

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:02,760

This is a United States  
Holocaust Memorial Museum

2

00:00:02,760 --> 00:00:05,370

volunteer collection interview  
with George Leonard conducted

3

00:00:05,370 --> 00:00:09,930

by Esther Finder on January 10,  
2001 in Rockville, Maryland.

4

00:00:09,930 --> 00:00:14,250

This is tape one  
side A. Thank you

5

00:00:14,250 --> 00:00:16,480

for doing an interview  
with me today.

6

00:00:16,480 --> 00:00:18,300

Let's start out by  
having you tell me

7

00:00:18,300 --> 00:00:19,610

when and where you were born.

8

00:00:19,610 --> 00:00:22,240

9

00:00:22,240 --> 00:00:25,650

I was born in Malden,  
Massachusetts,

10

00:00:25,650 --> 00:00:33,360

on December 24, 1921.

11

00:00:33,360 --> 00:00:36,660

Is that where you grew up?

12

00:00:36,660 --> 00:00:41,250

I very rapidly got moved to  
Dorchester, which at the time

13  
00:00:41,250 --> 00:00:47,340  
was a tremendously in  
flux quasi slum of Boston.

14  
00:00:47,340 --> 00:00:50,460  
And I pretty much  
grew up in Dorchester

15  
00:00:50,460 --> 00:00:52,760  
until the army came along.

16  
00:00:52,760 --> 00:00:56,205

17  
00:00:56,205 --> 00:00:57,580  
Can you tell me  
a little bit more

18  
00:00:57,580 --> 00:01:00,700  
about this community other  
than the few words that you

19  
00:01:00,700 --> 00:01:01,870  
used to describe it so far?

20  
00:01:01,870 --> 00:01:04,420

21  
00:01:04,420 --> 00:01:10,500  
Dorchester was and maybe  
still is the largest burrow

22  
00:01:10,500 --> 00:01:15,160  
or in-city suburb of Boston.

23  
00:01:15,160 --> 00:01:19,910  
And it had originally  
been famous for being

24

00:01:19,910 --> 00:01:23,960  
a seaport with the  
Puritans or Pilgrims

25  
00:01:23,960 --> 00:01:29,210  
or Lord knows what all, and  
lots of Indians around there.

26  
00:01:29,210 --> 00:01:37,280  
And as the community grew,  
it had its upper middle class

27  
00:01:37,280 --> 00:01:42,380  
and upper class and  
straight middle class areas.

28  
00:01:42,380 --> 00:01:45,200  
When I lived there,  
it was in such flux

29  
00:01:45,200 --> 00:01:49,220  
that it depended upon the  
block you were in, just

30  
00:01:49,220 --> 00:01:51,870  
like parts of Manhattan.

31  
00:01:51,870 --> 00:02:00,050  
And it went from when I was a  
little tiny kid, predominantly

32  
00:02:00,050 --> 00:02:07,130  
English background, to Irish,  
to then Mediterranean groups

33  
00:02:07,130 --> 00:02:10,130  
and Jews around the fringes.

34  
00:02:10,130 --> 00:02:15,030  
And by the time I  
left, say, in 1941,

35  
00:02:15,030 --> 00:02:20,690

'42, it was a sad, sad  
community, not because

36  
00:02:20,690 --> 00:02:23,120  
of the influx of  
groups, but because

37  
00:02:23,120 --> 00:02:27,320  
of what was happening  
to the infrastructure

38  
00:02:27,320 --> 00:02:29,480  
and so on and so  
forth-- overcrowded,

39  
00:02:29,480 --> 00:02:34,130  
and the houses were  
dilapidated, et cetera.

40  
00:02:34,130 --> 00:02:38,220  
You're probably familiar  
with the three-decker houses

41  
00:02:38,220 --> 00:02:38,720  
in Boston.

42  
00:02:38,720 --> 00:02:42,800

43  
00:02:42,800 --> 00:02:44,420  
There were economic problems.

44  
00:02:44,420 --> 00:02:46,130  
Of course, it was  
the Depression, which

45  
00:02:46,130 --> 00:02:48,380  
impinged upon the whole thing.

46  
00:02:48,380 --> 00:02:51,170  
And there were economic  
problems with people.

47

00:02:51,170 --> 00:02:55,700

There were sociological  
groups against groups.

48

00:02:55,700 --> 00:02:58,310

The Irish were--  
in my family, even

49

00:02:58,310 --> 00:03:02,690

though I have a quarter Irish  
from my real father, who

50

00:03:02,690 --> 00:03:07,610

had died four or five  
years after I was born.

51

00:03:07,610 --> 00:03:10,610

Even though I had quarter  
Irish, my mother and others

52

00:03:10,610 --> 00:03:13,460

in the community, the  
English community,

53

00:03:13,460 --> 00:03:17,270

were as rigid against Irish  
almost as they were the Jews.

54

00:03:17,270 --> 00:03:20,900

55

00:03:20,900 --> 00:03:23,420

Nobody knew why.

56

00:03:23,420 --> 00:03:27,410

In fact, I didn't really  
know, for example, a Jew

57

00:03:27,410 --> 00:03:29,570

until I was very mature--

58

00:03:29,570 --> 00:03:33,230

mature child, I mean.

59

00:03:33,230 --> 00:03:35,990

But I played with Irish  
kids all the time.

60

00:03:35,990 --> 00:03:40,370

And my entire  
background was formed

61

00:03:40,370 --> 00:03:43,143

by playing with a wide  
variety of people--

62

00:03:43,143 --> 00:03:44,810

playing with a wide  
variety of children.

63

00:03:44,810 --> 00:03:54,410

64

00:03:54,410 --> 00:03:57,160

Can you tell me what your  
parents did for a living?

65

00:03:57,160 --> 00:04:01,400

You mentioned you lost your  
father when you were young.

66

00:04:01,400 --> 00:04:03,290

I assume from that  
there was a remarriage

67

00:04:03,290 --> 00:04:06,320

and you had a second father?

68

00:04:06,320 --> 00:04:12,560

My real father died as  
a result of mustard gas

69

00:04:12,560 --> 00:04:14,810

in his lungs that  
caught up with him

70  
00:04:14,810 --> 00:04:17,360  
years and years after  
the First World War.

71  
00:04:17,360 --> 00:04:21,170  
I never really knew  
my real father at all.

72  
00:04:21,170 --> 00:04:23,840  
Most of the time he was  
in the veterans hospital

73  
00:04:23,840 --> 00:04:25,550  
in his final years.

74  
00:04:25,550 --> 00:04:30,050  
My mother married a pharmacist  
managing the Edward Everett

75  
00:04:30,050 --> 00:04:32,600  
Square Pharmacy in Dorchester.

76  
00:04:32,600 --> 00:04:35,210  
And after they had been  
married a couple of years,

77  
00:04:35,210 --> 00:04:41,210  
he went into Eli Lilly and  
became one of their detail men.

78  
00:04:41,210 --> 00:04:48,560  
And he ate and not  
drank himself to death,

79  
00:04:48,560 --> 00:04:51,710  
because he only drank beer,  
but he let himself go to pot.

80  
00:04:51,710 --> 00:04:55,250  
And before long, he died  
of a massive coronary

81

00:04:55,250 --> 00:04:59,420  
in 1939, just on the verge  
of becoming New England

82

00:04:59,420 --> 00:05:01,256  
manager of Eli Lilly.

83

00:05:01,256 --> 00:05:05,720

84

00:05:05,720 --> 00:05:08,720  
He brought with him to  
the marriage two girls,

85

00:05:08,720 --> 00:05:12,410  
and my mother had two  
boys, and between them they

86

00:05:12,410 --> 00:05:15,900  
had two children of their own.

87

00:05:15,900 --> 00:05:19,370  
It was quite a conglomeration.

88

00:05:19,370 --> 00:05:26,110  
I spent most of my younger  
years, from 12 to 17,

89

00:05:26,110 --> 00:05:29,980  
lusting after my stepsister--

90

00:05:29,980 --> 00:05:32,910  
the younger one.

91

00:05:32,910 --> 00:05:33,680  
That's about it.

92

00:05:33,680 --> 00:05:40,510

93

00:05:40,510 --> 00:05:42,450



Where did you go  
to school and what

94  
00:05:42,450 --> 00:05:44,850  
were your favorite subjects?

95  
00:05:44,850 --> 00:05:46,410  
You're talking  
about undergraduate?

96  
00:05:46,410 --> 00:05:47,140  
I mean, yeah--

97  
00:05:47,140 --> 00:05:47,640  
Elementary.

98  
00:05:47,640 --> 00:05:49,170  
Elementary, et cetera.

99  
00:05:49,170 --> 00:05:53,580  
Went to a little Quincy Street  
school for primary grades.

100  
00:05:53,580 --> 00:05:56,664  
There were only three rooms--

101  
00:05:56,664 --> 00:06:00,585  
the kind of a place  
that was really--

102  
00:06:00,585 --> 00:06:02,813  
you just couldn't believe it.

103  
00:06:02,813 --> 00:06:04,980  
They did away with it, of  
course, a few years later.

104  
00:06:04,980 --> 00:06:09,220  
And then I went to the Mather  
School from the fourth on up.

105  
00:06:09,220 --> 00:06:11,420

The Mather School was  
on Meeting House Hill.

106  
00:06:11,420 --> 00:06:13,070  
It still is there.

107  
00:06:13,070 --> 00:06:16,880  
I visited about two years  
ago and was astounded.

108  
00:06:16,880 --> 00:06:20,450  
Now, the Mather School was the  
first general public school

109  
00:06:20,450 --> 00:06:22,460  
in the country.

110  
00:06:22,460 --> 00:06:25,620  
And they changed the  
building of course.

111  
00:06:25,620 --> 00:06:32,710  
The building I went to was built  
in probably the late 1800s.

112  
00:06:32,710 --> 00:06:34,780  
I'm not sure.

113  
00:06:34,780 --> 00:06:42,340  
It was a very strict,  
authoritarian, punishing

114  
00:06:42,340 --> 00:06:43,360  
environment.

115  
00:06:43,360 --> 00:06:47,170  
At the same time, it was known  
as a good school system where

116  
00:06:47,170 --> 00:06:50,140  
you learn by rote,  
at least, even

117

00:06:50,140 --> 00:06:51,540

if it wasn't any other way.

118

00:06:51,540 --> 00:06:55,420

119

00:06:55,420 --> 00:07:00,790

We moved in my later  
teens to Roslindale,

120

00:07:00,790 --> 00:07:04,780

which was an up  
step, and everyone

121

00:07:04,780 --> 00:07:07,600

breathed a sigh of relief.

122

00:07:07,600 --> 00:07:10,780

And then we moved from  
there to West Roxbury,

123

00:07:10,780 --> 00:07:13,690

which was at the  
outer fringe of Boston

124

00:07:13,690 --> 00:07:17,980

on the  
Dedham-Norwood-Needham-Newton

125

00:07:17,980 --> 00:07:19,720

border out there.

126

00:07:19,720 --> 00:07:23,980

And this was even better, but  
that was just about the time

127

00:07:23,980 --> 00:07:27,010

my stepfather died,  
and my mother went back

128

00:07:27,010 --> 00:07:32,540

to her penurious way of living.

129  
00:07:32,540 --> 00:07:36,290

130  
00:07:36,290 --> 00:07:38,600  
I think I've said about  
the whole bit there.

131  
00:07:38,600 --> 00:07:41,057

132  
00:07:41,057 --> 00:07:42,640  
When you were growing  
up, what did you

133  
00:07:42,640 --> 00:07:45,550  
think you want it  
to be as an adult?

