

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with George Pisik
July 14, 1993
RG-50.106*0124**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with George Pisik, conducted on July 14, 1993 by 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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GEORGE PISIK

July 14, 1993

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Answer: My name is **George Pisik**. I was born May 25th, 1925 in **New York City**. I was going to City College, **Brooklyn** College actually, in **New York City** when I enlisted in the army. Took the **ASTP** test, was accepted into engineering school in the army, but I had to perform 13 weeks of basic training and then I was sent to **Cal Tech** for engineering school. After the first term was over, which was December, I guess of '44, the Battle of the Bulge occurred. We were closed down and we were sent to **Europe** as replacements. I was in this 13th armored division, 16th infantry battalion, assigned to half-tracks and tanks. And after three major campaigns, the war was winding down. And May 1945 we entered the place called **Dachau**, right outside of **Munich**. We were never told about **Dachau**, we were never told about concentration camps. We had no idea that we were getting into something like that.

Question: Nothing in “**The Stars and Stripes**” or no briefings of any kind?

A: Nothing of any kind. We had liberated some Canadian and **U.S.** Army or **U.S.** Air Force prisoner of war camps previous to this and we thought this was another prisoner of war camp. And when the troops and the tanks and our half-tracks entered **Dachau**, we couldn't believe what we saw. I was a kid, I really was a naïve kid and when I saw the bodies lying around, it – it really got to me. Some were just thrown in the corner and some were piled in blocks of five, five going one way, five

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going another way, and – like cordwood. And they had tags attached to their toes. We were there – as it was getting dark that evening, we were wandering around. We were warned, do not feed the prisoners, but we were hungry ourselves and we had **K** rations and **C** rations, which were almost indigestible to the soldiers. And these people were starving and we gave them frankfurters and beans and we almost killed them. We really did, their stomach couldn't take it. Then a young lady came up to me, who I thought was in her 30's. It turned out she was 19, and through an interpreter – she kept pointing to a mezuzah that I was wearing around my neck, a little silver cylinder given to me by my grandmother ... **[tape break]** – young lady said that she was 19 years old and that the German guards had ka – had kept her alive as she was a plaything for them. And they gave in – in return they kept her out of the ovens and they gave her food. She kept pointing to the mezuzah and I took it off and I gave it to her and I showed her and with her hairpins he pulled the shi – my – I didn't even know there was a paper in the mezuzah, it was a very small cylinder. She started to cry and said it was the first Hebrew that she had seen in years and years, because they had burnt everything. I took off the mezuzah and I gave it to her. She started to cry and she grabbed me around the legs and she was hysterical and – anyway, we – that was the last I saw of her. The army –

Q: Was she the only woman or –

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A: The only woman –

Q: – wa – were there large numbers –

A: – the only woman I had spoken to, that I had any contact with.

Q: Okay.

A: And she took me by the arm and she took me for a re – very long walk, and there were ovens, and there were some bodies in the ovens. And I couldn't believe it. I – I just – I mean, we weren't prepared for this. Then we were called, we had to mount up, get back on our tanks and we would continue further on.

Q: How long do you think you were there [indecipherable]

A: Oh, I was only there maybe four or five hours –

Q: Four or five hours.

A: – in **Dachau**, we had to keep going. I wrote my mother that night to tell her mother to forgive me, but I gave away the mezuzah in a concen – in a place called the concentration camp. And I forgot about it, I mean it took several weeks for the letter to go over and it took several more weeks for an answer to come back. She told me that she had told a neighbor what had occurred and that neighbor told another neighbor and before I knew it I began to receive shoeboxes full of mezuzahs. I must have received 50 to a hundred mezuzahs from all over **New York City**. What do you do with a hundred mezuzahs? We were now past the

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concentration camps and we – there was nobody to give them to. So I gave them to the chaplains and they said, some of them, they would distribute them. And now I still had a – a whole bunch of mezuzahs left. So I went to my southern soldiers, the people in my company, who were mostly from **Alabama** and **Mississippi** and **Georgia** – not too bright, but they were very good soldiers. And I gave them the mezuzahs and I told them that these were good luck charms and that if they wore these mezuzahs when th – but they were not to put them on til they got home, because then they would have endless erections. And they believed me.

Q: They did, huh?

A: All Jews are rich and all Jews are smart and I wouldn't lie to them.

Q: Okay.

A: And th-that's how –

Q: I bet those were their very prized possessions, then.

A: And not only that, but I said, if you have – if you take more than one, you should put it on the door to the entrance to your house, it will bring you very good luck.

And to – for all I know there is still in the backwoods of **Mississippi** and **Georgia** and **Alabama**, there may be some mezuzahs up on the doorways.

