **Heinrich Himmler**, expect defense. Well, it – I'm not sure if it was with **Himmler** or not, but there was a – going into **Ingolstadt** was not the bad, but that's the night we crossed the **Danube.** There was resistance there and that was a

– a pretty drastic night, to get in and get across basically, cross the river. As I said, we were th – we were the – we were the second company of the Americans to go cro – I mean, a – the whole American army to cross, apparently. We got a counterattack that night, got some – oh, we had a number who were killed, two or three killed, I think, and quite a few wounded. And that's one of the nights one realizes how thin is the veneer of civilization, by which I mean this. I remember that I was the – I was the platoon runner by that time, sort of ran messages between the company command posts, **CP** and our – where we were, some – oh, some blocks away. In the black of the night the Germans had come in, and the ka – and then several were wounded. And I remember going past and this – this German was crying, he says, I am **blessé**, well, French for woun – well, be – any – and I remember I – I said – I just – I said, **[speaks German]** shut up. I mean, I – no compassion at all on my part, huh? Yeah, I mean, you know, just – that was it. And you realize that yeah, I suppose that's our training and to – basically we – we couldn't – couldn't take a chance, that kind of a thing. Maybe he was – maybe he was just a – faking it, who knows? I couldn't take a chance. That was **Ingolstadt** and then we were there brief, and then after that really, the war was really finish up because by that time we were just on the move in – in – or sometimes – sometimes we were riding tanks and going out ahead, other times mostly in trucks.

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Then, within a matter of a week we were down in **Austria,** we crossed into **Austria.** We – we stopped, oh we were pro – at a small town called **Perwang**, which is about 20 – **p-e – p-e-r-w-a-n-g**, about 20 kilometers north of **Salzburg,** we were in **Austria**. And there – we were there when the word that the – it was May seventh or May eighth, take your choice, the war was over. And immediately rumors began coming, okay you guys, you're already – there – you're going to the **Pacific.** My God. Well, the thought was bad, but in the meantime we realized we were gonna have some time at home. So indeed that's what happened. We came back by truck back to **Mannheim.** We were there in **Mannheim** for a time, probably just a few days only in **Feudenheim** then truck again back across **France** to the same tents we were in when we first came, in **Old Gold**. And then – then we got new uniforms, got the combat jackets. Pretty spiffy stuff, we thought. And now getting ready for home. Trucks down to **LaHavre**. I was mentioning to Captain **Greenburg**(ph) when we talked today, as we were leaving **LaHavre** now, some romantic soul put on the loudspeaker system **Debussy's Clair de Lune.** That was a nice departure. A week back to cross the **Atlantic** and then came this tumultuous arrival at home, because we were the first division back from **Europe** and we had the grand welcome. Blimps in the sky, fireboats in the – in **New York** harbor. Great big, huge banner across a hill, well done, welcome home. And off –

off the ships. Our ship had on a great big panel, **ETO** to **Tokyo.** Well. But we got in and my captain, Captain **Reed**(ph), we were still **[indecipherable]** tell me that he – his home was **Hoboken.** His parents had learned of our return and his father was able to get around over to the **Manhattan's** ri – we – I think he s – I the captain said pier 77 or something. 57. Got off and his father was right out there. Father shoved and pushed, he – right past and he bay – they kissed. Marvelous, huh. And even the rest of us, it – it was tremendous to come back, our own country again. Amazingly – I have it here, but amazingly there were – we had dignitaries and well wishers, but a lot of media. Reporter – a reporter from the **"Des Moines Register"** was there and we had a great big feature, which I still saved at home basically, the – the **Blackhawks** back again and they had the – the name of every Iowan who was coming back and – and so there were many, many happy families. We knew from the **Register** at home they knew we'd been in combat, that's the first word, because that had a little feature, what they've done. And they had in the **Register,** toward the end of April that the 86th was in combat. Course, folks were just terribly tied up, terribly tied up. An amazing thing happened, a tragic thing. When I – we got back to **Mannheim**, got our mail for the first time. My mother had written that she met a good high school friend of hers of **Council Bluffs,** now in **Omaha**, they got talking and her son was in the 86th,

[indecipherable] together, his name was – was Captain **Bruce McAllister**, of our **K** company **[indecipherable]** in our regiment. And I remember as clearly sitting as we're sitting here. I remember saying to one of our – I said, my gosh, **Wes,** I – I've got to look up this Captain **McAllister**. He says, **Pete**, you're too late. He was killed two weeks ago, down on the – on the **[indecipherable]** down the **Danube**. So those things happen. That was – now –

Q: When you were leaving **Europe** and you were going towards **LaHavre** and you were –

A: Leaving **LaHavre**, yeah.