134  
00:07:45,550 --> 00:07:48,470  
A writer.

135  
00:07:48,470 --> 00:07:52,650  
What kind of writing  
did you want to do?

136  
00:07:52,650 --> 00:07:57,710  
I had fiction in mind, but  
after my government career

137  
00:07:57,710 --> 00:07:59,330  
when I retired,  
nonfiction proved

138  
00:07:59,330 --> 00:08:03,570  
to be my biggest boon, although  
I've done a couple of novels

139  
00:08:03,570 --> 00:08:05,390  
for publication.

140  
00:08:05,390 --> 00:08:08,030

And right now, I'm  
doing a non-fiction book

141  
00:08:08,030 --> 00:08:12,380  
which is my whole reason for  
living the past 20 or 30 years.

142  
00:08:12,380 --> 00:08:15,400

143  
00:08:15,400 --> 00:08:17,860  
Would you care to talk about  
that for just a moment?

144  
00:08:17,860 --> 00:08:20,920  
Just a quick word.

145  
00:08:20,920 --> 00:08:26,560  
About 23 years ago, I was  
taken into a meditation

146  
00:08:26,560 --> 00:08:32,740  
group in Gaithersburg by some  
very sophisticated people.

147  
00:08:32,740 --> 00:08:36,070  
And I learned a lot in it.

148  
00:08:36,070 --> 00:08:39,309  
I learned a lot about  
basic Kabbalism,

149  
00:08:39,309 --> 00:08:44,590  
Sufism, and the Masonic  
rites, and lots of others

150  
00:08:44,590 --> 00:08:46,960  
that have been pulled--

151  
00:08:46,960 --> 00:08:48,910  
the mystic tradition.

152

00:08:48,910 --> 00:08:55,400  
And they never went  
for gobbledygook,

153  
00:08:55,400 --> 00:08:58,560  
or what might be called  
just pure crap today.

154  
00:08:58,560 --> 00:09:02,390  
You go to the new age  
sections of the bookstores

155  
00:09:02,390 --> 00:09:06,770  
and libraries, and it's  
all crapped up with junk--

156  
00:09:06,770 --> 00:09:11,960  
stuff that a sensible person  
could never really digest.

157  
00:09:11,960 --> 00:09:14,240  
So at any rate,  
this was meditation

158  
00:09:14,240 --> 00:09:17,850  
from the point of view of  
letting your subconscious meet

159  
00:09:17,850 --> 00:09:18,350  
the--

160  
00:09:18,350 --> 00:09:22,540

161  
00:09:22,540 --> 00:09:25,440  
getting in touch with your  
higher self, et cetera, et

162  
00:09:25,440 --> 00:09:26,480  
cetera.

163  
00:09:26,480 --> 00:09:30,970  
So I went from one

stage to another

164

00:09:30,970 --> 00:09:35,620  
and felt that someday, I would  
pull together what I recognized

165

00:09:35,620 --> 00:09:37,660  
as being the best--

166

00:09:37,660 --> 00:09:40,720  
the most important strains  
in all of these traditions

167

00:09:40,720 --> 00:09:42,280  
going back thousands  
and thousands

168

00:09:42,280 --> 00:09:45,880  
of years, put it  
together in my own book,

169

00:09:45,880 --> 00:09:47,560  
and I've just started that book.

170

00:09:47,560 --> 00:09:52,990

171

00:09:52,990 --> 00:09:57,490  
Did you come from a  
religiously observant family?

172

00:09:57,490 --> 00:09:59,800  
My mother sent us--  
made sure that we

173

00:09:59,800 --> 00:10:01,540  
started in the  
congregational church

174

00:10:01,540 --> 00:10:03,080  
when we were practically babies.

175

00:10:03,080 --> 00:10:06,010

176

00:10:06,010 --> 00:10:09,655

Me and my siblings  
went to Sunday school

177

00:10:09,655 --> 00:10:13,480

and went to the Boy Scouts  
in the church later on.

178

00:10:13,480 --> 00:10:16,870

We did everything, but my mother  
never participated and neither

179

00:10:16,870 --> 00:10:17,860

did my stepfather.

180

00:10:17,860 --> 00:10:20,640

181

00:10:20,640 --> 00:10:24,180

I was never  
particularly religious.

182

00:10:24,180 --> 00:10:30,300

Indeed, when I hit college,  
I did what most of us do--

183

00:10:30,300 --> 00:10:36,510

we lost our organized  
religious feelings--

184

00:10:36,510 --> 00:10:38,340

any that were left.

185

00:10:38,340 --> 00:10:40,560

And we formulated  
either our new ones

186

00:10:40,560 --> 00:10:44,290

or became pure agnostics,  
et cetera, et cetera.



187  
00:10:44,290 --> 00:10:47,700  
So I suppose I leaned toward  
being a total agnostic

188  
00:10:47,700 --> 00:10:53,160  
by the time I was in the army.

189  
00:10:53,160 --> 00:10:55,860  
But then, by the time  
I reached the army--

190  
00:10:55,860 --> 00:10:59,700  
but then I had some experiences  
in the army which threw me

191  
00:10:59,700 --> 00:11:05,370  
right back again into a  
world in which I knew--

192  
00:11:05,370 --> 00:11:12,930  
knew in quotes-- that there  
was, after all, a central source

193  
00:11:12,930 --> 00:11:17,730  
and lots going on in  
the universe, et cetera,

194  
00:11:17,730 --> 00:11:21,300  
that most of us  
didn't recognize,

195  
00:11:21,300 --> 00:11:29,020  
and that you're left to infer  
and to get on faith by being

196  
00:11:29,020 --> 00:11:30,430  
in touch with certain things.

197  
00:11:30,430 --> 00:11:33,490

198

00:11:33,490 --> 00:11:36,640  
If you want, when this is over  
and you have five minutes,

199  
00:11:36,640 --> 00:11:39,850  
I'll tell you about an  
amazing experience or two

200  
00:11:39,850 --> 00:11:41,950  
I had particularly  
in the army that's

201  
00:11:41,950 --> 00:11:43,610  
irrelevant to the Holocaust.

202  
00:11:43,610 --> 00:11:50,682

203  
00:11:50,682 --> 00:11:52,390  
On a lighter note,  
when you were a child,

204  
00:11:52,390 --> 00:11:55,860  
what did you do for fun?

205  
00:11:55,860 --> 00:11:57,690  
Oh, boy.

206  
00:11:57,690 --> 00:12:00,180  
I was a typical  
kid from the point

207  
00:12:00,180 --> 00:12:03,840  
of view of playing marbles and  
Relievio and all the games.

208  
00:12:03,840 --> 00:12:08,850  
And it was an environment  
which was totally different

209  
00:12:08,850 --> 00:12:10,590  
from today's kids.

210

00:12:10,590 --> 00:12:14,040

There was no supervision  
of them playing.

211

00:12:14,040 --> 00:12:17,080

Nobody had play dates  
or anything like that.

212

00:12:17,080 --> 00:12:19,890

It was a question of you  
went out with the kids,

213

00:12:19,890 --> 00:12:21,420

and that was it.

214

00:12:21,420 --> 00:12:25,920

And your mother called you  
for supper and so forth.

215

00:12:25,920 --> 00:12:28,935

We learned to play all  
sorts of games together.

216

00:12:28,935 --> 00:12:31,560

217

00:12:31,560 --> 00:12:36,960

We learned to roam all over  
greater Boston in packs

218

00:12:36,960 --> 00:12:38,320

with the kids.

219

00:12:38,320 --> 00:12:44,370

And we went to Franklin Park and  
the Arnold Arboretum in Boston

220

00:12:44,370 --> 00:12:47,340

and had favorite places to go.

221

00:12:47,340 --> 00:12:52,380

And in the summer, we knew where

there were good swimming holes

222

00:12:52,380 --> 00:12:55,860

in certain small creeks  
that flowed through

223

00:12:55,860 --> 00:12:58,980

the Charles River, the  
upper Charles River,

224

00:12:58,980 --> 00:13:02,220

and Mother's Brook and  
West Roxbury and so forth.

225

00:13:02,220 --> 00:13:05,660

226

00:13:05,660 --> 00:13:10,100

I became interested in  
writing in high school

227

00:13:10,100 --> 00:13:14,030

and did a lot of that  
fiddling around myself,

228

00:13:14,030 --> 00:13:18,260

and knew I wanted  
to be a writer.

229

00:13:18,260 --> 00:13:25,670

But skipping ahead quickly,  
the army changed me

230

00:13:25,670 --> 00:13:27,700

into one of these  
silly attitudes about,

231

00:13:27,700 --> 00:13:30,740

oh, I got to do something  
in a government way

232

00:13:30,740 --> 00:13:32,490

and change the world.

233  
00:13:32,490 --> 00:13:35,130  
And so I went and studied  
government and economics

234  
00:13:35,130 --> 00:13:38,840  
in school and went  
into government first.

235  
00:13:38,840 --> 00:13:42,680  
So I had a pretty good career  
in the public health service

236  
00:13:42,680 --> 00:13:46,890  
as an economist, planner,  
administrative person.

237  
00:13:46,890 --> 00:13:50,120  
And when I retired from  
that, I immediately

238  
00:13:50,120 --> 00:13:54,710  
picked up the writing  
again, although I

239  
00:13:54,710 --> 00:13:59,090  
sold a novel while I was in  
the public health service.

240  
00:13:59,090 --> 00:14:00,680  
What was the name of the novel?

241  
00:14:00,680 --> 00:14:03,050  
Are you ready for this?

242  
00:14:03,050 --> 00:14:04,280  
It was called Sexmax.

243  
00:14:04,280 --> 00:14:08,270  
It was a Brave New  
World type in which

244

00:14:08,270 --> 00:14:13,490  
every single need that  
people had was satisfied

245  
00:14:13,490 --> 00:14:15,650  
by the government.

246  
00:14:15,650 --> 00:14:19,160  
And one of the mainstreams  
was that the women who

247  
00:14:19,160 --> 00:14:22,550  
were widowed at  
age 50 and 60 were

248  
00:14:22,550 --> 00:14:28,190  
able to apply to the government  
for assignment of a young man

249  
00:14:28,190 --> 00:14:30,860  
to them.

250  
00:14:30,860 --> 00:14:33,410  
And the young men were  
drafted for this purpose.

251  
00:14:33,410 --> 00:14:35,900  
Rather than being  
drafted to kill,

252  
00:14:35,900 --> 00:14:39,785  
they were drafted to  
make themselves useful.

253  
00:14:39,785 --> 00:14:41,090  
To make love and not war.

254  
00:14:41,090 --> 00:14:45,700

255  
00:14:45,700 --> 00:14:49,466  
What languages did you speak  
when you were a teenager?

256  
00:14:49,466 --> 00:14:50,840  
Just English?

257  
00:14:50,840 --> 00:14:51,710  
Languages?

258  
00:14:51,710 --> 00:14:54,500  
Just purely English.

259  
00:14:54,500 --> 00:14:57,080  
Studied French and  
Latin in high school.

260  
00:14:57,080 --> 00:15:00,650

261  
00:15:00,650 --> 00:15:02,990  
Did you witness  
much antisemitism

262  
00:15:02,990 --> 00:15:05,870  
when you were growing up?

263  
00:15:05,870 --> 00:15:07,232  
In spades.

264  
00:15:07,232 --> 00:15:09,200  
Do you have some examples?

265  
00:15:09,200 --> 00:15:13,140

266  
00:15:13,140 --> 00:15:15,150  
Examples don't  
immediately come to mind.

267  
00:15:15,150 --> 00:15:16,950  
It was so all-prevalent.