Q: Some good old Protestant boys that have mezuzahs on the doorways.

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A: And I'm sure they did have endless erections when they did get home, and that's my story with **Dachau**. [tape break]

Q: – had some wonderful detail about the road into **Dachau** and how it was towards the end of the war and they were moving so fast that the food drops couldn't keep up with you and sta – moto – motor oil was a priority, that – that you were without [indecipherable]

A: No – oh – wi – oh no, it – w-we were with the third army and we were moving so rapidly that we had no time to have food. We couldn't – we were running out of food. **Patton** says find the food wherever you can get it in the countryside.

Q: Don't armored units? I mean, they always –

A: Yes, armored units.

Q: – prepare [indecipherable] thing –

A: Either get off the road, or get out – anyway, airplanes were dropping supplies. The first thing that they dropped was fuel for the tanks and ammunition. Then they dropped medical supplies and by this time, when we were supposed to get the food, we were running out of gas again, so they came back and they kept dropping diesel fuel or gasoline, whatever they burned. And we never did get th-the food that we needed, so we had to live off the countryside, which wasn't very interesting. But we found food. We did find enough to keep going, and we went through **Munich** and

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we passed the **Munich** stadium with a huge swastika up on the – on the roof. And I remember that the company – well, the battalion commander had the tanks fire their tank guns and blow it away, which was very exciting. And that afternoon, late that afternoon we got into **Dachau**.

Q: Did you go through this town **Dachau**, or did you approach [indecipherable]

A: No, I don't remember that, I remember going through **Munich** and that took awhile to get through **Munich**. And then – I don't remember the town of **Dachau** at all, all I remember is going through the gates, the wooden gates that were busted open and going into the camp itself.

Q: Were there other American soldiers there before you, or were you all the [indecipherable] the first tanks?

A: I – there must have been, coming – cause they were coming from all directions.

Q: Several directions.

A: And I do remember that another person – it's coming back to me, gave me a cat of nine tails – no, this girl that I gave the mezuzah to gave me a – an object wrapped in a towel, which was about eight inches long, a wooden handle, it had nine leather thongs, and stuck in the leather thongs were carpet tacks. And they were beaten with these things and the flesh was ripped off and some of the tacks still had pieces of flesh on the tacks. And I had kept that for awhile, and then I just threw it away. I

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– what the hell did I need it for? And that was one of the souvenirs. We had a German flag, which I think I still have, and it was a very sad time in my life, and ya – being 19 – 19 or 20 years old at the time, it made a very strong impression on me.

Q: Was there any sort of counseling offered –

A: No.

Q: – either the chaplains, was there any attempt –

A: No.

Q: – to deal with the fact that –

A: None whatsoever.

Q: – this was a very traumatic experience?

A: We just kept going until we – they stopped us, we were in a small town in **Austria** for a couple of weeks, and then they – slowly they pulled us back to – the lucky – what we called the cigarette camps, luck – Camp **Lucky Strike**, Camp **Old Gold**, and from these camps, which were right near the harbor, we waited for the ship to come to take us to go to **Japan**. Our division was scheduled to be the assault division on **Honshu Island**, the Japanese invasion. We got back to the **United States**, I spent that – oh, a week or so on the boat in the hospital for a leg injury. I was home on a recuperative leave and during the recuperative leave, they dropped the atomic bomb – bomb on **Hiroshima**. That was the end of the war, and **Harry**

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Truman saved my life. I did not have to go to **Japan**, and according to the army officers when we did get to **California**, the life expectancy of our division was 20 minutes, and then the next wave would come in, then the following wave, and I was supposed to be in the assault wave.

Q: He did save your life, yeah.

A: So it saved – it saved my life.

Q: And quite a few others, I'm sure.

A: Oh yes.

Q: Really.

A: Many thousands of us. So we were always grateful for **Harry Truman** for that. However, after going through the museum and seeing what **Roosevelt** didn't do, it was very upsetting to me. I never really knew that he really laid back like that. I was not aware of that.

Q: There was a great, great deal known in the political and military highest circles, and very little done.

A: And when I was in **Israel**, my daughter and I went to **Yad Vashem**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And you take **Yad Vashem** added with this and it's an unbelievable experience. And I wrote in the memo book downstairs that if for any reason they built

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concentration camps in the **United States** to put the Jews in it, there would be no shortage of guards and no shortage of anything, there would be many volunteers. And it's unfortunate. So I don't think we have learned a thing from history.

Q: Human nature has not changed substantially, it seems.

A: All you have to do is look around the world today at – almost every conflict has something to do with religion.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Whether it's Arab and Muslim or Protestant and Catholic, I mean i-it – it's all there.