Q: Yeah, no, but on your way.

A: Oh, way in, yeah.

Q: On – on – on those weeks getting back there and you saw civilians and again **DPs**, and –

A: Yeah.

Q: – were you aware of the extent of the damage of the war at that point, or were you –

A: Well, **LaHavre –**

Q: – or again – or again aware of the camps? Were you ex – aware of the –

A: Oh, **LaHavre** was badly smashed, badly smashed.

Q: But even on the way to there, you know, as you were going through other cities to get there.

A: You mean ye – on the way back, you mean –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – from – yeah. **Mannheim –** well, let me back up. War finished we were it – we were north of **Salzburg.** Back then by the **autobahn**, from **Salzburg** up to **Munich – Munich** was badly smashed. I remember driving and we'd go over in the trucks and – and we – in – in **Munich**, just –

Q: I – I mean the terrible human toll.

A: Oh, I see, yeah. We were – a lot of people – you feel particularly sorry for the old people and children, who are the – the innocent, I – truth is, much as it can be, but the children **[indecipherable]**. And yet interestingly as we'd drive – I remember driving along in the trucks, there would be children watching us and they would be giving the Nazi salute. They were taught – we were sold – they didn't know, we were soldiers, and that was enough. But to the civilians we would talk. Now when we came back to **Feudenheim,** a suburb of **Mannheim**, where we were billeted, the Germans were there and they – they – they were all right. I mean, they were very sub – subservient. Get along basically, and of course, what little was that there were – you never – you never met any who were ever Nazis.

Down the street, I heard **[indecipherable]** but we were not – w-we were not political, huh? Typical, typical. Whatever – how did **Hitler** ev – ever come to power, you're thinking. None of them, none of them. But it was there, you know, I s – you know.

Q: Okay –

A: O-Other – other people – let me back up, if I may. Another experience that I remember that was such a remarkable thing. I remember we were on trucks after we'd gone through **Ackstatt – Eichstätt,** heading toward, and suddenly realized that – that the trucks were being surrounded practically by this wild horde of persons in green uniforms. They're Russian – Russian. They were Russian, released Russian – Russian appar – I'm sorry, Russian prisoners of war. And my first rec – these are like Chinese. Mongolians, the whole thing. My – my first realization, I mean, you read of – of what **Russia** was, I mean, all this – this variegated population, in appearance, I mean, the-these were Orientals, basically, huh. Then they moved on back basically, we go to the – we would see again – a-again also – we came across a number in **Bavaria** of allied prisoners, British, who were out of ba – sent to work on farms, huh. Course you know, th-they – they were – they were lucky to be in the country so they had food, you know. Others

didn't. I don't remember though – there were quite a few displaced persons moving back. It's hard to get a count, basically.

Q: Did you see anybody in prison camp you – concentration camp uniforms?

A: No. The on – th-they were just civilian clothing, basically, that we saw. Now, to back – go back to the death camp side, though. After we – our division, 86th, was in – we were down in **Austria**, our engineer battalion, I understand, was sent over to **Dachau**. And I had a friend in it, and he – he – he said he – again, he'd never such terror in his – that's where you had that – of course, the slave was bad enough, but of course there were others where you've seen the pictures of, they are just incredible, incredible.

Q: By May of '45, June of '45, had you heard of a place called **Auschwitz**?

A: I don't think that we got the names until later. None of them, to my recollection, none of them. That seemed to come later. But then of course, by – we learned more of it during the fall. By that time we had been back home, furlough, trained again briefly at **Gruber**(ph) then came to **Baums**(ph) and we were sent out to the **Philippines.** We were in the **Philippines** now when the war trials, the Japanese were going on. General **Hawla**(ph) for example, was being tried there. We saw a lot of the – of the – the tales of atrocities committed by – and they were – by the Japanese, as they were leaving the **Philippines** and that was really – that

was bad. And – and of course the same time, I'm not exactly sure, I think the **Nuremberg** trials were in October November, maybe, of '45, right? And so we began seeing more of – in just general, news about the information coming out. Th-That – so much was new that I – incredible. But I don't recall prior to that time any of the names, basically.

Q: How long were you in the **Philippines**?