268  
00:15:16,950 --> 00:15:20,310

Just words and  
looks and feelings

269  
00:15:20,310 --> 00:15:23,340  
on the parts of people  
who had pretty limited

270  
00:15:23,340 --> 00:15:29,500  
lives and didn't know where  
to put their frustrations.

271  
00:15:29,500 --> 00:15:35,410  
And you heard slights all  
the time, all the time.

272  
00:15:35,410 --> 00:15:38,350  
And indeed, when I met my wife--

273  
00:15:38,350 --> 00:15:42,010  
and I had come  
back from the army

274  
00:15:42,010 --> 00:15:44,410  
and met my wife,  
who was Jewish--

275  
00:15:44,410 --> 00:15:48,580  
Jewish family-- my  
mother, I suppose,

276  
00:15:48,580 --> 00:15:56,770  
did the best she could to be  
pleasant and like Phyllis.

277  
00:15:56,770 --> 00:15:59,350  
And there were times  
when it worked out fine.

278  
00:15:59,350 --> 00:16:01,090  
But generally  
speaking, particularly

279  
00:16:01,090 --> 00:16:08,320



in the early stages, I got  
subtle chaff from my mother.

280  
00:16:08,320 --> 00:16:12,540  
I got less-than-subtle  
chaff from Phyllis's family.

281  
00:16:12,540 --> 00:16:14,000  
You know all the stories there.

282  
00:16:14,000 --> 00:16:21,622

283  
00:16:21,622 --> 00:16:29,320  
What do you remember hearing  
or reading about Hitler's rise

284  
00:16:29,320 --> 00:16:30,775  
to power and events in Germany?

285  
00:16:30,775 --> 00:16:33,460

286  
00:16:33,460 --> 00:16:36,296  
I assume you mean before  
I went into the army?

287  
00:16:36,296 --> 00:16:38,280  
Before the war.

288  
00:16:38,280 --> 00:16:39,330  
Very, very little.

289  
00:16:39,330 --> 00:16:45,780  
We recognized as being a  
threat to Europe peace,

290  
00:16:45,780 --> 00:16:48,790  
and everyone held their  
breath from that point of view

291  
00:16:48,790 --> 00:16:50,005

in the late '30s.

292

00:16:50,005 --> 00:16:52,830

293

00:16:52,830 --> 00:16:59,220

But it's Hitler's antipathy  
or singling out the Jews

294

00:16:59,220 --> 00:17:05,800

was a relatively new thing  
when I came into the army.

295

00:17:05,800 --> 00:17:10,940

I don't even remember  
hearing about Kristallnacht,

296

00:17:10,940 --> 00:17:15,430

for example, although probably  
I did, and it went right

297

00:17:15,430 --> 00:17:16,390

over my head.

298

00:17:16,390 --> 00:17:29,870

299

00:17:29,870 --> 00:17:35,948

What was happening in your  
life in 1939 and 1940?

300

00:17:35,948 --> 00:17:44,120

I graduated from high school and  
went to a Sunday school teacher

301

00:17:44,120 --> 00:17:48,140

training at Durham, New  
Hampshire, the college town.

302

00:17:48,140 --> 00:17:51,570

And I said, my god,  
this is college?

303

00:17:51,570 --> 00:17:52,730

This is great.

304

00:17:52,730 --> 00:17:53,960

This is for me.

305

00:17:53,960 --> 00:17:58,040

Nobody in my family  
had ever mentioned it.

306

00:17:58,040 --> 00:18:01,100

So I started the low way.

307

00:18:01,100 --> 00:18:05,480

The only way I could do it was  
Boston University at night.

308

00:18:05,480 --> 00:18:07,670

I did that for a  
year, and then went

309

00:18:07,670 --> 00:18:13,295

to Suffolk University days,  
working two part-time jobs.

310

00:18:13,295 --> 00:18:15,830

311

00:18:15,830 --> 00:18:19,800

And I'm starting to  
get emotional already.

312

00:18:19,800 --> 00:18:24,480

I guess my emotionalism  
is based more

313

00:18:24,480 --> 00:18:27,720

upon old memories  
in general than it

314

00:18:27,720 --> 00:18:32,160

is the combat and

Mauthausen that I thought.

315  
00:18:32,160 --> 00:18:33,810  
I'm not sure.

316  
00:18:33,810 --> 00:18:37,590  
At any rate, I went  
to Suffolk days

317  
00:18:37,590 --> 00:18:40,230  
and worked two part-time jobs.

318  
00:18:40,230 --> 00:18:44,940  
And one of the jobs I  
had had my first year,

319  
00:18:44,940 --> 00:18:47,070  
when I was going to BU  
nights, was interesting,

320  
00:18:47,070 --> 00:18:49,560  
because my mother  
immediately sent me

321  
00:18:49,560 --> 00:18:54,570  
to her brother George, who was  
treasurer of the State Street

322  
00:18:54,570 --> 00:19:00,055  
Trust back in the days  
when banks were banks.

323  
00:19:00,055 --> 00:19:00,930  
You know what I mean?

324  
00:19:00,930 --> 00:19:01,846  
[INAUDIBLE]

325  
00:19:01,846 --> 00:19:02,762  
Huh?

326  
00:19:02,762 --> 00:19:03,680

[INAUDIBLE]

327

00:19:03,680 --> 00:19:07,790

Big, big organizations, and  
being treasurer was something.

328

00:19:07,790 --> 00:19:09,890

Today, they have these  
little branches around,

329

00:19:09,890 --> 00:19:12,083

and everybody's an  
assistant treasurer.

330

00:19:12,083 --> 00:19:15,050

331

00:19:15,050 --> 00:19:17,430

There are no secretaries and  
administrative assistants

332

00:19:17,430 --> 00:19:17,930

anymore.

333

00:19:17,930 --> 00:19:19,670

They're administrators.

334

00:19:19,670 --> 00:19:21,620

At any rate, she  
sent me to George,

335

00:19:21,620 --> 00:19:25,370

and I went into his  
walnut-paneled office,

336

00:19:25,370 --> 00:19:33,450

and he referred me to  
Esterbrook and Company,

337

00:19:33,450 --> 00:19:36,540

which is a very  
classy, upscale--

338

00:19:36,540 --> 00:19:41,760

the upscale stock  
brokerage on State Street,

339

00:19:41,760 --> 00:19:44,910

just right there off  
of Washington on State.

340

00:19:44,910 --> 00:19:48,810

And I became a board  
runner with messages

341

00:19:48,810 --> 00:19:50,470

around and so on and so forth.

342

00:19:50,470 --> 00:19:55,650

And I came across  
antisemitism there personally,

343

00:19:55,650 --> 00:20:00,810

because I remember an  
old-- a very nice woman--

344

00:20:00,810 --> 00:20:06,040

nice woman that I liked.

345

00:20:06,040 --> 00:20:09,490

And all of a sudden, I'm on  
the edge of a conversation,

346

00:20:09,490 --> 00:20:13,110

and she's saying something  
to the other woman.

347

00:20:13,110 --> 00:20:14,610

And she's saying  
something about,

348

00:20:14,610 --> 00:20:19,920

shh, you'd better be quiet, you  
don't know who is these days.

349

00:20:19,920 --> 00:20:21,900

And I realized from  
something else that

350

00:20:21,900 --> 00:20:25,080

came out a minute later that  
they were talking about me

351

00:20:25,080 --> 00:20:27,780

being possibly Jewish,  
and they'd better not

352

00:20:27,780 --> 00:20:32,060

go on with their probably  
insulting statements

353

00:20:32,060 --> 00:20:35,420

or touching statements, anyway.

354

00:20:35,420 --> 00:20:37,070

So that hit home.

355

00:20:37,070 --> 00:20:38,540

That hit home.

356

00:20:38,540 --> 00:20:41,530

I didn't, of course,  
react at all.

357

00:20:41,530 --> 00:20:48,750

And my step father-- bless  
his heart-- was with a guy--

358

00:20:48,750 --> 00:20:51,420

I'm going back years  
now beforehand--

359

00:20:51,420 --> 00:20:54,240

was a guy who was very  
rough around the edges

360

00:20:54,240 --> 00:20:56,010

and had lots and

lots of problems.

361

00:20:56,010 --> 00:20:59,460

But bless his heart, he  
did lots of things for me.

362

00:20:59,460 --> 00:21:05,730

He gave me a male  
figure when I needed it.

363

00:21:05,730 --> 00:21:09,420

Even though I didn't have a  
close relationship with him,

364

00:21:09,420 --> 00:21:11,010

there was that male figure.

365

00:21:11,010 --> 00:21:17,190

And he bought one year a  
big, big saw and so forth--

366

00:21:17,190 --> 00:21:20,490

electric apparatus  
down in the cellar.

367

00:21:20,490 --> 00:21:27,900

And a friend of his was a  
Jewish pharmacist named Yarosh.

368

00:21:27,900 --> 00:21:30,510

369

00:21:30,510 --> 00:21:32,340

And he was one of the  
first-- this was back

370

00:21:32,340 --> 00:21:33,930

when I was younger.

371

00:21:33,930 --> 00:21:37,710

And he was one of the  
first mature Jewish men



372

00:21:37,710 --> 00:21:39,500

I'd ever seen.

373

00:21:39,500 --> 00:21:49,830

And I was so impressed  
back then with the delicacy

374

00:21:49,830 --> 00:21:55,460

of his features and his  
eyes and everything.

375

00:21:55,460 --> 00:21:59,270

The man was absolutely  
impressive as all hell.

376

00:21:59,270 --> 00:22:03,530

And i remember, we  
crowded around the door

377

00:22:03,530 --> 00:22:07,370

to look downstairs in the cellar  
to see what a Jew looked like.

378

00:22:07,370 --> 00:22:09,890

379

00:22:09,890 --> 00:22:14,590

And as I remember him-- and I  
do have a memory of his face--

380

00:22:14,590 --> 00:22:17,620

he was a good example--

381

00:22:17,620 --> 00:22:20,240

and I don't know where  
you're coming from.

382

00:22:20,240 --> 00:22:25,930

It makes no difference to me as  
far as what I'm about to say.

383

00:22:25,930 --> 00:22:31,660

He was a good example  
of having one leg back

384  
00:22:31,660 --> 00:22:36,750  
in the greatness of the  
Jews thousands of years ago.

385  
00:22:36,750 --> 00:22:38,500  
I don't mean that  
they're not great today.

386  
00:22:38,500 --> 00:22:41,860  
I mean that they were  
once even more impressive.

387  
00:22:41,860 --> 00:22:46,090  
They came out of  
situations in Europe

388  
00:22:46,090 --> 00:22:52,490  
and Central Asia that is  
not in our history books--

389  
00:22:52,490 --> 00:22:55,580  
not in history books at all.

390  
00:22:55,580 --> 00:22:58,922  
And so as I say, I was  
very impressed with it.

391  
00:22:58,922 --> 00:23:00,880  
And then I became impressed  
with my stepfather,

392  
00:23:00,880 --> 00:23:04,540  
that he would have  
a friend like this.

393  
00:23:04,540 --> 00:23:13,130

394  
00:23:13,130 --> 00:23:14,780  
So you were

finishing high school

395

00:23:14,780 --> 00:23:17,240  
and starting college  
around the times

396

00:23:17,240 --> 00:23:22,100  
that Austria was being  
annexed and Hitler

397

00:23:22,100 --> 00:23:25,160  
was beginning to expand.

398

00:23:25,160 --> 00:23:28,340  
I was wondering if you can  
remember how that was treated

399

00:23:28,340 --> 00:23:30,200  
by the United States  
media or if it

400

00:23:30,200 --> 00:23:32,720  
was discussed in any of your  
classes at school or anything

401

00:23:32,720 --> 00:23:33,470  
like that.