Q: Do you think that you would have been – one of the things that we ask people about is how politically cognizant they are. Do you think that you would be as aware of the conflicts around the world now if you had not gone through this experience, or if you did not have Jewish background upbringing?

A: Well, I am –

Q: Has it sensitized you?

A: I am more sensitive to what's going on around the world.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You must remember in 1943 - 1944, there was no communications like they had today. I mean, you have **CNN** showing you what's happening as it happens. We had

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nothing like that. We had a newspaper that came out days and weeks later and it was controlled by the army.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So what they told us, or what we read was strictly what they wanted us to hear. And that's my story.

Q: Okay. Couple – couple more questions. Do you remember, when you were inside **Dachau**, obviously there were other people from your team, your battalion.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember any of their reactions? Did anybody get sick?

A: Yes. Many of us.

Q: Okay.

A: The doctor, who was the battalion doctor, his name was Dr. **Rosenberg**, he himself became sick. And he tried, with what limited medical facilities he had, he tried to help these people, but there was malnutrition, there was starvation, it was sores, it was beatings, it was – whatever. And he really wasn't prepared for this kind of thing. He – his stuff was for gunshot wounds and things like that, it wasn't for starving and malnutrition. But he was trying to come around and tell us, don't give them franks and beans, you'll kill them. But these people were starving, so we gave them biscuits and whatever canned goods we had, we had to open it for them. And

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then – it's coming back to me, two of the, or three of the men pointed out to somebody that looked like one of them, and he was younger and healthy looking, he was one of the guards.

Q: Right.

A: And they wanted him. And we –

Q: What happened?

A: – we gave him the – we searched him and he was screaming, no, no, I'm – but they all claimed he was one of the brutal guards, and we – they took him into one of the barracks and they killed him with their bare hands. And I never went into –

Q: We have had – we have had other reports of that.

A: Huh?

Q: We have had other reports of that, yeah.

A: Well, I didn't go in to check on it, but I heard the scream. They did it with their bare hands, they killed this guy. And –

Q: Did you find or see other German guards laying around the premises that you think perhaps the inmates had **[indecipherable]**

A: Many of them had changed into – from what we had heard, they changed into civilian clothes and many of them got away. But others that were pointed out were taken by the **MPs**, and what happened to them, I don't know. Also, when we

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liberated the camp there were many, many bicycles lying around. And they wanted – prisoners of the – they wanted to go back to **Poland, Austria**, wherever they came from. What did we know? Here, take a bicycle, go home. And they got on their bicycles, they got as far as the gate and then they were stopped. They had to be interviewed, they had to be examined, you know, so they never got more than a couple of hundred yards, but we gave them all the bicycles they wanted. And –

Q: Did you and your – the soldiers who were with you, did you discuss this in the following days? Did you talk about it?

A: First of all, many of them wore the yellow Star of **David** [indecipherable] **Jude**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I did not see that patch downstairs. I mean, I saw patches but I did not see the yellow Star of **David** that said **j-u-d** – or **j-u-d-e**, I don't really remember at this point. And they really – I told them that these were all Jewish people and that they were being persecuted. And these Southerners really, they were sorry to see that, you know, anybody was put – but they didn't seem to care that they were Jewish or not.

Q: Hm, so they did not understand the significance of the whole [indecipherable]

A: No, yi – I'll tell you all – I did, but they didn't.

Q: Yeah. Hm.

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A: They did not, and again you were dealing with people who were farmers. Some of them could not write, barely. They could barely read. I had to tie their shoelaces for them, I had to make their necktie for them. But if you said to them, walk through that wall, they would walk through that wall. I mean, that's what the army wanted. They didn't want you to think too much.

Q: So they would have been very, either historically or politically ignorant.

A: Yes, we all –

Q: They just simply weren't exposed.

A: Well, I was ignorant of what I was getting into and I was a hell of a lot brighter than they were. I mean, I had – I had one year of college, and I knew I was Jewish. I was Bar Mitzvahed, I knew something about my religion. But –

Q: Before you went overseas, I would think that you would have been at least clearly aware that **Hitler's** main focus was against the Jews. Were you aware of that from newspapers back home, or –

A: Yeah, we knew about the anti-Semitism, we knew about Crystal Night and things like that, but we had no idea there were concentration camps. And –

Q: Did you still have family, close family in **Germany** or **Austria** at the time of the war?