A: We got to the **Philippines**, we – we – to draw back. We were at Camp **Gruber**(ph) for a couple weeks, and then the bombs, what was it, like August 6th, August whatever it was. And naga – fi-first of course **Hiroshima**, then **Nagasaki**. We were on – we were on the train shortly after that by order. We got to **San Francisco.** We sailed to **San Francisco** about the last week – next to last week in August. Got to the **Philippines** about three weeks later and we were there from late in September. And the program was this, that as you were in longer, there was a point system, so many points for so many months. Combat infantry badge gave you 10 extra points, a Purple Heart gave you fi – by the point system then, you see, our particular group was ready to come back, and we did, we left in March from **Manila** to come back, March o-of '46. We were home a month later.

Q: And then what did you do?

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

A: First of all bought a suit of clothes. No, beyond that it was fla – great to be back home again, of course. Planned to go, and I did then begin school. My summertime was open. Began school at the University of **Iowa** in – in September of ’46, right away. And I finished my schooling there.

Q: So you went four years of university?

A: I had to go – yes – es – I – I had – well, I had a little bit of a credit from – from **Kansas**, in **Drake,** not much. But result was that I – I took what is called a combined schedule of liberal arts and law. Your first – your first three years are all liberal arts. Then your first year law, combined with – with the other. So you actually had the whole thing six years.

Q: Six years.

A: I had – I went through the summertime basically **[indecipherable]** so I – then I finished – I finished my – the law s – law school in June ’51 and took the bar. **[indecipherable]**

Q: Then what did you do?

A: **[indecipherable]** I went home to **Council Bluffs,** I entered my father’s firm. Dad was still practicing at the time. And practiced with the firm then following that time. Met my wife at **Iowa**, **Pat** and I were married in – mustn’t forget this, August 14th of – of – of 1949. So we has the last two years of school together and

then came back home and our first child was born October of ’51, and been practicing law since that time. In October – November of 1955, Dad, my father was appointed to the **Iowa** Supreme Court. After which time then, I was in the firm, of course, continued that basically. And then I made some career changes over the years, but I practiced law ever since that time. All – all – practice of law all the time.

Q: And you are currently still working?

A: Yes.

Q: In a private firm, or –

A: No, no, I – well, yeah. I, for a variety of reasons left the – Dad’s law firm, he – he was long since gone, in 70 – ’75, and then I was a trust officer of – of a bank for two years. Then back in the practice, I practiced since that time. First on my own, and now with another firm which is **Telpner, Peterson, Smith and Ruesch** in **Council Bluffs.**

Q: And you’re also a magistrate judge?

A: I’m a part ti – i-it’s called **United States** Magistrate Judge exactly, it’s a part time position. And have – and a-actually, interesting because I’m – last June I finished 40 years of federal service, long. And I think probably my position is

going to be fazed out. The picture changes. Quite alright, but it's been – it's been fine, so – yeah.

Q: And how many children do you have?

A: Three. Daughter in the 40's, married of course. And then they have – they have three children. The older son, married and they have three children and the younger son, married with one child. So I have seven grandchildren.

Q: Can we now talk a little bit about some of your feelings and reflections about what you went through, though you have alluded – you have talked about some of it already. Do you think you are a different person today because of what you experienced during the war?

A: Oh yes, no question.

Q: And if so, in what way?

A: As I mentioned before, I think my – I do not ha – had had a rather sheltered life, even through high school. I was the – the so – the youngest in the family basically and so forth, and I – I think probably looking back, indulged to a degree. But I was typical growing up. There is no question though, that being in the military, you're on the common denominator with a lot of other people of all different backgrounds, sizes, shapes, tempers, the whole thing. It's a very – to me a very valuable experience. Require a lot of self confidence about it, but you get to

assume much – realize so much more about people and understanding people hopefully. And having served as we had in the military, too, it's a – it's a source of satisfaction, and – and – and not to be nostalgic or sentimental about it, but I think to me there is a – there is a great – a great value and a great importance of serving one's country. And I think all of us felt that, at least the World War II people pretty much. I can't speak for the other – in **Vietnam,** different things basically. But I think for us it was a source of gratification, satisfaction. I – I – I know, in answer t – to answer to the question presented that it – that it was a very valuable experience for me.

Q: When your children were 19 and 20, the age – 19, th-the age that you were when you experienced such life threatening ex – you know, moments.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Did that bring back to you in those years, when your children were that age, what you went through? Did it trigger memories or thoughts of those times? When you looked at your son and he was 19.