402

00:23:33,470 --> 00:23:38,130  
Do you have any recollection  
at all of those events?

403

00:23:38,130 --> 00:23:40,290  
I don't recall it being  
discussed in school,

404

00:23:40,290 --> 00:23:44,130  
because I don't  
think they figured

405

00:23:44,130 --> 00:23:45,320  
they were prepared for it.

406

00:23:45,320 --> 00:23:47,820

And I never took a course on  
current events or anything

407

00:23:47,820 --> 00:23:50,010

like that.

408

00:23:50,010 --> 00:23:55,390

If they did say anything, it  
was offhand, and then I forget.

409

00:23:55,390 --> 00:23:57,660

Do you want me to  
turn up the heat?

410

00:23:57,660 --> 00:24:03,900

The papers reported  
pretty straightly--

411

00:24:03,900 --> 00:24:08,440

annexation and Chamberlain doing  
this and so on and so forth.

412

00:24:08,440 --> 00:24:10,740

And I remember that  
the personal feelings

413

00:24:10,740 --> 00:24:14,490

on my part, on my mother's  
part, and most people

414

00:24:14,490 --> 00:24:18,840

that I heard talk about  
it were always personal.

415

00:24:18,840 --> 00:24:22,620

We were afraid of being caught  
up in another war, particularly

416

00:24:22,620 --> 00:24:23,820

those who had--

417

00:24:23,820 --> 00:24:28,160  
people all around me had one  
leg back in the First World War.

418  
00:24:28,160 --> 00:24:30,710  
And they were deathly  
afraid of this.

419  
00:24:30,710 --> 00:24:33,920  
My mother broke into tears  
many, many times about,

420  
00:24:33,920 --> 00:24:36,170  
oh, I don't want to  
see you boys go off

421  
00:24:36,170 --> 00:24:39,650  
and die like my husband  
did, your father did,

422  
00:24:39,650 --> 00:24:41,130  
et cetera, et cetera.

423  
00:24:41,130 --> 00:24:43,400  
So there was that.

424  
00:24:43,400 --> 00:24:46,850  
The Jewish theme was not  
played up in the papers

425  
00:24:46,850 --> 00:24:48,320  
particularly at all.

426  
00:24:48,320 --> 00:24:50,930

427  
00:24:50,930 --> 00:24:53,300  
Austria certainly wasn't.

428  
00:24:53,300 --> 00:24:56,600  
Poland-- no.

429

00:24:56,600 --> 00:24:59,420  
Kristallnacht, as I  
said, I forget about.

430  
00:24:59,420 --> 00:25:01,490  
I don't really have  
a memory of that.

431  
00:25:01,490 --> 00:25:02,690  
Maybe I was too young.

432  
00:25:02,690 --> 00:25:05,030  
When was that? '33?

433  
00:25:05,030 --> 00:25:10,910  
'32-'33, which meant I  
was 10, 11 years old.

434  
00:25:10,910 --> 00:25:16,480  
And let's see-- you were about  
three years old, weren't you?

435  
00:25:16,480 --> 00:25:20,830  
At any rate, I think I've  
shot my bolt on that subject.

436  
00:25:20,830 --> 00:25:25,590

437  
00:25:25,590 --> 00:25:28,800  
I want to stress again  
the personal nature--

438  
00:25:28,800 --> 00:25:33,030  
people saw things through their  
own skin and their own eyes,

439  
00:25:33,030 --> 00:25:35,500  
which is true in the war,  
which is true everywhere,

440  
00:25:35,500 --> 00:25:36,510  
which is true now.

441  
00:25:36,510 --> 00:25:41,780

442  
00:25:41,780 --> 00:25:44,330  
I'm trying to understand if  
you're telling me that you

443  
00:25:44,330 --> 00:25:45,800  
were not particularly alarmed.

444  
00:25:45,800 --> 00:25:48,680

445  
00:25:48,680 --> 00:25:51,470  
Other than the  
possibility of American

446  
00:25:51,470 --> 00:25:53,910  
involvement when it came  
to the invasion of Poland,

447  
00:25:53,910 --> 00:25:56,790  
for example, in the  
onset of the war,

448  
00:25:56,790 --> 00:25:58,340  
am I understanding  
you correctly?

449  
00:25:58,340 --> 00:26:01,880  
Was that pretty much the extent  
of the reaction of yourself

450  
00:26:01,880 --> 00:26:07,040  
and the people around you, that  
when Hitler invaded Poland,

451  
00:26:07,040 --> 00:26:09,170  
the main concern  
was that America

452

00:26:09,170 --> 00:26:12,000  
would become involved possibly?

453  
00:26:12,000 --> 00:26:17,025  
I would have to say that  
that was the leading feeling.

454  
00:26:17,025 --> 00:26:20,210

455  
00:26:20,210 --> 00:26:23,330  
I don't think that  
anyone was, in my circles

456  
00:26:23,330 --> 00:26:28,340  
or in my family or  
anything, for Hitler at all.

457  
00:26:28,340 --> 00:26:29,860  
I don't mean that.

458  
00:26:29,860 --> 00:26:35,240  
I mean they recognized him  
as being a monomaniac and war

459  
00:26:35,240 --> 00:26:36,450  
lover and so forth.

460  
00:26:36,450 --> 00:26:39,440  
But people pretty  
well personalized it.

461  
00:26:39,440 --> 00:26:42,230  
I just can't  
overemphasize that at all.

462  
00:26:42,230 --> 00:26:44,360  
It was a personal thing.

463  
00:26:44,360 --> 00:26:45,290  
I was afraid.

464



00:26:45,290 --> 00:26:47,840

I didn't want my  
young life interrupted

465

00:26:47,840 --> 00:26:49,310

with that sort of stuff.

466

00:26:49,310 --> 00:26:54,525

And my mother was deathly  
afraid of it, crying again.

467

00:26:54,525 --> 00:26:55,025

And--

468

00:26:55,025 --> 00:27:03,710

469

00:27:03,710 --> 00:27:05,990

You mentioned the  
reaction toward Hitler.

470

00:27:05,990 --> 00:27:09,350

What about the reactions  
in this country regarding

471

00:27:09,350 --> 00:27:11,690

Stalin, because  
Hitler and Stalin had

472

00:27:11,690 --> 00:27:13,220

signed a non-aggression pact?

473

00:27:13,220 --> 00:27:17,710

Did that set up any red flags  
as far as you can remember?

474

00:27:17,710 --> 00:27:21,470

475

00:27:21,470 --> 00:27:28,901

I remember it as being thought  
of as a stab in the back

476

00:27:28,901 --> 00:27:33,160  
and two dictators  
getting together.

477

00:27:33,160 --> 00:27:38,080  
I think that there was more  
feeling over those years

478

00:27:38,080 --> 00:27:39,160  
anyway.

479

00:27:39,160 --> 00:27:45,550  
Proceeding is against Russia  
probably because of propaganda

480

00:27:45,550 --> 00:27:48,820  
on the part of some people  
and so on, and partly

481

00:27:48,820 --> 00:27:53,350  
for very real reasons about  
what Stalin was doing.

482

00:27:53,350 --> 00:28:00,080  
Although just like  
Hitler, the real stories

483

00:28:00,080 --> 00:28:03,890  
of what would happen as a  
result of Stalin's influence

484

00:28:03,890 --> 00:28:06,050  
and Hitler's influence  
didn't come out until

485

00:28:06,050 --> 00:28:10,070  
much later, much later.

486

00:28:10,070 --> 00:28:12,410  
When the time came for--

487

00:28:12,410 --> 00:28:18,020

when we were in the war, I  
think that fear of Russia--

488  
00:28:18,020 --> 00:28:24,350  
this was before the stuff about  
the camps ad become obvious--

489  
00:28:24,350 --> 00:28:29,810  
the fear of Russia was greater  
than the fear of Germany.

490  
00:28:29,810 --> 00:28:31,750  
Definitely-- a fear of Russia.

491  
00:28:31,750 --> 00:28:46,460

492  
00:28:46,460 --> 00:28:50,060  
During the period of time  
between the beginning

493  
00:28:50,060 --> 00:28:56,090  
of the war in September  
of '39 and Pearl Harbor,

494  
00:28:56,090 --> 00:29:04,450  
how did the war in Europe impact  
your personal life experience?

495  
00:29:04,450 --> 00:29:09,960  
Again, personal-- I  
had my own agenda,

496  
00:29:09,960 --> 00:29:16,910  
which was to get college  
and to be a writer

497  
00:29:16,910 --> 00:29:25,480  
and to have some kind  
of a life in addition

498  
00:29:25,480 --> 00:29:31,870  
to that, when all young men

would want and engage in,

499

00:29:31,870 --> 00:29:37,150

et cetera, et cetera,  
going places, et cetera.

500

00:29:37,150 --> 00:29:39,010

For a long time  
in that period, I

501

00:29:39,010 --> 00:29:44,290

was social chairman of  
the young group at church.

502

00:29:44,290 --> 00:29:51,400

And so I threw dances  
that joined five churches

503

00:29:51,400 --> 00:29:55,990

in the West Roxbury  
Roslindale area in a group,

504

00:29:55,990 --> 00:29:59,060

and we invited them to the  
dances and so on and so forth.

505

00:29:59,060 --> 00:30:03,460

And we had trips from on  
the Provincetown steel pier

506

00:30:03,460 --> 00:30:07,870

ship and other events  
that we planned.

507

00:30:07,870 --> 00:30:09,310

I was caught up in these things.

508

00:30:09,310 --> 00:30:13,510

These things were, in the long  
run, more important to me,

509

00:30:13,510 --> 00:30:15,760

except for the fear

of the headlines.

510

00:30:15,760 --> 00:30:18,520

511

00:30:18,520 --> 00:30:20,560

I hate to sound shallow,  
but that was it.

512

00:30:20,560 --> 00:30:29,280

513

00:30:29,280 --> 00:30:32,760

When you look back on your life  
before American involvement

514

00:30:32,760 --> 00:30:34,740

in the war, is  
there anything else

515

00:30:34,740 --> 00:30:37,820

that stands out in your  
mind about your life

516

00:30:37,820 --> 00:30:40,973

before World War II  
and the United States'

517

00:30:40,973 --> 00:30:42,140

involvement in World War II?

518

00:30:42,140 --> 00:30:42,790

Anything else?

519

00:30:42,790 --> 00:30:54,680

520

00:30:54,680 --> 00:30:59,460

I can't think of anything  
that's worth putting out now.

521

00:30:59,460 --> 00:31:03,540

Minutia, but my life consisted  
of the things I said.

522  
00:31:03,540 --> 00:31:06,560

523  
00:31:06,560 --> 00:31:11,030  
And I didn't really snap  
to until some events

524  
00:31:11,030 --> 00:31:13,850  
during the war  
and afterward made

525  
00:31:13,850 --> 00:31:17,110  
a different person out of me--

526  
00:31:17,110 --> 00:31:18,940  
really, a different person.

527  
00:31:18,940 --> 00:31:26,690  
Not just more maturity,  
but changed me

528  
00:31:26,690 --> 00:31:29,390  
within the context of who I am--

529  
00:31:29,390 --> 00:31:32,290  
whatever I mean by that.

530  
00:31:32,290 --> 00:31:35,470  
All right, we're going to pause,  
and I'm going to flip the tape.

531  
00:31:35,470 --> 00:31:43,470

532  
00:31:43,470 --> 00:31:45,180  
The state's Holocaust  
Memorial Museum

533  
00:31:45,180 --> 00:31:47,730

volunteer collection  
interview with George Leonard.