A: No, I had no family in **Europe** whatsoever, none. So I had no contact over there,

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and ... [tape break] when I came home, August of 1945, I had mezuzahs waiting for me in the house from my grandmother and from everybody else. It had made a big impression on a large part of the **Bronx**. And one of the souvenir – it had nothing to do with the camps, one of the souvenirs that I brought home was a swastika flag. And on **V-E Day** – no, **V-J Day**, when I was home on leave, my mother made a party for whoever wanted to drop in. And next door to us were two refugees who had left **Germany**, and when they saw – they came to the party and they saw the swastika and they wiped their feet on it and they spit on it. The next morning –

Q: It was used as a doormat for the party [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, it was a doormat. The next morning my mother didn't know what to do with this filthy swastika, so she took it to the basement of an apartment house in the **Bronx**, washed in the community washing machine. There was no dryer. Not thinking, my mother put it out on the fire escape to dry and you could see it all over the **Bronx**, which was on **Jerome Avenue** and **165th Street**. Within a half hour the police were up there knocking on the door, who's flying the German flag? Thank God I was wearing my uniform with the medals, with the whole bit. And I said, oh my God, we had this party last night, and there was still liquor on the table and

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cookies out. At 10 o'clock in the morning I was drinking with these two Irish cops from the **Bronx**, and –

Q: It's [indecipherable] everyone's attention.

A: – it was – was a very excite – it was a very exciting time. And I still have the flag. [tape break] I had brought home as souvenirs a **Luger** and a **Mauser** pistol, absolutely worthless to me, but they were in working condition and they were great souvenirs. And my mother, this nice, little, old Jewish lady who was absolutely petrified of firearms, took the pistols to an army depot where they had advertised, bring your souvenirs to us and we will deactivate them so you don't get killed, or you don't blow yourself up with ha – people were bringing home hand grenades. My mother took these pistols and had them pour hot lead into the barrel, which absolutely wiped out the pistols. And I had them for many years and I finally gave them to my nephew also. And I never really forgave her for that.

Q: Lead in your pistols. Oh no, no, no, don't turn off yet.

A: Okay.

Q: When you came back to the **States**, you know, there's a – a period of reentry. You know, you're getting back into the – I assume you did not stay in the – in the military?

A: No.

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Q: So there's a kind of a reentry to civilian life.

A: When I came out of the service, I spent – let's see, I came out in February and I think the next week, I went back to college. And from then on it was school – back to **Brooklyn** College. I met my wife there and got married a few years later.

Q: Did you in those first four or five years feel any need to discuss your experiences in **Dachau** with – say with friends, with family?

A: Not so much with the family, but other friends of mine and relatives who were in the army, we discussed it among ourselves over and over again. But as far as I knew, I was the only one of my group that was actually in a working concentration camp. And –

Q: Were people receptive? Did you run into people who didn't want to hear about this because it was too terrible?

A: No, they – they had heard, of course – by that time they had all heard stories, they had all seen pictures. They had asked me about it and I told them my side of the story, you know, what I had seen, which seemed to coincide with what they had seen, and after awhile, you know, it's another war story and you forget about it. You had your life to lead and these were just war stories that we had been telling each other over and over again over the years, and pretty soon that was history.

Q: You kind of leave it, yeah.

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A: And then when I trying to tell my children about the Holocaust, and –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – which I did over the years. And maybe not **Hugh** so much, but **Susan** and **Sandy**.

Q: Was there a point in time when you became more interested in telling your children? For example in 1978 they did the Holocaust mini-series, which started a lot of people talking, for the first time.

A: I couldn't watch it.

Q: Okay.

A: I absolutely could not watch it. Yet, I had no problem going to the movies and watching all those crazy stories, you know, where three guys wiped out 500 tanks you know, with peanuts. That was okay, but the mini-series on the Holocaust, I couldn't look at it.

Q: It was real.

A: It was re –

Q: [indecipherable] away.

A: – I knew it was real, I couldn't do it.

Q: Yeah. Do you feel like that programs like that are important, though, to educate people who don't know?

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A: Yes, if people will believe it. You have people in politics today who are – who say to you, hey, the Holocaust never happened. How can you – how can they reconcile that with the facts? And I'm thinking of – what's his name, bu –

Buchanan?

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: I mean here is a man who is an intelligent guy, he is a writer, he was an assistant to the president, and yet he said the Holocaust never happened. So that's frightening because if he says it there are tens of thousands of other people believe it never happened.

Q: Mm-hm. There is a resurgence of Holocaust deniers right now, and I think in particular that's why your testimony's important. A lot of people will ignore testimony from survivors, but a lot of people will listen to someone that they consider trustworthy, an American and a liberator. And I think that's one reason there's been such an emphasis on getting the testimonies from liberators such as yourself.