A: Yeah. I didn't think that much about it. When sons were that age we were fussing around with rebel without cause kids. We were fussing around with musical colleges, what to do. And – and at that time too, concerns about what life was doing to them, with exposure to drugs and so forth. Fortunately that – not, but

it-it's a concern for parents. That wasn't happening then, I – and I never really – I never really equated them with my experience very much. And I knew – I talked to a degree military, the importance of my – of my experience basic – we never talked very much about it, though, I mean as far as what had happened.

Q: That was going to be my next question. Did you share with them those –

A: Wife **[indecipherable]** she would make occasional references to it, but I – all to a degree they knew about it, but not until several years ago, which was the 50th year after **Attendorn**, the rite of peace, which I call – and then only because I felt the time had – some – generally speaking these are things you visit only with your buddy – your – your – your – your immediate friends about. Other veterans to a degree too, yeah, but you can really share with those that you served with. You have your own **lingua franca** that you can go back and forth with. And you – you can share with them, say a certain thing and a whole picture comes back. One of our – one of our **A** company people, **James McRandall**(ph) later got his doctorate in history. And – and **Jim** is a brilliant fellow. Wrote a marvelous book called, "**The Antique Drums of War**," in which he – in which he profiled quite a bit our – our military experience and ha – its affect upon us. Does a – a marvelous job in my judgment of – of – of describing, as best one can, combat, put into words, but – but as he would say, to get together to re – renew recollections at a – a reunion is

like watching a broken mirror, in the sense that the mirror is broken and there are certain shards of memory that come back. Shards of memory like I've talked about here. Sometimes incomplete. We see – we see this broken mirror, each of us in a different way, because in our combat experience, some of what – had the things – some, for example, what Sergeant **Mac** in great detail, hm, things that – that for some reason or another, now whether – whether they're still latently – latent up here, that need to be triggered, I don't know. But – yes Ma'am?

End of Tape Two, Side B

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Richard Peterson**. This is tape three, side **A.**

A: We have spoken about my friend **Jim McRandall's**(ph) analogy of the – of – of – of the broken mirror and the shards of memory, and – and says **Jim,** just as you cannot effectively reconstruct that mirror with the broken shards, some pieces are missing, some pieces are quite sharp, to carry on the – the – the metaphor of it. But to all of us, to all of us, we can go back, and in our experience, in this – in the world in which we live, the – the – i-in my terms, the crucible of contra – of combat, you can see and remember the expression a certain fellow had, one of your – one of your **G.I.** buddies on the street corner at a certain time. You can – you can see or visualize a hillside, or a certain setting where you were and what was happening at the time. You can still recall the thunk of a mortar in the distance or the rattle of machine gun fire. And they bring back – they – they can bring back these things, in some bizarre, strange way, but can never be fully – never fully reconstructed, just as – as a broken mirror can not be. And what you're seeing in the broken mirror also many times is – and results of being distorted in some ways, you know, th-th-the – the different angles you're seeing of it. And – and – and that's why you get with different veterans different views of things. The

– the famous story of – of the – of the four blind men blindfolded with the elephant. One, the one leg and the trunk and so forth. And you – then that's very much the way it is. And – and in – in a combat situation, the first thing you realize is there's begin – it-it's confusion. I have here our division history. And as I read it through there are many areas – history is hard – is hard to recover accurately and I find many things that I – I ca – I describe as being garbled in this. It depends who one talks to, it depends how it's reconstructed, and it – wh-while there's a lot of good work, at the same time there are things that do come off wrong. But so be it, I mean, tha-that's a part of the problem of reconstructing history.

Q: Speaking about different perspectives, do you think it – it was an advantage that you were so young when you went through this, or – or would it have been – been better to be older?

A: I think – I think better to be young because we were young, impressionable, but we learned. We did not have intense, deep preconceptions of things and we would accept discipline better as younger people, I think, basically and could be trained better, seems to me. And – and – and – and war is not a thing for anybody, but less I think older persons than younger. I think you maybe adjusted better. There was so many descriptions of it. One of the best, of course, is course the old original, the wa – the time honored one of – of **Sherman**. Another one too that – that to – to be

in combat is looking like – you are looking like in a window into hell. A variety of things, the base – I think maybe as young people we can hopefully, maybe accept them more easily than we can a-as older – I'm not – I've not followed that too, too much, but certainly it – it – it's for young people. If – if – if you have to be there, a younger person.

Q: Have your – or do you think your religious views are – or were influenced by your brush with death and what you saw, the sights you saw during the war years?