534  
00:31:47,730 --> 00:31:51,900  
This is tape number  
one, side B. When

535  
00:31:51,900 --> 00:31:56,340  
did you first learn about  
the attack on Pearl Harbor?

536  
00:31:56,340 --> 00:31:59,430  
Most people can say that they  
remember it quite vividly.

537  
00:31:59,430 --> 00:32:01,200  
When did you hear about Pearl?

538  
00:32:01,200 --> 00:32:05,470

539  
00:32:05,470 --> 00:32:08,890  
I remember the occasion  
very, very vividly,

540  
00:32:08,890 --> 00:32:11,500  
because I had been  
working that afternoon

541  
00:32:11,500 --> 00:32:19,350  
in the church mimeographing  
a newsletter to all

542  
00:32:19,350 --> 00:32:23,500  
the young people around.

543  
00:32:23,500 --> 00:32:25,170  
So I got hold of  
the news around two

544  
00:32:25,170 --> 00:32:27,960  
or three o'clock our  
time in the afternoon.

545

00:32:27,960 --> 00:32:34,360  
And right away again, personal--

546

00:32:34,360 --> 00:32:36,030  
what's going to happen to me?

547

00:32:36,030 --> 00:32:38,970  
What's going to happen  
to me and my friends?

548

00:32:38,970 --> 00:32:41,960  
What's going to  
happen to America?

549

00:32:41,960 --> 00:32:50,590  
And a sidelight on this is that  
the one person I was closest to

550

00:32:50,590 --> 00:32:54,280  
during the whole combat  
experience, Captain

551

00:32:54,280 --> 00:32:59,210  
[? Kirkabou, ?] had been an  
enlisted non-commissioned

552

00:32:59,210 --> 00:33:04,820  
officer at Pearl Harbor  
in the regular army.

553

00:33:04,820 --> 00:33:07,890  
And he was a man  
without education

554

00:33:07,890 --> 00:33:13,140  
and without any  
softening effects

555

00:33:13,140 --> 00:33:17,130  
that you usually  
get in civilization.



556

00:33:17,130 --> 00:33:22,080

But he turned out to be not  
only a magnificent officer

557

00:33:22,080 --> 00:33:28,760

in combat, but a  
great guy who was--

558

00:33:28,760 --> 00:33:33,380

I don't-- do you want-- is it  
all right if I tell you about

559

00:33:33,380 --> 00:33:37,220

a scene in Mauthausen  
with him now,

560

00:33:37,220 --> 00:33:38,780

or should I let  
that go to later?

561

00:33:38,780 --> 00:33:39,630

Leave it for later.

562

00:33:39,630 --> 00:33:40,130

OK.

563

00:33:40,130 --> 00:33:45,480

564

00:33:45,480 --> 00:33:49,180

We'll get to your experiences  
in Mauthausen with him later.

565

00:33:49,180 --> 00:33:53,460

But when you heard  
about Pearl Harbor, what

566

00:33:53,460 --> 00:33:56,660

was its immediate  
impact on your life?

567

00:33:56,660 --> 00:34:02,040

568  
00:34:02,040 --> 00:34:03,525  
Impact in my life was--

569  
00:34:03,525 --> 00:34:06,960

570  
00:34:06,960 --> 00:34:10,949  
immediate impact was  
nothing except personal fear

571  
00:34:10,949 --> 00:34:14,070  
and wonderment, et cetera.

572  
00:34:14,070 --> 00:34:17,800  
The more long-range, that  
is in the ensuing months,

573  
00:34:17,800 --> 00:34:20,130  
and I don't recall  
exactly when, I

574  
00:34:20,130 --> 00:34:27,400  
enlisted in the enlisted reserve  
and expected them to take me up

575  
00:34:27,400 --> 00:34:29,050  
right away.

576  
00:34:29,050 --> 00:34:31,270  
But they said they  
have the right

577  
00:34:31,270 --> 00:34:34,929  
to do what they wanted to  
do with the enlisted reserve

578  
00:34:34,929 --> 00:34:39,610  
people, so they said, stay at  
Suffolk for a while, at least

579

00:34:39,610 --> 00:34:41,770  
until you finish the year.

580  
00:34:41,770 --> 00:34:44,784  
So I finished the year,  
and then I wrote to them.

581  
00:34:44,784 --> 00:34:46,840  
And I said, here,  
here, come take me.

582  
00:34:46,840 --> 00:34:47,739  
I'm through.

583  
00:34:47,739 --> 00:34:50,020  
And they ignored me,  
and they ignored me

584  
00:34:50,020 --> 00:35:02,580  
until the fall of that  
year, which was 1942.

585  
00:35:02,580 --> 00:35:09,280  
When they did take you,  
what was your basic training

586  
00:35:09,280 --> 00:35:11,620  
and your initiation  
into the military?

587  
00:35:11,620 --> 00:35:14,310  
What was that experience like?

588  
00:35:14,310 --> 00:35:20,810  
It was pretty strong.

589  
00:35:20,810 --> 00:35:24,950  
I stayed at Fort Devens  
for a while, being bored,

590  
00:35:24,950 --> 00:35:27,900  
but then they sent me down  
to Fort McClellan, Alabama,

591  
00:35:27,900 --> 00:35:32,120  
which had been written about  
by Walter Winchell as being

592  
00:35:32,120 --> 00:35:36,500  
a hellhole of America, and had  
the usual basic training there

593  
00:35:36,500 --> 00:35:40,160  
in the cold mud, which  
in the long run was--

594  
00:35:40,160 --> 00:35:43,100  
I wouldn't want to do it  
again, but it was good for me,

595  
00:35:43,100 --> 00:35:43,730  
damn good.

596  
00:35:43,730 --> 00:35:49,010

597  
00:35:49,010 --> 00:35:53,180  
How long was your  
basic training?

598  
00:35:53,180 --> 00:35:57,470  
Started out at six weeks, but  
I think it went to closer to 12

599  
00:35:57,470 --> 00:35:59,390  
by the time they finished.

600  
00:35:59,390 --> 00:36:02,660  
From there, they shipped me to  
the sixth motorized division

601  
00:36:02,660 --> 00:36:09,320  
in the California desert, which  
was training to go to Japan,

602

00:36:09,320 --> 00:36:11,120  
the islands, et cetera.

603  
00:36:11,120 --> 00:36:14,630  
All the training was  
motivated toward that.

604  
00:36:14,630 --> 00:36:16,790  
And I had been with  
them for a while

605  
00:36:16,790 --> 00:36:21,380  
in the desert, eating sand and  
so forth, and all of a sudden,

606  
00:36:21,380 --> 00:36:26,950  
a Jeep came up one day with  
a lieutenant and a sergeant

607  
00:36:26,950 --> 00:36:27,450  
in it.

608  
00:36:27,450 --> 00:36:31,610  
And the sergeant jumped out and  
said, are you George Leonard?

609  
00:36:31,610 --> 00:36:33,140  
And I said, yeah.

610  
00:36:33,140 --> 00:36:39,060  
And he said, you  
were ordered to go

611  
00:36:39,060 --> 00:36:43,710  
at oh-something o'clock tomorrow  
morning to Stanford University.

612  
00:36:43,710 --> 00:36:47,050

613  
00:36:47,050 --> 00:36:49,510  
This was almost the  
first I had heard

614  
00:36:49,510 --> 00:36:52,070  
of army specialized training.

615  
00:36:52,070 --> 00:36:53,400  
Do you know about it?

616  
00:36:53,400 --> 00:36:57,110

617  
00:36:57,110 --> 00:37:06,540  
Which was a program to  
train young men particularly

618  
00:37:06,540 --> 00:37:08,570  
for a long war.

619  
00:37:08,570 --> 00:37:11,850  
They feared that they were  
going to be light on officers

620  
00:37:11,850 --> 00:37:19,260  
and occupiers later on, and so  
they got this mammoth program

621  
00:37:19,260 --> 00:37:24,780  
of giving you a full  
semester of basic engineering

622  
00:37:24,780 --> 00:37:27,090  
or there were other--

623  
00:37:27,090 --> 00:37:31,650  
there was medicine, for example,  
with some lucky to get in it--

624  
00:37:31,650 --> 00:37:34,350  
basic engineering  
in three months.

625  
00:37:34,350 --> 00:37:36,390  
So I was there in the program.

626

00:37:36,390 --> 00:37:39,150

I went from Stanford to  
University of California

627

00:37:39,150 --> 00:37:41,610

at Berkeley, where  
I had the training.

628

00:37:41,610 --> 00:37:44,250

Stanford was only for  
a couple of weeks.

629

00:37:44,250 --> 00:37:49,950

And nine months,  
three full semesters,

630

00:37:49,950 --> 00:37:53,910

and then all of a sudden, they  
disbanded the program totally

631

00:37:53,910 --> 00:37:55,620

and sent us to--

632

00:37:55,620 --> 00:37:58,350

most of us in that  
particular unit

633

00:37:58,350 --> 00:38:02,640

in California-- to the 11th  
Armored Division, which

634

00:38:02,640 --> 00:38:04,260

was in Camp Cooke, California.

635

00:38:04,260 --> 00:38:07,310

636

00:38:07,310 --> 00:38:11,480

I must say that one of  
the most important aspects

637

00:38:11,480 --> 00:38:14,870  
of the training was not only  
the physics, math, and calculus,

638  
00:38:14,870 --> 00:38:18,180  
and stuff like  
that, and chemistry,

639  
00:38:18,180 --> 00:38:20,070  
but it was a course  
that they had,

640  
00:38:20,070 --> 00:38:22,065  
and most people just  
overlooked it completely,

641  
00:38:22,065 --> 00:38:24,310  
and they overlook it today.

642  
00:38:24,310 --> 00:38:27,720  
They don't really know  
what it must have been for.

643  
00:38:27,720 --> 00:38:29,820  
It was a course  
designed to teach us

644  
00:38:29,820 --> 00:38:33,790  
the sociology,  
psychology, geography,

645  
00:38:33,790 --> 00:38:38,040  
et cetera of Kazakhstan,  
Uzbekistan, all

646  
00:38:38,040 --> 00:38:41,280  
those Asian republics.

647  
00:38:41,280 --> 00:38:45,390  
And the purpose  
could only have been,

648  
00:38:45,390 --> 00:38:47,190



well, these armored  
divisions are

649  
00:38:47,190 --> 00:38:50,280  
going to go on into Central  
Asia and take it all over.

650  
00:38:50,280 --> 00:38:54,540

651  
00:38:54,540 --> 00:38:56,530  
Then the rest of the  
story, of course,

652  
00:38:56,530 --> 00:38:59,170  
there is that in the  
fall of that year,

653  
00:38:59,170 --> 00:39:01,770  
we were shipped to England.

654  
00:39:01,770 --> 00:39:04,075  
And when the Bulge  
started, we were--

655  
00:39:04,075 --> 00:39:06,450  
Battle of the Bulge-- we were  
shipped across the channel.

656  
00:39:06,450 --> 00:39:12,950

657  
00:39:12,950 --> 00:39:16,640  
Tell me about the trip from  
the States over to Europe

658  
00:39:16,640 --> 00:39:20,960  
and then into the  
actual theater of war.

659  
00:39:20,960 --> 00:39:22,224  
When did you leave?

660

00:39:22,224 --> 00:39:33,370

661

00:39:33,370 --> 00:39:45,070

We left for England sometime  
in the summer of '44,

662

00:39:45,070 --> 00:39:52,020

stayed in England until  
something like late November,

663

00:39:52,020 --> 00:39:53,910

and were shipped  
across the channel when

664

00:39:53,910 --> 00:39:56,430

the Battle of the  
Bulge occurred.