A: In 1950 – probably 1952 or 1953, I had made a business trip that I – down south where my clients were and I went to a town, **Crowley, Louisiana**. And there is a Catholic priest there who was invited to my client's house for lunch, and I was there and in the course of the conversation he found out that I was Jewish, he said to me,

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well, you know, I have to tell you that the Holocaust never happened and I'm telling my parishioners that the Holocaust never occurred. I said, trying to be as polite as I could, I said you're wrong. I was there and I saw it. He said oh no, the Catholic church would never allow something like that, and therefore it never happened. And the Catholic church, as it did – collaborated with them in many instances.

Q: In many ways, in many ways [indecipherable]

A: And who is it, Pope **Pius**? He didn't do much to save the Jews, although he claims he opened up the Vatican to them. I was there and they had some little thing that they had saved **X** amount of Jews in the Vatican, which is probably true, but he could have done a lot more, which he didn't.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Because the story was he was afraid that if he fought **Hitler** they would come into the Vatican and just take it over, which they didn't. They left the Vatican alone.

Q: Yeah, the church as a whole collaborated, I believe. Did your experiences change your religious values or your religious beliefs in any way?

A: I was never a religious Jew. I lived by the, you know, like by the 10 Commandments. But I was not religious. Two of my children were **Bats** Mitzvahed, one wasn't. And – well, I wasn't too upset about that. And I was happy that my daughter that did get married, married a Jewish guy, and it turned out to be a – a

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marital disaster. But I am now more active in federation, raising money for federation. I've been to **Israel** with my children, but I can't say that it's because of the Holocaust.

Q: Okay.

A: I mean, that was over in history 48 years ago. And I go to services, you know, the high holidays primarily and I'm active in Jewish Federation in my community, and that's about the extent of it.

Q: Okay. Do you, either at that time in 1945, or even today, have you come up with, in your mind, some sort of understanding or explanation of how **Hitler** and the Nazis became so powerful, how they were so persuasive?

A: I guess because there was the depression and things were very difficult. And like today, whenever things get tough, they need a scapegoat and the scapegoat throughout history has always been the Jews. And they were willing to listen to him, and hey here – look at these, they have stores, and they were lawyers and they were bankers. Not all of them, but enough of them that were very visible, and they were very easy to go after them. Tha-That's my reasoning, I don't know if history supports my contention.

Q: That's a large factor that's usually cited in most historical analysis.

A: And it will happen again.

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Q: What can we do? What can – what can be done different? How can we re-educate people or how can we change people?

A: Well, it has to start in school. They have to be educated and told what the Holocaust was. They have to be told what brought it on and what the outcome was. And I'm sorry to say that in **Boca Raton, Florida**, which is a rather affluent society, I have spoken to some friends – children of friends of mine, grandchildren, I should say, who go to school, Jewish kids, half of them never heard of the Holocaust. They have no idea what the Holocaust is. And the non-Jewish kids have no idea what the Holocaust is. They don't teach it in school that I know of. I don't even think it's in the history books. If it is, it's just a paragraph.

Q: Right. Very briefly.

A: And it's nothing and it has to start at the root level, it has to start at the s – with the school system and work its way up.

Q: What about churches and synagogues? Do you feel like that's a appropriate place to address this?

A: Excuse me?

Q: What about churches and synagogues, was that an appropriate forum?

A: I think tha – particularly the churches because the – the Jews [indecipherable] you know, are sympathetic to the Jews, and the parents should tell the children what

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the Holocaust was. But you're going two generations now. My grandchildren, who live in Boston, I don't see them that much, one is 10 and one is eight, I'm sure they have no idea what the Holocaust is. But when I see them in a couple of weeks, I think I will tell them again what happened.

Q: Good, good.

A: I don't know if my daughter has ever told them or explained it to them, but I think she should.

Q: Perhaps there would be some way for you to speak in the public schools in your area. I mean **[indecipherable]** –

A: Well, I haven't thought of it.

Q: – consider that? I mean, I think that children respond to – to someone who was there in a way that they don't respond to a textbook, you know, or to a lecture. And that can be a very powerful teaching tool sometimes.

A: I think if we could get some of the actual survivors with the tattoos on their arm, but I have seen nothing in the local papers even suggesting anything like that.

Q: Mm. To have survivors and liberators come and share together would be wonderful.

A: Well –

Q: Be a terrific experience.

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A: Maybe I'll bring it up when I get back.

Q: I hope so. That would be –

A: But they have to start with the school system. Now, many blacks do not, as a group feel that this never happened. When you bring blacks through here, what is their reaction?

Q: I've only been here three days, I don't know.

A: Oh.

Q: I'm from **Atlanta** and I'm just up here on a research trip.

A: Okay.

Q: But that would be something to ask Dr. **Diorio**(ph). It – it would be interesting to find out.

A: But I wonder if their opinions have changed, or if they believe –

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: Was it really hot there, or was it temperate?