A: I – I will say this, I mean, we were – we – we had religious training in the background basically, but you have the imponderable question, in our experiences. You've got people killed right beside you, the – the – the question, why them and not me? It's an unanswerable question and – an-and still after all these years, I puzzle. An-And th-there is no solution to that, no answer. I-I think maybe the religious faith, you know, faith in God, of course, in the hereafter if we're going to accept that, is important. S – but apropos of the matter of – of how to reason it out, it ca – it cannot be reasoned out. You see too many things where there is no reason of why things happen or shouldn't happen in combat. You see brutality where it shouldn't be. You see incredible cruelty. You see some of the best guys are – are taken, killed, and other dunderheads, pardon the expression, seem to skin through. Th-There – there i – there is no logic to it. And yet, and yet there is an incredible

attraction to it. Strange, isn't it? We – we've seen the movie **"Patton"** **[indecipherable]** well, we don't love him, but – but it's undeniable and many, many, many people feel this, that there is an incredible thrill in that situation, if you come through. If you come through. We can look back and see things, there is – there can be – there can be, strangely, a great exhilaration in – in – in a firefight, it's strange. People inflicting death on others, and here again, the veneer of civilization, the old tradition that when you get your blood up and so forth, it's the strangest thing. You – you want to deny it to yourself, and yet contradictorily it's still there. Strange. Not often, but – but more often it – more often is a – come – comes the feeling of – of the futility of it and the – and th – and the – I remem- member coming home in my furlough and – and during that time, I remember we lost some of these guys, tha-that – that brought me to tears. I think **[indecipherable]** good guys, wonderful guys. Why, why, why, huh? Huh? My good friend Sergeant **Smith**, **Smitty** was our re – machine gun section. They were just laying down field of fire as we were heading down into **Attendorn**. An 88 round came in right through the center of the house they were in, took them all out and they were all badly injured. **Smitty** partic – badly bu – very badly injured. And of course he later on learned of our – my experience at night. **Smitty**, in **Rochester M-Minnesota** now, a great, wonderful guy, very devout Catholic, go –

goes to mass daily. Has had – has had some bouts with cancer, we're in close touch. We always talk and we will talk next Monday on **Attendorn** day, the 11th, we're there. It's kind of a contest who calls who first. I-I – I catch him before mass, his morning mass, but we talk about it a bit and I – and I recently said last time, I said, **Smitty**, how you doing with the cancer? He says **Pete,** doing fine, but he says every day, every day you – you – you and I have after **Attendorn** is a plus. That's right. That's right.

Q: What else do you do special on April 11th, besides call him?

A: Oh, I think that's basically it. No, that's the big thing is that, that's – but that-that-that's the day. How much longer it will happen, I don't know.

Q: You also had mentioned that you do think about what had happened more frequently now. Is that true as you're getting older?

A: I – I – I – I – I think so, yeah. I think that – oh, I suppose we get older, maybe we begin reflecting more about it. Hate to call them the twilight years for gosh sakes, but – no, but maybe – and then you re – go back and reflect upon these things and – and – and recognize what a full life a person's had, but – and – and – and interestingly enough too, **Oliver Wendell Holmes,** the justice, a Civil War veteran, combat veteran, injured three times in the war, in the 1890's was asked to give a Memorial Day talk. And in that – and in that he touched upon – made this

comment, may – maybe you've read it before, **[indecipherable]**. It was our great and good fortune that in our youth we learned that life was real and life was meaningful, powerful **[indecipherable]** thing. I'm not sure about the great good fortune, but – but so be it, we can't change that, but it's a part of our lives and always will be and – and as I say, I mean, **Smitty**, God bless him, with his comment that whatever happens, every day, every day after is a plus. And th – i-it's a good thing to remember sometimes when you get, you know, down or depressed or something, it's – it – it's – we're lucky.

Q: Ho – did – has your experience, those few minutes in that labor camp assumed a more prominent part of your memories in recent years –

A: A-Ans –

Q: – than it did at the time?

A: – answer yes. I-I think the comment made by – by Captain **Greenburg**(ph), we touched upon earlier that at the time it was just a part of the whole thing. Now, having seen the unfolding history, and we see here is about the – the death camps as well as the slave labor camp, it assumes a different importance basically, an – an importance, because it – it – it – it's a – war itself is bad, but that – that, to evidence the cold bloodedness, and the – and – a-a-and th-the depravity of what this – this remarkable nation **Germany** – I say remarkable, it's – has a – of

culture, of art and beauty and **[indecipherable]** all pluses, had sunk to. A-And I think probably the – the – the mission of the – o-of – of your institution, the Holocaust here, to let it not be forgotten – if I may add though, I'm interested too, I – I read an interesting piece by **Leon Uris**(ph), who would certainly be qualified to speak, on the matter – on the m – on the matter of – of the Holocaust. It was following the publicity on **"Schindler's List."** And he touched upon it, he – he said that – hi-his thought was this. He said, it – it's a critical part of our – naturally of our human, but let it not obsess us. Let it not obsess us because, he said, we – we become sickened by it and we are limiting ourselves and our capacity if – if – if – if we take a narrow view, hm. Int-Interesting point. Now again, it's difficult to judge when you're not in the other person's moccasins, so to speak and you think of all the people, I'm sure that you – that – that – that it – an interviewer must **[indecipherable]** their experiences.