665

00:39:56,430 --> 00:40:02,770

The trip over on the boat was  
not a nice experience at all.

666

00:40:02,770 --> 00:40:06,960

I mean, we were down on the hull  
of the ship and the air was bad

667

00:40:06,960 --> 00:40:10,000

and the food was  
bad and everything.

668

00:40:10,000 --> 00:40:12,120

The only important thing  
that happened to me

669

00:40:12,120 --> 00:40:18,488

was that I asked  
one of the sergeants

670

00:40:18,488 --> 00:40:22,220

how you bet in shooting  
craps, and he told me

671

00:40:22,220 --> 00:40:25,990  
to always bet against the dice.

672

00:40:25,990 --> 00:40:28,610  
And I misunderstood,  
and I bet with the dice,

673

00:40:28,610 --> 00:40:32,020  
and I won something  
like \$1,000 and gave it

674

00:40:32,020 --> 00:40:34,570  
to the first sergeant to  
keeping the company safe

675

00:40:34,570 --> 00:40:36,970  
or for something  
or other like that.

676

00:40:36,970 --> 00:40:41,590  
When I got to England, I sent  
about three quarters of it

677

00:40:41,590 --> 00:40:45,410  
back to my mother, and  
then used the rest of it

678

00:40:45,410 --> 00:40:47,090  
on splurges in London.

679

00:40:47,090 --> 00:40:53,110

680

00:40:53,110 --> 00:40:57,310  
When you arrived  
in England, what

681

00:40:57,310 --> 00:41:02,850  
was your rank and your duties  
and your responsibilities?

682

00:41:02,850 --> 00:41:08,210

When I arrived in England, I  
was a private first class--

683  
00:41:08,210 --> 00:41:12,540  
a rifleman.

684  
00:41:12,540 --> 00:41:17,100  
I guess the military  
occupation specialty was 750--

685  
00:41:17,100 --> 00:41:19,050  
I forget.

686  
00:41:19,050 --> 00:41:24,760  
Rifleman with a  
subheading of machine gun.

687  
00:41:24,760 --> 00:41:27,340  
That was it.

688  
00:41:27,340 --> 00:41:31,270  
As a rifleman, I'd become expert  
in stripping down a rifle,

689  
00:41:31,270 --> 00:41:34,250  
putting it back  
together, cleaning it,

690  
00:41:34,250 --> 00:41:35,210  
et cetera, et cetera.

691  
00:41:35,210 --> 00:41:38,350

692  
00:41:38,350 --> 00:41:40,740  
Who was your commanding  
officer, and who were some

693  
00:41:40,740 --> 00:41:43,780  
of the members of your unit?

694  
00:41:43,780 --> 00:41:45,610

Commanding officer  
was a guy named--

695  
00:41:45,610 --> 00:41:51,030

696  
00:41:51,030 --> 00:41:54,060  
don't recall his  
name now, but he's

697  
00:41:54,060 --> 00:41:58,070  
the one who, going up the  
hill after we first got

698  
00:41:58,070 --> 00:42:02,430  
bombarded by Tiger  
tanks in Belgium--

699  
00:42:02,430 --> 00:42:05,580  
he was the one that got the  
bullet right through the head.

700  
00:42:05,580 --> 00:42:12,880  
And the first lieutenant  
of the company,

701  
00:42:12,880 --> 00:42:17,680  
Lieutenant [? Kirkabou, ?]  
became immediately the captain.

702  
00:42:17,680 --> 00:42:22,900  
And when he couldn't find  
Labadie, the sociopath,

703  
00:42:22,900 --> 00:42:27,170  
he yelled for me to get him  
in the command half track

704  
00:42:27,170 --> 00:42:28,490  
and be his company runner.

705  
00:42:28,490 --> 00:42:32,510

706  
00:42:32,510 --> 00:42:34,850  
What does it mean to  
be the company runner?

707  
00:42:34,850 --> 00:42:37,700  
What exactly is that?

708  
00:42:37,700 --> 00:42:42,140  
Company runner-- it's a  
variety of functions--

709  
00:42:42,140 --> 00:42:44,750  
predominantly to stay  
close to the captain

710  
00:42:44,750 --> 00:42:50,330  
and maintain communications  
with the platoon lieutenants,

711  
00:42:50,330 --> 00:42:53,090  
or in our case, the  
platoon lieutenants

712  
00:42:53,090 --> 00:42:54,530  
get killed off too quickly.

713  
00:42:54,530 --> 00:42:57,230  
They were platoon sergeants--

714  
00:42:57,230 --> 00:43:04,830  
and to keep contact  
through walkie talkie type.

715  
00:43:04,830 --> 00:43:09,090  
And in the half  
track on the move,

716  
00:43:09,090 --> 00:43:11,910  
to get from division  
headquarters

717

00:43:11,910 --> 00:43:17,340  
by radio, the code for  
the next day's march--

718  
00:43:17,340 --> 00:43:21,480  
translate that code, make  
sure that the captain got it,

719  
00:43:21,480 --> 00:43:26,130  
and advise him as the  
company moved forward--

720  
00:43:26,130 --> 00:43:34,500  
advising meaning the road  
signs, in many cases,

721  
00:43:34,500 --> 00:43:38,580  
were all bollixed up on  
purpose and things like that.

722  
00:43:38,580 --> 00:43:43,980  
And you had to use  
some ingenuity or sense

723  
00:43:43,980 --> 00:43:46,958  
to know which way you were  
going, things like that.

724  
00:43:46,958 --> 00:43:48,750  
And this was particularly  
important for us,

725  
00:43:48,750 --> 00:43:53,520  
because our company and  
battalion turned out

726  
00:43:53,520 --> 00:43:57,420  
to be the point, pretty  
much, of the division.

727  
00:43:57,420 --> 00:44:00,990  
And the division turned out to  
be the point of Patton's Third

728

00:44:00,990 --> 00:44:02,520

Army.

729

00:44:02,520 --> 00:44:05,310

The exception to that  
was when the 4th Armored,

730

00:44:05,310 --> 00:44:09,650

which was the most magnificent  
Armored Division in Europe--

731

00:44:09,650 --> 00:44:11,510

I have to give them credit.

732

00:44:11,510 --> 00:44:13,825

They had been through  
France and Italy and France

733

00:44:13,825 --> 00:44:14,450

and everything.

734

00:44:14,450 --> 00:44:17,780

The 4th Armored was superb.

735

00:44:17,780 --> 00:44:22,490

They were on a tangent with  
us like that moving forward.

736

00:44:22,490 --> 00:44:25,520

But other times, we were  
the point like that,

737

00:44:25,520 --> 00:44:29,300

and the foot infantry  
would be coming sometimes

738

00:44:29,300 --> 00:44:35,175

50 miles behind mopping up  
towns that we had bypassed,

739

00:44:35,175 --> 00:44:36,050

et cetera, et cetera.



740  
00:44:36,050 --> 00:44:40,010  
We just went like  
wildfire sometimes.

741  
00:44:40,010 --> 00:44:44,610  
And it was a hair  
raising experience,

742  
00:44:44,610 --> 00:44:46,670  
but at the same time,  
it was exhilarating,

743  
00:44:46,670 --> 00:44:47,770  
et cetera, et cetera.

744  
00:44:47,770 --> 00:44:50,340

745  
00:44:50,340 --> 00:44:54,390  
When you say the point, let me  
make sure I'm understanding.

746  
00:44:54,390 --> 00:44:56,840  
You're saying that you  
were the first to arrive?

747  
00:44:56,840 --> 00:44:59,940  
The point, meaning the division.

748  
00:44:59,940 --> 00:45:04,530  
The division might move  
ahead like an arrow,

749  
00:45:04,530 --> 00:45:09,030  
and the point would be  
responsible for meeting

750  
00:45:09,030 --> 00:45:13,140  
the enemy and dealing  
with it first.

751

00:45:13,140 --> 00:45:16,800  
And the most dangerous  
job in the whole army,

752  
00:45:16,800 --> 00:45:20,220  
practically, was to  
be reconnaissance.

753  
00:45:20,220 --> 00:45:24,137  
And our combat command--

754  
00:45:24,137 --> 00:45:26,220  
there were two combatant  
commands in the reserve--

755  
00:45:26,220 --> 00:45:27,890  
combat A and B--

756  
00:45:27,890 --> 00:45:32,010  
our combat command had  
its own reconnaissance,

757  
00:45:32,010 --> 00:45:34,830  
which meant guys  
that would sometimes

758  
00:45:34,830 --> 00:45:38,790  
go forward not just in armored  
vehicles, but in Jeeps--

759  
00:45:38,790 --> 00:45:40,710  
we called them peeps--

760  
00:45:40,710 --> 00:45:44,010  
and go until they met the enemy.

761  
00:45:44,010 --> 00:45:46,350  
And more than  
once, we'd be going

762  
00:45:46,350 --> 00:45:50,760  
along a road as the  
point of the army,

763  
00:45:50,760 --> 00:45:55,260  
and find a wrecked Jeep  
with bodies on the road.

764  
00:45:55,260 --> 00:45:57,870  
You see how dangerous  
that job was?

765  
00:45:57,870 --> 00:46:00,160  
When they discovered the  
enemy, they'd usually

766  
00:46:00,160 --> 00:46:04,170  
be dead, that sort of thing.

767  
00:46:04,170 --> 00:46:06,540  
I met a few of these guys--

768  
00:46:06,540 --> 00:46:09,660  
the ones that lived.

769  
00:46:09,660 --> 00:46:10,860  
Phyllis and I met them.

770  
00:46:10,860 --> 00:46:14,880  
She came with me to the first  
reunion I've ever been to.

771  
00:46:14,880 --> 00:46:16,380  
Never went to an army--

772  
00:46:16,380 --> 00:46:18,450  
11th Armored Division reunion.

773  
00:46:18,450 --> 00:46:24,530  
We went to Reno last August,  
and it was very interesting.

774  
00:46:24,530 --> 00:46:27,840

775

00:46:27,840 --> 00:46:29,650

Were there any  
Jews in your unit?

776

00:46:29,650 --> 00:46:30,150

What?

777

00:46:30,150 --> 00:46:33,990

Any Jews in your unit?

778

00:46:33,990 --> 00:46:34,670

Yes, ma'am.

779

00:46:34,670 --> 00:46:39,580

780

00:46:39,580 --> 00:46:44,320

I didn't know any of these guys  
and almost any in the reunion,

781

00:46:44,320 --> 00:46:49,420

because the ones I knew in my  
company had been killed off

782

00:46:49,420 --> 00:46:51,880

or were dead by then.

783

00:46:51,880 --> 00:46:56,110

But there were a few from  
recon and a few from the tanks

784

00:46:56,110 --> 00:46:59,210

and a few from artillery  
and so forth there.

785

00:46:59,210 --> 00:47:03,830

And the guy that befriended  
Phyllis and me, him

786

00:47:03,830 --> 00:47:06,830

and his wife--

787

00:47:06,830 --> 00:47:11,690

he was Jewish, and he had  
been an officer back then.

788

00:47:11,690 --> 00:47:16,760

And the officer-- and I  
think his name was Abrams--

789

00:47:16,760 --> 00:47:21,410

who commanded the  
21st Armored Infantry

790

00:47:21,410 --> 00:47:25,430

Battalion when the whole  
battalion moved together--

791

00:47:25,430 --> 00:47:27,890

he'd get out in  
front of the tank--

792

00:47:27,890 --> 00:47:32,400

a Jewish officer, a colonel--

793

00:47:32,400 --> 00:47:36,420

and stand up in the  
turret and a gung ho guy.