A: No, it wasn't that warm. It was early May, and I was wearing – no, we were wearing cotton uniforms, so it – I don't remember the weather being any factor.

Q: Yeah. Were there – were there a lot of people in your – how many people were in your unit, roughly. Were you 50, were you a hundred?

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A: In the – in the – the army, in my outfit?

Q: In your – in your – yeah.

A: Several thousand.

Q: And all of you liberated the camps –

A: I don't know how many battalions came in. I know my battalion came in. Don't forget, a – a division had like 12,000 men, and we were shooting all over the place. And my battalion, which was probably a thousand men, wa – I know that battalion was there and spread out throughout the whole area.

Q: Right.

A: These camps were big. So what I saw, other people saw in other are – in other areas.

Q: But – so your unit had a thousand men in it? Company **D** [indecipherable]

A: Well, Company **B** only had 200.

Q: Okay, that – that seems like a far more manageable number. And in that final assault, when you were moving fast and you knew that something was going on and mail wasn't catching up and you weren't being dropped food, and – I mean, did you know that you were heading into something?

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A: Oh, we – combat was pretty much over by this time because as we were squeezing the Germans, we were coming from one side and the Russians were coming from the other side.

Q: Right.

A: And they knew it was over, so what they did was, they were giving up, they were surrendering by the hundreds, by the thousands. And we knew they were surrendering because the Germans had a – a unique way of surrendering. They threw their steel helmets away. If you saw a German soldier without his steel helmet, he was surrendering.

Q: And that's how you knew not to shoot him? That's how you knew not to shoot him?

A: Well, they wen – they threw – the first thing they did were throw their guns away.

Q: Really?

A: Because when they came out, wherever they came out like this without their steel helmet on, it wa – it was – here they were coming out by the thousands, and we didn't know what to do with them.

Q: And they were in bad condition themselves?

A: No, not bad, though –

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Q: They – they'd been eating, and [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, they weren't in bad shape. But by this time what we were running into were kids maybe 15 - 16 - 17 years old and 60 and 70 year old older men. The younger ones were – were gone already, pretty much. And if we found **SS** troopers, which we did, now they were very cute. The **SS** troopers tattooed the **SS** insignia on their shoulder, and they were very proud of it. It had like a lightning bolt with the **SS**, and our Intelligence people said, if they're young and they're healthy and they got blue eyes, they got blonde hair and they look like – go look – rip their shirts off and look at the – and we found them, after **Dachau**. And we had a German company commander who asked Sergeant **Goldstein** and myself to take these **SS** troopers back to the prisoner of war. He said probably eight or 10 miles in the back and I want you back here in 20 minutes. And he said, make sure you have your side-arms with you when you take them back. But 20 minutes later I want you back here.

Q: Did you accept?

A: Yeah, they – we were back in less than 20 minutes.

Q: What happened to the **SS**?

A: They tried to escape.

Q: And what did you do?

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A: Oh, I –

Q: Let them go?

A: Oh yeah, they'll never – but they didn't go anywhere. You can't do that, that's not – that's against all the rules and regulations. You can't shoot prisoners of war. But they never got to the prisoner of war camp and we were back in 20 minutes.

Q: Do you think that your treatment of German civilians changed, or your feelings even toward German civilians changed?

A: When we were going through some of the towns, little ole – the truth, little old ladies would aim hunting rifles out of a window and shoot. Fortunately they were lousy shots. Our orders were, do not go in after them. We had something called **thermite** grenades. **Thermite** grenades would burn through six steel helmets in 30 seconds. So we would take a **thermite** grenade and throw it into the window and just keep going. And within minutes that building was completely engulfed in flames. We never – he said, don't get yourself involved, you'll only – you can get hurt. Just burn the building down, let them take care of themselves. Yeah, **thermite** grenades, I haven't said that word in a long time. Any other question?

Q: Were you and **Goldstein** the only Jews in your battalion, your division?

A: There weren't many more. There were about – in my company there were probably three Jews. **Epstein** –

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Q: [indecipherable] in the infantry.

A: **Epstein, Goldberg** and **Pisik**. How I ended up in the infantry, I'll never know.

Q: Right, you know, Grandma raised a smarter guy, because the **ASTP** program was cancelled.

A: Yeah, well I know, that's how I ended up, I figure even then the – you know, guys li – I figured I'd be in quartermaster, or whatever.

Q: Oh yeah, it just seems –

A: Intelligence.

Q: – they dumped everybody, it seems like, in the front lines.

A: I was in – I – right out to the front lines, riding in the back of a tank.

Q: How long had you been serving? How long had you been overseas when you got to the camp? It – it had been years, hadn't it?

A: I was overseas February and March –

Q: [indecipherable] would say?

A: I was overseas about a year and a half.