Q: What is your feeling about **Germany** today?

A: Now? Interesting, after the war we had a number of good German friends and my mothers says, why in the world do you like these darn Germans so much? Especially my Danish background, my – cause the Dani – all – **Germany**, interesting, we do have some good German friends. And they have a long difficult job ahead with the reunification to blend it together, but I think it can be an

interesting country, and yet – and yet – and yet there are still people that have the feeling should they reunite it because of in the past what **Germany** has done. The old saying, forgot who it was, Germans are either at your feet or at your throat. I – I can't answer – generalizations are always a little bit dangerous, I mean, you know, you can't follow it that much, but we've been in **Germany** a number of times, enjoy it, beautiful country, good friends. And yet, and yet. Captain **Greenburg**(ph), ther – they're both Jewish and his wife **Phyllis** will not go to **Germany**. Will not go to **Germany**. For my own part we – we – as I said, we have good friends in **Germany**, we enjoy having been there basically. We're thinking now about maybe this October, October '99 with a good friend from home who has lived some length of time in **Germany**, has good German, of going back. I'd like to begin, if we go back in October, at the **Margraten** cemetery, American cemetery where my – where **George Evans** is buried. Then up into the **Ruhr** again to see it and then down into **Bavaria, Eichstätt, Ingol –** and I don't know, just – interesting. We'll see. We'll see.

Q: You said that you – you father was a lawyer and that you studied law quite soon after you got back. Was any of – aside from those aspects, do you think your choice of law was influenced ag – also by the war experience and what happens when the rule of law gets distorted?

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

A: That-That's a very idealistic and appropriate thought. I-I don't think so. I once said to Dad, practice law – he practiced law for – he began in 1908 and there until he went into court in 1955. I said, Dad, why did you become a lawyer? Oh, he chuckled **[indecipherable]** said, you know, he said, I was in grade school at home with a young kid, he used to – I'm gonna be a lawyer, I'm gonna be a lawyer. He said, I got thinking, maybe I should be. And so I did. I said, what happened to the other guy, Dad? He said, I think he became a housepainter. But we kind of in the family, Dad, my uncle in his firm, my brother was a lawyer and of course, I am too. I don't know, I – we just always seem to head that direction, and it's been a very fulfilling thing. I don't know, and I – I – I appreciate your comment about the – the benefit of the rule of law. That's quite idealistic. I don't think we think it, but we see it, as we get older and have lived a lifetime of law, it – it's our discipline and of cour – there's no question about the – the importance of it, because we saw in **Germany** what happened when – when – when the – when law vanished. I mean, proper law vanished. And it wa – it was abused by the – by the German system, yeah.

Q: What are your thought when you pick up the newspaper today and you see people fleeing from **Kosovo –**

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: – for instance, and you – you, 50 years ago saw people on the streets.

A: Yeah, yeah, it – again, I – I-I would have great compassion and – and – and – and – and sorrow for the – the old people, the young – the children, for heaven sakes, you know.

Q: Does it bring back memories to you?

A: I-I thought about it some, yeah, I've seen them, yeah, yeah. Especially – especially the – the children. I – I cannot – I do not have the wisdom to sort out the right and wrong of it, I mean I – I don't know, I – I – I – I can't answer that. My inclination is – is that maybe it has to – has to happen, but even so, the – the side effects, and that's not the correct word really, for a war, the – the consequences of it to – to the un – to the people who had – were not really involved in causing it, i-is terrible, is terrible. We read the book of **Job.** Why? Why do these – these – I – I have no answer. It's just a part – a part of – a part of the life we lead, apparently it's gonna happen, unfortunately. Until we find some way to conquer all these things and get over and get th – get past them, but not in our li – not in la – maybe your lifetime, not in mine. No, we're too far – we would do all we can to help, but I don't know what we can do.

Q: Why did you feel the need, when you had that 30 day furlough and you came back to the **United States**, why did you feel the need to write a diary, a log?