794

00:47:36,420 --> 00:47:37,480

Let's go like this.

795

00:47:37,480 --> 00:47:42,230

He was magnificent.

796

00:47:42,230 --> 00:47:45,850

I can't praise him too much.

797

00:47:45,850 --> 00:47:47,680

There was a guy  
named Jacobson who

798

00:47:47,680 --> 00:47:52,450

had been my first

sergeant in the States

799

00:47:52,450 --> 00:47:55,060  
when I first joined the 11th.

800

00:47:55,060 --> 00:48:02,760  
Jacobson-- he owned a  
taxi company in Albany.

801

00:48:02,760 --> 00:48:07,590  
And he was a five striper,  
which was the typical rank

802

00:48:07,590 --> 00:48:11,450  
for the platoon sergeants.

803

00:48:11,450 --> 00:48:13,290  
There'd be lieutenant over them.

804

00:48:13,290 --> 00:48:17,460  
Five stripes for-- he  
was a five striper.

805

00:48:17,460 --> 00:48:22,770  
And he used to do things  
for me, and I wondered why.

806

00:48:22,770 --> 00:48:26,020  
And it went on like this.

807

00:48:26,020 --> 00:48:29,520  
He was favoritism galore.

808

00:48:29,520 --> 00:48:34,050  
And something happened, and he  
said to me, you're not Jewish?

809

00:48:34,050 --> 00:48:34,650  
he said.

810

00:48:34,650 --> 00:48:35,850  
I thought you was a Heb.

811  
00:48:35,850 --> 00:48:38,898

812  
00:48:38,898 --> 00:48:40,440  
He really thought  
I was Jewish, which

813  
00:48:40,440 --> 00:48:42,420  
is why he had caught on to me.

814  
00:48:42,420 --> 00:48:45,070

815  
00:48:45,070 --> 00:48:50,700  
I must add that when the  
army specialized training

816  
00:48:50,700 --> 00:48:57,690  
guys flooded into the division  
and filled up the empty slots,

817  
00:48:57,690 --> 00:49:02,770  
that there were a lot of  
Jewish boys in that group.

818  
00:49:02,770 --> 00:49:05,170  
I wouldn't say a  
significant number,

819  
00:49:05,170 --> 00:49:06,910  
but there were quite a few.

820  
00:49:06,910 --> 00:49:10,675  
And they helped 11.

821  
00:49:10,675 --> 00:49:12,880  
Some of the notes I've  
made, as a matter of fact,

822  
00:49:12,880 --> 00:49:21,140  
show that our company consisted

of three or four major groups.

823

00:49:21,140 --> 00:49:26,500

One is the old, hard-bitten,  
grizzled guy who had been with

824

00:49:26,500 --> 00:49:28,690

them since Camp  
Polk, Louisiana--

825

00:49:28,690 --> 00:49:32,800

was usually in his mid-upper  
20s, sometimes early 30s.

826

00:49:32,800 --> 00:49:37,210

Tough-- I'm generalizing--  
tough, et cetera.

827

00:49:37,210 --> 00:49:40,870

Another group consisted  
of the ASTP that came in,

828

00:49:40,870 --> 00:49:46,000

like me, who tended  
to be certainly

829

00:49:46,000 --> 00:49:48,670

more intellectual and  
capable, because you had

830

00:49:48,670 --> 00:49:52,900

to have a certain grade in the  
army general classification

831

00:49:52,900 --> 00:49:57,640

test in order to get into it,  
which is the only criteria they

832

00:49:57,640 --> 00:50:01,490

had for me when they came  
out in the desert and said,

833

00:50:01,490 --> 00:50:03,880



you're going to Stanford  
tomorrow morning.

834  
00:50:03,880 --> 00:50:08,431  
It was the AGCT test  
result. That was all.

835  
00:50:08,431 --> 00:50:10,270  
At any rate, there  
were those two groups

836  
00:50:10,270 --> 00:50:13,060  
plus the third group-- by  
the time the war ended,

837  
00:50:13,060 --> 00:50:18,910  
all of the kids that had come  
in from replacement depots

838  
00:50:18,910 --> 00:50:22,210  
and so forth, replacing the ones  
that got killed and wounded.

839  
00:50:22,210 --> 00:50:24,460  
So you had some  
major factions there

840  
00:50:24,460 --> 00:50:30,960  
which colored how  
Mauthausen was dealt with.

841  
00:50:30,960 --> 00:50:34,620  
Now, if you were  
in one faction, you

842  
00:50:34,620 --> 00:50:37,810  
tended to have one feeling--

843  
00:50:37,810 --> 00:50:41,770  
this is a big generality,  
a really big generality,

844  
00:50:41,770 --> 00:50:45,580

but you can make some  
safe generalities.

845  
00:50:45,580 --> 00:50:51,630  
And so at any rate,  
if you were ASTP,

846  
00:50:51,630 --> 00:50:53,490  
army specialized  
training, you tended

847  
00:50:53,490 --> 00:50:56,040  
to have a greater understanding  
of what was going on

848  
00:50:56,040 --> 00:51:04,230  
with the camps, and you  
tended to be more oriented

849  
00:51:04,230 --> 00:51:07,080  
toward doing something  
consciously instead of trying

850  
00:51:07,080 --> 00:51:10,730  
to get out of  
something, et cetera.

851  
00:51:10,730 --> 00:51:14,330

852  
00:51:14,330 --> 00:51:20,210  
Did you witness any  
antisemitism in the army?

853  
00:51:20,210 --> 00:51:22,570  
Do you mean that  
personally, or--

854  
00:51:22,570 --> 00:51:23,570  
Did you see it?

855  
00:51:23,570 --> 00:51:24,410  
Did I see it?

856  
00:51:24,410 --> 00:51:27,970

857  
00:51:27,970 --> 00:51:32,870  
Yeah, but not  
much, nothing much.

858  
00:51:32,870 --> 00:51:35,030  
Coming back on the boat--

859  
00:51:35,030 --> 00:51:37,460  
I was shipped because  
I had a lot of points

860  
00:51:37,460 --> 00:51:40,912  
through a Bronze  
Star and a Purple

861  
00:51:40,912 --> 00:51:42,120  
Heart and a few other things.

862  
00:51:42,120 --> 00:51:44,870  
And I had more points  
than most in my division,

863  
00:51:44,870 --> 00:51:48,410  
and they shipped me to  
the 79th Infantry Division

864  
00:51:48,410 --> 00:51:52,400  
in Kitzingen, which  
was ready to go home.

865  
00:51:52,400 --> 00:51:56,360  
And coming back on that  
boat, I met and worked

866  
00:51:56,360 --> 00:52:01,610  
with a lot of guys who were  
Jewish, because at that point,

867

00:52:01,610 --> 00:52:04,640  
they shoved me into  
a clerical situation

868  
00:52:04,640 --> 00:52:08,120  
because of a minimum of  
college I had had and so forth.

869  
00:52:08,120 --> 00:52:12,800  
And the 79th needed  
that, for some reason.

870  
00:52:12,800 --> 00:52:15,830  
And I found Jewish guys galore.

871  
00:52:15,830 --> 00:52:25,640  
And they were good-naturedly  
dealt with among that class,

872  
00:52:25,640 --> 00:52:27,530  
the clerical class.

873  
00:52:27,530 --> 00:52:33,020  
And good friends, and I  
never really saw antisemitism

874  
00:52:33,020 --> 00:52:35,420  
among those groups.

875  
00:52:35,420 --> 00:52:37,130  
I remember playing  
bridge with them

876  
00:52:37,130 --> 00:52:40,710  
on the deck, stripped  
to our waist,

877  
00:52:40,710 --> 00:52:45,370  
coming back in December, because  
of the warmth, because of the--

878  
00:52:45,370 --> 00:52:48,130

879  
00:52:48,130 --> 00:52:50,820  
what are the Zephyr  
breezes called

880  
00:52:50,820 --> 00:52:53,060  
coming up from the Caribbean  
at that time of year?

881  
00:52:53,060 --> 00:52:55,808

882  
00:52:55,808 --> 00:52:57,541  
I'll think of it in a minute.

883  
00:52:57,541 --> 00:53:01,780

884  
00:53:01,780 --> 00:53:07,930  
Before you got to England  
and then into the fighting,

885  
00:53:07,930 --> 00:53:11,230  
what did you know about  
the treatment of the Jews

886  
00:53:11,230 --> 00:53:12,030  
under Hitler?

887  
00:53:12,030 --> 00:53:15,480

888  
00:53:15,480 --> 00:53:16,950  
Before the fighting,  
very little.

889  
00:53:16,950 --> 00:53:20,940

890  
00:53:20,940 --> 00:53:28,890  
We've been told in army films,  
orientation films, something

891  
00:53:28,890 --> 00:53:29,690  
about it.

892  
00:53:29,690 --> 00:53:32,330

893  
00:53:32,330 --> 00:53:37,210  
We had been told that  
there was antisemitism

894  
00:53:37,210 --> 00:53:41,260  
and that they were losing  
their rights, things like that,

895  
00:53:41,260 --> 00:53:44,350  
and there had been uprisings  
like in Kristallnacht.

896  
00:53:44,350 --> 00:53:47,530  
I did find out about it then.

897  
00:53:47,530 --> 00:53:53,090  
But the camps were not  
really talked about or even

898  
00:53:53,090 --> 00:53:53,915  
much known.

899  
00:53:53,915 --> 00:53:56,630

900  
00:53:56,630 --> 00:54:00,410  
I'm sure that some  
people knew about it,

901  
00:54:00,410 --> 00:54:03,380  
but it didn't reach us.

902  
00:54:03,380 --> 00:54:04,400  
It didn't reach us.

903

00:54:04,400 --> 00:54:09,360

904

00:54:09,360 --> 00:54:13,650

Now, I'm going to ask you to go  
through your combat experiences

905

00:54:13,650 --> 00:54:17,790

from when you got  
into the fighting.

906

00:54:17,790 --> 00:54:20,820

If you could please walk  
me through the steps

907

00:54:20,820 --> 00:54:25,710

that you took across Europe  
and some of the battles

908

00:54:25,710 --> 00:54:26,810

that you were engaged in.

909

00:54:26,810 --> 00:54:29,970

910

00:54:29,970 --> 00:54:40,200

Well, the baptism of fire, I've  
mentioned it consisted of our--

911

00:54:40,200 --> 00:54:44,370

Company C was leading  
the division that day.

912

00:54:44,370 --> 00:54:52,050

And we hit the crossroads  
where the German Tiger

913

00:54:52,050 --> 00:54:54,810

tanks were zeroed in.

914

00:54:54,810 --> 00:54:58,020

And zeroing in, of

course, is a process

915

00:54:58,020 --> 00:55:03,510

whereby they keep on  
shooting and a spotter

916

00:55:03,510 --> 00:55:07,920

with field glasses tells them  
with where they're landing.

917

00:55:07,920 --> 00:55:09,330

Go 20 yards to the right.

918

00:55:09,330 --> 00:55:10,990

Go third-- blah, blah, blah.

919

00:55:10,990 --> 00:55:14,850

So they zeroed in that point,  
and we came across there.

920

00:55:14,850 --> 00:55:16,620

They gave us all hell.

921

00:55:16,620 --> 00:55:21,430

And half tracks were getting  
hit, and so on and so forth.

922

00:55:21,430 --> 00:55:24,030

And I jumped out of the  
track, went over here

923

00:55:24,030 --> 00:55:29,190

into one of the early holes  
that had been made by the 88,

924

00:55:29,190 --> 00:55:35,080

and stayed down there  
with my face down.

925

00:55:35,080 --> 00:55:39,890

And when I came up something  
like 20 minutes later,



926

00:55:39,890 --> 00:55:42,490

that was the most horrible  
experience, of course,

927

00:55:42,490 --> 00:55:44,770

I had ever been in--  
that one right there.

928

00:55:44,770 --> 00:55:47,620

I was to hit worse  
experiences than that,

929

00:55:47,620 --> 00:55:50,350

but that was it to that date.

930

00:55:50,350 --> 00:55:53,470

When I came up, the guy--

931

00:55:53,470 --> 00:55:56,350

one of the track drivers,  
a lovely, lovely guy

932

00:55:56,350 --> 00:55:59,770

who had loaned me  
his suitcase when

933

00:55:59,770 --> 00:56:04,390

I went home on furlough just  
before the company shipped

934

00:56:04,390 --> 00:56:05,800

out--

935

00:56:05,800 --> 00:56:08,740

he was up against a  
track with his head

936

00:56:08,740 --> 00:56:10,330

bashed in from a shell.

937

00:56:10,330 --> 00:56:11,470

Things like that.

938  
00:56:11,470 --> 00:56:16,750

939  
00:56:16,750 --> 00:56:21,250  
But we didn't have  
time for anything

940  
00:56:21,250 --> 00:56:27,350  
except jump in the track,  
a track that's functioning,

941  
00:56:27,350 --> 00:56:30,200  
and get out of there, and go on.

942  
00:56:30,200 --> 00:56:34,100  
And that was when we came up  
a hill and the real captain

943  
00:56:34,100 --> 00:56:38,370  
got a bullet through his  
head going up that hill.

944  
00:56:38,370 --> 00:56:41,240  
And then when going down another  
hill, the smoke screen, the one

945  
00:56:41,240 --> 00:56:45,230  
I told you about, and John  
Doles came in the picture.

946  
00:56:45,230 --> 00:56:46,910  
For four days and  
four nights, it

947  
00:56:46,910 --> 00:56:56,310  
was a question of going from  
one scene like that to another,

948  
00:56:56,310 --> 00:57:00,620  
and all night long  
staying up, grabbing naps

949

00:57:00,620 --> 00:57:04,490

with someone else, staying  
awake, that type of thing.

950

00:57:04,490 --> 00:57:07,280

And cold, cold, cold--

951

00:57:07,280 --> 00:57:10,290

this cold seeps in you  
when you live with it.

952

00:57:10,290 --> 00:57:13,610

And all you've got is  
some C-rations mostly,

953

00:57:13,610 --> 00:57:17,240

which is wrapped stuff.

954

00:57:17,240 --> 00:57:24,900

And after four days  
and four nights,

955

00:57:24,900 --> 00:57:30,240

they pulled us back and sent  
us to a place in Belgium

956

00:57:30,240 --> 00:57:36,120

where there were houses standing  
and it was relatively peaceful.

957

00:57:36,120 --> 00:57:39,840

And we just went around and  
sifted through the houses,

958

00:57:39,840 --> 00:57:42,150

taking rooms where we could.

959

00:57:42,150 --> 00:57:44,340

And we had a very  
delightful experience

960

00:57:44,340 --> 00:57:45,930

there with a mother  
and her daughter

961  
00:57:45,930 --> 00:57:50,340  
and a husband who  
were very sweet to us.

962  
00:57:50,340 --> 00:57:55,510  
And life became almost  
normal for a couple of days--

963  
00:57:55,510 --> 00:57:56,800  
three days.

964  
00:57:56,800 --> 00:57:59,830  
And then they  
shipped us off again,

965  
00:57:59,830 --> 00:58:04,150  
and this was just as  
hair-raising as the first--

966  
00:58:04,150 --> 00:58:05,980  
just as hair-raising.

967  
00:58:05,980 --> 00:58:17,120  
And there was one example where  
one of these jerky type higher

968  
00:58:17,120 --> 00:58:19,880  
officers came up  
from behind and said,

969  
00:58:19,880 --> 00:58:23,540  
we're going to attack in half  
tracks, which nobody had ever

970  
00:58:23,540 --> 00:58:24,920  
heard of.

971  
00:58:24,920 --> 00:58:32,190  
And the half tracks went  
in staggered situation

972  
00:58:32,190 --> 00:58:35,100  
over the brow of a  
hill, this one there,

973  
00:58:35,100 --> 00:58:37,440  
and then the next one come  
up, the next one come up.

974  
00:58:37,440 --> 00:58:43,140  
And Tiger tanks were off in  
the woods about 200 yards away.

975  
00:58:43,140 --> 00:58:48,970  
And they started-- and I  
was on the fifth track,

976  
00:58:48,970 --> 00:58:52,710  
the headquarters track,  
which had started out

977  
00:58:52,710 --> 00:58:54,910  
as the first one.

978  
00:58:54,910 --> 00:59:01,890  
But the three or four on the  
left had gone a little faster,

979  
00:59:01,890 --> 00:59:04,640  
and now they were one,  
two, three, and more.

980  
00:59:04,640 --> 00:59:09,780  
And the Tiger tank  
started picking them off.

981  
00:59:09,780 --> 00:59:15,320  
And I watched as the guy,  
our half track driver,

982  
00:59:15,320 --> 00:59:19,070  
put it in reverse quickly,  
as quick as he could.

983  
00:59:19,070 --> 00:59:21,470  
In the meantime,  
some of our guys

984  
00:59:21,470 --> 00:59:25,310  
are either dead, wounded,  
or being taken prisoner.

985  
00:59:25,310 --> 00:59:30,890  
And I watched a German  
motion to a couple of guys

986  
00:59:30,890 --> 00:59:34,040  
from the next track  
who had jumped out

987  
00:59:34,040 --> 00:59:38,030  
not to go that direction, but  
to go that direction with them.

988  
00:59:38,030 --> 00:59:41,550  
And that was a  
hair-raising experience.

989  
00:59:41,550 --> 00:59:45,790  
We lost permanently two  
or three tracks, I think.

990  
00:59:45,790 --> 00:59:49,900  
Couldn't be started again  
or the treads were ruined.

991  
00:59:49,900 --> 00:59:54,700  
And had to go on lower--

992  
00:59:54,700 --> 00:59:55,720  
what do you call it?

993  
00:59:55,720 --> 00:59:57,280  
No, I think we  
took from reserve.

994

00:59:57,280 --> 00:59:59,560

We took some half  
tracks from reserve.

995

00:59:59,560 --> 01:00:03,710

You always have a combat  
command A, combat command B,

996

01:00:03,710 --> 01:00:06,340

and a combat command in reserve.

997

01:00:06,340 --> 01:00:08,950

So we took two or  
three of their tracks.

998

01:00:08,950 --> 01:00:13,420

From there, we went  
toward the Siegfried Line

999

01:00:13,420 --> 01:00:16,990

after many, many  
days more mopping up.

1000

01:00:16,990 --> 01:00:22,950

And we mopped up in one town--

1001

01:00:22,950 --> 01:00:30,240

I think it Chenogne in Belgium,  
just beyond Bastogne, or just

1002

01:00:30,240 --> 01:00:31,920

south of Bastogne.

1003

01:00:31,920 --> 01:00:38,250

By this time, the guys who had  
been holed up there and kept

1004

01:00:38,250 --> 01:00:45,480

by the Germans were all freed  
and the situation was normal.

1005

01:00:45,480 --> 01:00:48,900

We took this town and  
stayed in it at night.

1006  
01:00:48,900 --> 01:00:52,790  
And at about 3:00 or  
4:00 in the morning,

1007  
01:00:52,790 --> 01:01:00,290  
horrible firing occurs, and  
we run upstairs and look out.

1008  
01:01:00,290 --> 01:01:03,920  
And in the darkness, we see  
the tracer bullets going over

1009  
01:01:03,920 --> 01:01:05,330  
our heads.

1010  
01:01:05,330 --> 01:01:08,270  
Tracer are the lit-up bullets--

1011  
01:01:08,270 --> 01:01:11,810  
coming from up there, and the  
Germans are counterattacking.

1012  
01:01:11,810 --> 01:01:14,280  
And boy, oh boy, did  
we get out of there.

1013  
01:01:14,280 --> 01:01:23,190  
And as we went out, the 101st  
Airborne Division paratroopers

1014  
01:01:23,190 --> 01:01:28,880  
are coming up in the darkness  
on either side of the street,

1015  
01:01:28,880 --> 01:01:31,670  
trying to retake the town.

1016  
01:01:31,670 --> 01:01:34,550  
And they retook it, but  
then we found out later



1017  
01:01:34,550 --> 01:01:39,320  
that they had been brutalized  
and driven out again.

1018  
01:01:39,320 --> 01:01:41,750  
So we went on toward  
the Siegfried Line

1019  
01:01:41,750 --> 01:01:45,530  
after all of these experiences.

1020  
01:01:45,530 --> 01:01:49,300  
And this is all a  
clear cut situation

1021  
01:01:49,300 --> 01:01:57,960  
of just pure combat, no example  
of coming across civilians

1022  
01:01:57,960 --> 01:02:02,950  
in distress, like in camps  
or anything like that at all.

1023  
01:02:02,950 --> 01:02:06,000  
It's just pure combat.

1024  
01:02:06,000 --> 01:02:07,930  
And we come in to  
[? Herscheid, ?]

1025  
01:02:07,930 --> 01:02:14,810  
Germany, and we  
bunk up in houses.

1026  
01:02:14,810 --> 01:02:19,910  
And I'm delivering  
messages for the captain.

1027  
01:02:19,910 --> 01:02:23,120  
And it's pitch dark at night,  
and I'm delivering messages

1028

01:02:23,120 --> 01:02:31,710  
through the woody area, and  
I come across a single file

1029

01:02:31,710 --> 01:02:34,500  
of men with no helmets on.

1030

01:02:34,500 --> 01:02:38,710  
And you could barely see  
in the darkness like this--

1031

01:02:38,710 --> 01:02:42,970  
barely see-- starlight  
or something.

1032

01:02:42,970 --> 01:02:46,780  
And I go up to the  
rear one and touch him

1033

01:02:46,780 --> 01:02:51,130  
on the shoulder to ask him  
whether he's company C or what.

1034

01:02:51,130 --> 01:02:53,890  
And it turns out to  
be a German patrol.

1035

01:02:53,890 --> 01:02:59,730  
And I absolutely  
defecated in my pants,

1036

01:02:59,730 --> 01:03:03,110  
practically, and dived  
off the side of the road

1037

01:03:03,110 --> 01:03:04,010  
into the woods.

1038

01:03:04,010 --> 01:03:06,110  
And there was all  
kinds of shooting.

1039

01:03:06,110 --> 01:03:09,320

And I kept on going like  
this, like this, like this,

1040

01:03:09,320 --> 01:03:13,440

and came across a  
series of houses.

1041

01:03:13,440 --> 01:03:16,620

Went into a house  
and found that it

1042

01:03:16,620 --> 01:03:25,250

was the headquarters that night  
of an infantry division which

1043

01:03:25,250 --> 01:03:27,530

was alongside of us.

1044

01:03:27,530 --> 01:03:28,160

And they--

1045

01:03:28,160 --> 01:03:31,130

1046

01:03:31,130 --> 01:03:32,750

I'm sorry, I have  
to interrupt you,

1047

01:03:32,750 --> 01:03:34,375

because we're about  
to run out of tape.

1048

01:03:34,375 --> 01:03:36,130

Just one moment.

1049

01:03:36,130 --> 01:03:37,139