Q: I remember you telling me when the – the **Persian Gulf** parades were going on, and you said, oh, these guys sat in a desert for five months, look what we did, you know? So you – that was all active duty, too, it wasn't just –

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A: Well, when we came back on this ship, we were told that our division was going to land in **New York City** and there's going to be parade up **Fifth** Avenue. Oh, I – I mean, from a kid from **New York City**, we knew what a ticker tape parade was. And two days out they said, oh, the orders have changed, we're going to **Newport News, Virginia**, no parade. Very upsetting. But there were German prisoners of war who were working the commissary at the army camp, Camp **Patrick Henry** in **Newport News, Virginia**. And we were told, said look fellas, be – they been here for awhile and they're the cooks and they're the clean up and they're whatever, they do all the dirty work. So if you start anything with them, you're going to go into the kitchen and do the dirty work. And we found that the German prisoners of war were doing the grass cutting, sitting on tractors with umbrellas over their head. Or they were working in the laundries with the American women, and we were out there busting our backsides out in the hot sun. And th – I'm just trying to correlate how they were treated over here and how the prisoners were treated over there. So you – as you know, I have no – no love for the Germans, or the German people. You know when I told you about Uncle **Ben's Mercedes**? He got a new **Mercedes** years ago and I said, **Ben**, what is that little door over there, you know? He said, well that's the glove compartment. I said, no it isn't, that's a microwave oven for Jewish babies. He got very upset.

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Q: Didn't you say when you were touring the camps, or when you were first going through there, what – didn't – didn't you see, what was it, the **Mercedes** emblem or other – other s –

A: I believe and I – people told me I'm wrong, but I believe that on one of the ovens I saw the **Mercedes-Benz** emblem on the oven door. Other – have you heard that?

Q: I haven't heard that, but there were a number of major businesses and industries that were in that immediate area and they contracted for the slave labor force. So, it's certainly possible. I had not heard that before.

A: Well, people tell me that I – I didn't see it, because they didn't see it, but don't forget, in 1945, I wasn't even sure what the – the emblem was, but I – I thought I saw the **Mercedes** emblem on the – on the oven doors. Th-They could have been, you know.

Q: Were the – there were no guards, just the trustees? I mean, there were no –

A: No, many of the guards had left, but we did get a bunch of them. And this one group that asked for a guard, a particular guard, we gave it to them. We – we s – made sure he had no weapons and we threw him into the barracks with the men. And they – they tore him limb from limb. And they hardly had the strength.

Q: Were there other souvenirs, so to speak, or any kind of looting going on in the camps?

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A: Well, I told you, I had that cat o'nine tails, which I carried around with me for several weeks and then one day I looked at it and said what am I gonna do with a whip with the leather thongs with thumbtacks in it, and I just threw it away.

Q: Right.

A: But, if I hadn't seen it, in my mind I still see it, with the thumbtacks with a little bit of flesh on it, on one of the tacks. And the handle was only about that big, and strips of leather about that big and they would just whip the prisoners with it. And I had the flag and I had the, you know, the bayonet I brought home, I don't know what happened to that. Remember the bayonet?

Q: Mom managed to lose it in the move, I bet.

A: Yeah, probably. Any other questions?

Q: You said you had a leg injury?

A: I had no time to bathe or change my shoes or whatever, and by the time the war was over, I had developed a very, very bad case of impetigo and oh I forgot the word that they use for the feet with the –

Q: Trenchfeet?

A: Trenchfoot.

Q: Mm-hm, trenchfoot.

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A: And when we went back to the **United States**, I was on sick call and they put me in the hospital, the – and they put hot compresses on my feet for a week and they painted my feet with potassium permanganate. Violet gentian? Something like that. And it cured it. And even though I really wasn't cured, they told me that I could go home on leave, 30 day leave. But I could barely walk when I got on that ship. It was four weeks before I – I hadn't taken my shoes off. Didn't have time.

Q: So you were moving that fast or that long?

A: Yeah, I was scratching with the rifle butt, I was scratching my toes through the leather shoe, trying to get some relief.

Q: I would assume, too, you mentioned earlier that supplies were having a real hard ta – time keeping up with you because you were moving so fast, so that you were not necessarily getting fresh socks –

A: Ti – we weren't getting nothing.

Q: – when you were supposed to, at all.

A: We were getting nothing, we were living – when we came to a farmyard, my Southerners were wonderful. They'd run out and grab a chicken and they'd wring its neck, you know, and the whole thing. And then they said to me, Sarge, it's your term – your turn to kill a chicken. So I took a machine gun out of the half-track, a 45 caliber machine gun and I couldn't hit the chicken – thank God I didn't hit the

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chicken with it. They were laughing so hard they – th-they fell down crying they were laughing so hard. So they killed the chicken and I did all the rest of the dirty work for them. I wrote their letters for them and I – I had to mother them, they couldn't do it themselves. But they were great soldiers.

Q: And the army made no effort to explain or debrief that you had – what you had seen?

A: No, nobody cared. There were millions of us.

Q: Had you seen things up to that point that were incrementally as awful, and that this was just another –

A: Well, d-don't forget, there is artillery shells, there was bombing. We saw many dead bodies –

Q: So it's like **[indecipherable]**

A: – but most of the dead bodies we saw were – were Germans, or civilians.

Q: Right.

A: It really didn't bother me too much. Hey, they were the enemy. That's the idea, we were there to kill them. But th-the helpless families, with the children, with – I really didn't see – come to think of it, I don't think I saw children in **Dachau**. I mean, I saw adults. Now, the children I know were there, I didn't see any. At that stage of time they may have been all killed already.

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Q: That's what it most people mention, is that either they saw very, very few children or none at all.

A: I don't remember seeing any.

Q: Cause by that time they had already been disposed of, yeah. So it was clear to you coming in, having seen other battle dead, that this was something different.

A: Yes.

Q: This was not like a regular war zone, this was something –

A: A war zone didn't bother me.

Q: Okay.

A: This bothered me, cause we realized what it was, we – we could see what it was, these people told us what it was. And it was such a complete shock. Nothing in my background ever could prepare me. It couldn't prepare anybody for something like this.

Q: Could you speak Yiddish at the time?

A: Yeah, I probably spoke a little Yiddish, and –

Q: So did the prisoners try to talk to you?

A: – but it wasn't enough, it really wasn't enough to communicate with this woman who spoke German. And we have, a lot of guys in the outfit could speak German,

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so we were able to communicate very easily. But – but that mezuzah business, that was the funniest thing, i-if you could call it funny, what happened.

Q: It's an amazing story. Wasn't – didn't Grandma say something to the **Brooklyn News**, or something, and you're even getting [indecipherable]

A: Well, it was – I think it got into the **Bronx Home News**, and that also with the – with the mezuzahs. Th-They're probably still following me, trying to find me.

Q: Make sure that you have one.

A: I came back pretty quickly after. I was back in the **United States** in August. I got back in July. From May –

Q: From May eighth to August, were you part of military government? What did you do until you came home?

A: We – yeah, we were cleaning up areas, searching for soldiers, searching for arms and ammunition. And almost immediately we were ordered to go back to the **United States** and prepare to go to **Japan**. Some people went by way of **India**. We were lucky, we went back toward **America** and then we were supposed to go to **California**. After the bomb was dropped, I still had to report to Camp **Roberts** – not Camp **Rob**, one of the camps in **California**. And we were waiting for orders to go overseas and they never came and we were told, okay fellas, you're going home. And February 14th, I went home.

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Q: Up until you left in August, did you have opportunities to talk with German civilians?

A: Yes, but it was strictly as a do this, and do that and you know, clean this up and it was not the man to man friendly – this was still right after the war. We weren't allowed to fraternize with them. All the hanky panky with the women and all that, that came later, I guess, after we left. But we were in a town with a big sawmill and we had told the Germans to start cutting two by fours, they needed it for something. And the guy deliberately, the foreman burnt out the motor by jamming the throttle forward instead of doing it gradually. And one of the boys who n – from the southern boys said, he's doing that deliberately, because he knows he's burning out the motor. So this southern boy put a pistol up to his head and said – and they got – he got the point, you do it now and you do it right or we put a bullet into you. Within an hour they had it changed and everything ran very smoothly.

Q: Smoothly.

A: But they could have done it all day and all night, I wouldn't have known what they were doing wrong. So this is my very limited exposure with the population.

Q: Okay. The reason I had wondered was because a lot of liberators report that they got blanket denial from all German civilians that they had any knowledge.

A: Oh, I never – I never met a Nazi. I never met a –

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Q: That's right.

A: The – the German soldiers, at first they said, you know, me? N-Ni – Nazi, no, not me. Maybe him, not me.

Q: Did you go into their homes very much?

A: Yeah, we t – we went into their homes to take them over for – for barracks for ourselves. And one of the expressions I remember was **raus**(ph) the house. Out of the house, leave. And one of them said in English, where am I gonna go? I said after – after **Dachau**, I didn't give a damn, out. We threw out little old ladies, we threw out grandmas, it was raining, out. I don't care where they went.

Q: So there definitely was a change in the feeling after **[indecipherable]**

A: Oh, no problem with that.

Q: Okay.

End of Tape One, Side B

Conclusion of Interview