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

A: It's a most interesting question, yeah. It's a most, most interesting question. I don't know why, unless it was still vivid in my mind. Looking back, I'm glad I had the foresight to do it, because t-to look over here, and touch these old, now semi-yellowed pa – piece – paper, with some additions on the end in my almost undecipherable hieroglyphics, of each day down the line. I – I – I don't know. But I can go through here and pull things out basically and I'm glad that I did. I d – I don't know. Wha – why – why do we do some of the things that turn out to be so good and other things – and overlook the things we don't? I don't know, tha – tha-that's interesting, I never thought too much about it, but I felt it had to be done. In addition to this I have quite a few items of memorabilia in a great, big scrapbook that I have at home. Clipping from papers, a variety of postcards from **Germany**, a leaf – leaflets that the Americans dropped. A variety of things, you know.

Q: I had a – a – just a small factual question to ask you. I noticed in some of the reference books, when I looked up the **Attendorn** labor camp that it said it was in the British zone, but this was the American army.

A: It – it probably would be now, because that was actually, has become the British zone, but we took it, you see? I mean, the – the Americans took it.

Q: **[indecipherable]**

A: I have to – I've – it would be the British zone now, that's right, yeah, because that would be the area that they – that they did take. That the a – that's correct, that's correct.

Q: So they came in after you is what you're saying?

A: Yes, because the division a-aft-after the complete – the complete conquest of **Germany**, then – then came the impact and the – and the implementation of the **[indecipherable]** agreement, which made the division, as I re – as I understand it, with the – and the – within the country.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Is there anything we haven't touched on –

A: Well, in –

Q: – that you would like to say – talk about?

A: – I – I – it's – it's – it's been very, very, very, very well asked, very, very well done. I-I think basically that – that would cover it. I mean, le-let – to review … I-I-I pause because – because I'm trying to – to think base – basically of what else could be contributed on the matter of the – of the individuals that – that were released that day. I wonder sometimes what their fate was, if they were ru – were Russian, probably a bad fate. What we read, at least about the prisoners of war, the Russians, they were not accepted back or they were, if they were taken back they were – brutal thing. As far as the civilians, I – I – I've – I sometimes wonder what

happened to those people, a-again, you know. Didn't think at the time, but after the pass of years you wonder about it, basically. Interestingly also, I did some checking out – I had occasion to read – check back in to the records of the **Nuremberg – Nuremberg.** November, it began. One of the major cases was that of a Field Marshal **Milch m-i-n-l – m-i-l-c-h, Milch**, who was a subordinate of **Albert Speer,** and that was the **[indecipherable]**. He was one was responsible for the – the so-called forced labor, alright? And in the exhibits presented at **Nuremberg** in his behalf were requirements by the **Reich** supposedly that these people would be adequately fed and cared for. Not humanitarianly-wise, but to insure the fact they could do the work they were going to do, huh. The other was – simply seemed secondary, basically. And of course in the case of these poor people, in ha – admittedly now, probably the logistical system had broken down, I mean as far as food, but that does not still explain in a – in any way excuse the way they were being held. Read, as we have, **Manchester's** book, **"The Arms of Krupp**," and the – and the – and th-the treatment to which the **Kruppianer** subjected all their force people, huh. It's an incredible thing, incredible living in it. And – and what we saw that afternoon, I mean, the way these that – the way these people were. As **Mac** said, look what these fucking German – terrible.

Interview with Richard Peterson
April 6, 1999

Q: You are rightfully proud of your Danish ancestry. What do you attribute th-the difference in their response in the war?

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: The Danish people. I said you were rightfully proud of your Danish ancestry.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And we know what the Danes did during the war.

A: Yeah.

Q: To what do you attribute that to?

A: The Danish experience?

Q: The Danish experience, as opposed to the German.

A: Well, it's quite inters – it's quite interesting. Number one, there had been a great – a great tradition, history of tolerance in **Denmark**. Smaller countries **[indecipherable]** also. But early enlightenment, which began in **Denmark** in the 1820's - 30's, they had – they had left the monarchy, I mean the – the actual absolute monarchy and into more of a constitutional monarchy, th-that helped. A smaller country, as I mentioned again, and beyond that, I'm not sure, except that there was – it was indeed a safe haven. Now, as to how the wonderful escape took place in October, several things I – I read – as we read it. Number one, there had been the great feeling of the Danish people. The-The-These are not Danish Jews,

it's Jewish Danes. A subtle distinction, but it's interesting. Secondly the war situation was turning against **Germany**. Allies were in north **Africa** by that time. **Stalingrad** had been completed. The general feeling was – was different. The proximity – the proximity of **Sweden** now, made it possible, which might, in a landlocked country not have happened, huh. And the willingness of the Swedes to accept it. There's a wonderful story told apropos of that, about the Swedish side of it now. When the time came that was realized the Germans were going to move, to take the Danish Jews, time was short. It was a matter of days, but they had to somehow – they meaning the Danish people under their leadership and the resistance get them out. But they had to have the agreement of **Sweden** to take them. They could not deal with **Germany** and say – because that would tip it off. So what was determined, from what I read, was this, they realized that the Danish leadership, they had to get the agreement of the Swedish crown. The arrangement was made that they, the Danish people would select, hopefully, that – a leader of the Danish Jewish community to hopefully visit with the King of **Sweden**. It was arranged. And the person selected was **Niels Bohr**, the great atomic **[indecipherable]**. The story goes on to say that in – in **Bohr's** words he said – he said, I'm a scientist, not an advocate, he said, why – well, they said you have th- the standing, the name, the King will – all right. It was arranged remarkably

[indecipherable]. Then, in just a matter of hours they set this up and apparently then, either – either by boat – they're not – they're – they're – they're still – they're c-careful, or possibly by a British aircraft, the **Mosquito** coming, take him over, **Bohr** was taken to **Stockholm,** to probably **Drottningholm** and the palace, the story is told. He said, in I went, to this massive palace. Re-Realized what was on my shoulders to try and get this done, to persuade the king. I was shown into the room. Had a room and th-th-th-the king's attendant was there, basically very fine, he said Dr. **Bohr**, please wait. Then he said the moment came, he said **[indecipherable]** here – here – here I am just becoming more tense by the moment. The door opened and they said, Dr. **Bohr**, the king will see you now. He said, I stepped in and here was this very pleasant looking gentleman, it was the king, King **Gustav**. **Gustav Aroff**(ph) I think it was. And he said, I-I have some Swedish. And he said, I explained in **[indecipherable]** as best I could the plight of our people, what was going to happen and – and that we desperately pled for help. He said, the king, very courteous, stood up. He said, of course I stood up too. The king walked to the window, looked out. He said that – I can **[indecipherable]** it was probably all of maybe 10 seconds, but he came back and said, Dr. **Bohr,** your people will be welcome in **Sweden**. And that was it, laid the foundation. So, a combination of things put together, you see, and of course the – it was not all – I

mean there were – there were some problems to getting them – getting the Danes across or getting the – the – the Jews across, the Jewish people. Some – some boat people did charge, others did not, back and forth, but it still was a remarkable, remarkable thing, huh? Incredible.

Q: Anything else before we close, any message?

A: I – I – I –

Q: Any message to your grandchildren?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: Any message to your grandchildren?

A: Keep the faith. No, oh I – I – no, th-the – the kids are doing fine. And I have one of my – my good Jewish friend who i-i-is very – is very much involved in his persuasion, which is fine. But he often repeats the fact, he says, how fortunate we are a-a-as Jews to live in this country, this is – to be a part of this great country. That's very true for all of us. Apologize, I didn't mean to get all – but – but it's – it's a – you know, I come to **Washington,** this tremendous country and – and – and I still – don't we all – get a look, you see our great flag, great flag. And speaking to this – this'll be the final thing, I – we – it's been – I – it's been a ri – fine experience. I gave a talk, I think you have it here, when I die, don't play "**Taps," "Taps"** makes me cry. I cry for – cause I – if I may go on, I cry for all the

young men, my friends that I couldn't save and tried to. So don't play **"Taps"** but when the time comes, I see I'll join on gree – on a – on a grassy knoll, they'll be a bunch of **G.I.s** there in well pressed uniforms, they'll be a lieutenant with a piece of grass and they'll say to me, where you been? You got any cigarettes? We'll fall in, and – in two lines, basically, put on our packs, grab up our **M1s** basically and move off, and right, left, easy cadence. No ice, no mud, no snow. No 88s or mortars coming in, or 88s. And then we will move off, my – my buddies and I, past the moon, **Jupiter** on our left, the sun on our right, following our glorious flag to God's peaceful eternity. Isn't that good? Marvelous, huh? Well, I – I – I – I think of nothing else, thank you.

Q: It's a beautiful note to end on. Beautiful note.

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: Well, **Gail,** so very good and I think it ga – I – I – I hope we've added something to your archives.

Q: Yes, you have. This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Richard Peterson.**

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview