

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with George Leonard conducted by Esther Finder on January 10, 2001 in Rockville, Maryland. This is tape one side A. Thank you for doing an interview with me today. Let's start out by having you tell me when and where you were born.

I was born in Malden, Massachusetts, on December 24, 1921.

Is that where you grew up?

I very rapidly got moved to Dorchester, which at the time was a tremendously in flux quasi slum of Boston. And I pretty much grew up in Dorchester until the army came along.

Can you tell me a little bit more about this community other than the few words that you used to describe it so far?

Dorchester was and maybe still is the largest burrow or in-city suburb of Boston. And it had originally been famous for being a seaport with the Puritans or Pilgrims or Lord knows what all, and lots of Indians around there. And as the community grew, it had its upper middle class and upper class and straight middle class areas. When I lived there, it was in such flux that it depended upon the block you were in, just like parts of Manhattan.

And it went from when I was a little tiny kid, predominantly English background, to Irish, to then Mediterranean groups and Jews around the fringes. And by the time I left, say, in 1941, '42, it was a sad, sad community, not because of the influx of groups, but because of what was happening to the infrastructure and so on and so forth-- overcrowded, and the houses were dilapidated, et cetera. You're probably familiar with the three-decker houses in Boston.

There were economic problems. Of course, it was the Depression, which impinged upon the whole thing. And there were economic problems with people. There were sociological groups against groups. The Irish were-- in my family, even though I have a quarter Irish from my real father, who had died four or five years after I was born. Even though I had quarter Irish, my mother and others in the community, the English community, were as rigid against Irish almost as they were the Jews. Nobody knew why. In fact, I didn't really know, for example, a Jew until I was very mature-- mature child, I mean. But I played with Irish kids all the time. And my entire background was formed by playing with a wide variety of people-- playing with a wide variety of children.

Can you tell me what your parents did for a living? You mentioned you lost your father when you were young. I assume from that there was a remarriage and you had a second father?

My real father died as a result of mustard gas in his lungs that caught up with him years and years after the First World War. I never really knew my real father at all. Most of the time he was in the veterans hospital in his final years. My mother married a pharmacist managing the Edward Everett Square Pharmacy in Dorchester. And after they had been married a couple of years, he went into Eli Lilly and became one of their detail men. And he ate and not drank himself to death, because he only drank beer, but he let himself go to pot. And before long, he died of a massive coronary in 1939, just on the verge of becoming New England manager of Eli Lilly.

He brought with him to the marriage two girls, and my mother had two boys, and between them they had two children of their own. It was quite a conglomeration. I spent most of my younger years, from 12 to 17, lusting after my stepsister-- the younger one. That's about it.

Where did you go to school and what were your favorite subjects?

You're talking about undergraduate? I mean, yeah--

Elementary.

Elementary, et cetera. Went to a little Quincy Street school for primary grades. There were only three rooms-- the kind of a place that was really-- you just couldn't believe it. They did away with it, of course, a few years later. And then I

went to the Mather School from the fourth on up. The Mather School was on Meeting House Hill. It still is there. I visited about two years ago and was astounded. Now, the Mather School was the first general public school in the country. And they changed the building of course. The building I went to was built in probably the late 1800s. I'm not sure. It was a very strict, authoritarian, punishing environment. At the same time, it was known as a good school system where you learn by rote, at least, even if it wasn't any other way.

We moved in my later teens to Roslindale, which was an up step, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. And then we moved from there to West Roxbury, which was at the outer fringe of Boston on the Dedham-Norwood-Needham-Newton border out there. And this was even better, but that was just about the time my stepfather died, and my mother went back to her penurious way of living. I think I've said about the whole bit there.

When you were growing up, what did you think you want it to be as an adult?

A writer.

What kind of writing did you want to do?

I had fiction in mind, but after my government career when I retired, nonfiction proved to be my biggest boon, although I've done a couple of novels for publication. And right now, I'm doing a non-fiction book which is my whole reason for living the past 20 or 30 years.

Would you care to talk about that for just a moment?

Just a quick word. About 23 years ago, I was taken into a meditation group in Gaithersburg by some very sophisticated people. And I learned a lot in it. I learned a lot about basic Kabbalism, Sufism, and the Masonic rites, and lots of others that have been pulled-- the mystic tradition. And they never went for gobbledygook, or what might be called just pure crap today. You go to the new age sections of the bookstores and libraries, and it's all crapped up with junk-- stuff that a sensible person could never really digest. So at any rate, this was meditation from the point of view of letting your subconscious meet the-- getting in touch with your higher self, et cetera, et cetera.

So I went from one stage to another and felt that someday, I would pull together what I recognized as being the best-- the most important strains in all of these traditions going back thousands and thousands of years, put it together in my own book, and I've just started that book.

Did you come from a religiously observant family?

My mother sent us-- made sure that we started in the congregational church when we were practically babies. Me and my siblings went to Sunday school and went to the Boy Scouts in the church later on. We did everything, but my mother never participated and neither did my stepfather. I was never particularly religious. Indeed, when I hit college, I did what most of us do-- we lost our organized religious feelings-- any that were left. And we formulated either our new ones or became pure agnostics, et cetera, et cetera. So I suppose I leaned toward being a total agnostic by the time I was in the army.

But then, by the time I reached the army-- but then I had some experiences in the army which threw me right back again into a world in which I knew-- knew in quotes-- that there was, after all, a central source and lots going on in the universe, et cetera, that most of us didn't recognize, and that you're left to infer and to get on faith by being in touch with certain things. If you want, when this is over and you have five minutes, I'll tell you about an amazing experience or two I had particularly in the army that's irrelevant to the Holocaust.

On a lighter note, when you were a child, what did you do for fun?

Oh, boy. I was a typical kid from the point of view of playing marbles and Relievio and all the games. And it was an environment which was totally different from today's kids. There was no supervision of them playing. Nobody had play dates or anything like that. It was a question of you went out with the kids, and that was it. And your mother called you

for supper and so forth. We learned to play all sorts of games together. We learned to roam all over greater Boston in packs with the kids. And we went to Franklin Park and the Arnold Arboretum in Boston and had favorite places to go. And in the summer, we knew where there were good swimming holes in certain small creeks that flowed through the Charles River, the upper Charles River, and Mother's Brook and West Roxbury and so forth.

I became interested in writing in high school and did a lot of that fiddling around myself, and knew I wanted to be a writer. But skipping ahead quickly, the army changed me into one of these silly attitudes about, oh, I got to do something in a government way and change the world. And so I went and studied government and economics in school and went into government first. So I had a pretty good career in the public health service as an economist, planner, administrative person. And when I retired from that, I immediately picked up the writing again, although I sold a novel while I was in the public health service.

What was the name of the novel?

Are you ready for this? It was called Sexmax. It was a Brave New World type in which every single need that people had was satisfied by the government. And one of the mainstays was that the women who were widowed at age 50 and 60 were able to apply to the government for assignment of a young man to them. And the young men were drafted for this purpose. Rather than being drafted to kill, they were drafted to make themselves useful.

To make love and not war. What languages did you speak when you were a teenager? Just English?

Languages? Just purely English. Studied French and Latin in high school.

Did you witness much antisemitism when you were growing up?

In spades.

Do you have some examples?

Examples don't immediately come to mind. It was so all-prevalent. Just words and looks and feelings on the parts of people who had pretty limited lives and didn't know where to put their frustrations. And you heard slights all the time, all the time. And indeed, when I met my wife-- and I had come back from the army and met my wife, who was Jewish-- Jewish family-- my mother, I suppose, did the best she could to be pleasant and like Phyllis. And there were times when it worked out fine. But generally speaking, particularly in the early stages, I got subtle chaff from my mother. I got less-than-subtle chaff from Phyllis's family. You know all the stories there.

What do you remember hearing or reading about Hitler's rise to power and events in Germany?

I assume you mean before I went into the army?

Before the war.

Very, very little. We recognized as being a threat to Europe peace, and everyone held their breath from that point of view in the late '30s. But it's Hitler's antipathy or singling out the Jews was a relatively new thing when I came into the army. I don't even remember hearing about Kristallnacht, for example, although probably I did, and it went right over my head.

What was happening in your life in 1939 and 1940?

I graduated from high school and went to a Sunday school teacher training at Durham, New Hampshire, the college town. And I said, my god, this is college? This is great. This is for me. Nobody in my family had ever mentioned it. So I started the low way. The only way I could do it was Boston University at night. I did that for a year, and then went to Suffolk University days, working two part-time jobs. And I'm starting to get emotional already. I guess my emotionalism is based more upon old memories in general than it is the combat and Mauthausen that I thought. I'm not

sure.

At any rate, I went to Suffolk days and worked two part-time jobs. And one of the jobs I had had my first year, when I was going to BU nights, was interesting, because my mother immediately sent me to her brother George, who was treasurer of the State Street Trust back in the days when banks were banks. You know what I mean?

[INAUDIBLE]

Huh?

[INAUDIBLE].

Big, big organizations, and being treasurer was something. Today, they have these little branches around, and everybody's an assistant treasurer. There are no secretaries and administrative assistants anymore. They're administrators. At any rate, she sent me to George, and I went into his walnut-paneled office, and he referred me to Esterbrook and Company, which is a very classy, upscale-- the upscale stock brokerage on State Street, just right there off of Washington on State. And I became a board runner with messages around and so on and so forth.

And I came across antisemitism there personally, because I remember an old-- a very nice woman-- nice woman that I liked. And all of a sudden, I'm on the edge of a conversation, and she's saying something to the other woman. And she's saying something about, shh, you'd better be quiet, you don't know who is these days. And I realized from something else that came out a minute later that they were talking about me being possibly Jewish, and they'd better not go on with their probably insulting statements or touching statements, anyway. So that hit home. That hit home. I didn't, of course, react at all.

And my step father-- bless his heart-- was with a guy-- I'm going back years now beforehand-- was a guy who was very rough around the edges and had lots and lots of problems. But bless his heart, he did lots of things for me. He gave me a male figure when I needed it. Even though I didn't have a close relationship with him, there was that male figure. And he bought one year a big, big saw and so forth-- electric apparatus down in the cellar. And a friend of his was a Jewish pharmacist named Yarosh. And he was one of the first-- this was back when I was younger. And he was one of the first mature Jewish men I'd ever seen.

And I was so impressed back then with the delicacy of his features and his eyes and everything. The man was absolutely impressive as all hell. And I remember, we crowded around the door to look downstairs in the cellar to see what a Jew looked like. And as I remember him-- and I do have a memory of his face-- he was a good example-- and I don't know where you're coming from. It makes no difference to me as far as what I'm about to say. He was a good example of having one leg back in the greatness of the Jews thousands of years ago. I don't mean that they're not great today. I mean that they were once even more impressive. They came out of situations in Europe and Central Asia that is not in our history books-- not in history books at all. And so as I say, I was very impressed with it. And then I became impressed with my stepfather, that he would have a friend like this.

So you were finishing high school and starting college around the times that Austria was being annexed and Hitler was beginning to expand. I was wondering if you can remember how that was treated by the United States media or if it was discussed in any of your classes at school or anything like that. Do you have any recollection at all of those events?

I don't recall it being discussed in school, because I don't think they figured they were prepared for it. And I never took a course on current events or anything like that. If they did say anything, it was offhand, and then I forget. Do you want me to turn up the heat? The papers reported pretty straightly-- annexation and Chamberlain doing this and so on and so forth. And I remember that the personal feelings on my part, on my mother's part, and most people that I heard talk about it were always personal. We were afraid of being caught up in another war, particularly those who had-- people all around me had one leg back in the First World War. And they were deathly afraid of this. My mother broke into tears many, many times about, oh, I don't want to see you boys go off and die like my husband did, your father did, et cetera, et cetera. So there was that.

The Jewish theme was not played up in the papers particularly at all. Austria certainly wasn't. Poland-- no. Kristallnacht, as I said, I forget about. I don't really have a memory of that. Maybe I was too young. When was that? '33? '32-'33, which meant I was 10, 11 years old. And let's see-- you were about three years old, weren't you? At any rate, I think I've shot my bolt on that subject.

I want to stress again the personal nature-- people saw things through their own skin and their own eyes, which is true in the war, which is true everywhere, which is true now.

I'm trying to understand if you're telling me that you were not particularly alarmed. Other than the possibility of American involvement when it came to the invasion of Poland, for example, in the onset of the war, am I understanding you correctly? Was that pretty much the extent of the reaction of yourself and the people around you, that when Hitler invaded Poland, the main concern was that America would become involved possibly?

I would have to say that that was the leading feeling. I don't think that anyone was, in my circles or in my family or anything, for Hitler at all. I don't mean that. I mean they recognized him as being a monomaniac and war lover and so forth. But people pretty well personalized it. I just can't overemphasize that at all. It was a personal thing. I was afraid. I didn't want my young life interrupted with that sort of stuff. And my mother was deathly afraid of it, crying again. And--

You mentioned the reaction toward Hitler. What about the reactions in this country regarding Stalin, because Hitler and Stalin had signed a non-aggression pact? Did that set up any red flags as far as you can remember?

I remember it as being thought of as a stab in the back and two dictators getting together. I think that there was more feeling over those years anyway. Proceeding is against Russia probably because of propaganda on the part of some people and so on, and partly for very real reasons about what Stalin was doing. Although just like Hitler, the real stories of what would happen as a result of Stalin's influence and Hitler's influence didn't come out until much later, much later. When the time came for-- when we were in the war, I think that fear of Russia-- this was before the stuff about the camps ad become obvious-- the fear of Russia was greater than the fear of Germany. Definitely-- a fear of Russia.

During the period of time between the beginning of the war in September of '39 and Pearl Harbor, how did the war in Europe impact your personal life experience?

Again, personal-- I had my own agenda, which was to get college and to be a writer and to have some kind of a life in addition to that, when all young men would want and engage in, et cetera, et cetera, going places, et cetera. For a long time in that period, I was social chairman of the young group at church. And so I threw dances that joined five churches in the West Roxbury Roslindale area in a group, and we invited them to the dances and so on and so forth. And we had trips from on the Provincetown steel pier ship and other events that we planned. I was caught up in these things. These things were, in the long run, more important to me, except for the fear of the headlines. I hate to sound shallow, but that was it.

When you look back on your life before American involvement in the war, is there anything else that stands out in your mind about your life before World War II and the United States' involvement in World War II? Anything else?

I can't think of anything that's worth putting out now. Minutia, but my life consisted of the things I said. And I didn't really snap to until some events during the war and afterward made a different person out of me-- really, a different person. Not just more maturity, but changed me within the context of who I am-- whatever I mean by that.

All right, we're going to pause, and I'm going to flip the tape.

The state's Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with George Leonard. This is tape number one, side B. When did you first learn about the attack on Pearl Harbor? Most people can say that they remember it quite vividly. When did you hear about Pearl?

I remember the occasion very, very vividly, because I had been working that afternoon in the church mimeographing a newsletter to all the young people around. So I got hold of the news around two or three o'clock our time in the

afternoon. And right away again, personal-- what's going to happen to me? What's going to happen to me and my friends? What's going to happen to America?

And a sidelight on this is that the one person I was closest to during the whole combat experience, Captain [? Kirkabou, ?] had been an enlisted non-commissioned officer at Pearl Harbor in the regular army. And he was a man without education and without any softening effects that you usually get in civilization. But he turned out to be not only a magnificent officer in combat, but a great guy who was-- I don't-- do you want-- is it all right if I tell you about a scene in Mauthausen with him now, or should I let that go to later?

Leave it for later.

OK.

We'll get to your experiences in Mauthausen with him later. But when you heard about Pearl Harbor, what was its immediate impact on your life?

Impact in my life was-- immediate impact was nothing except personal fear and wonderment, et cetera. The more long-range, that is in the ensuing months, and I don't recall exactly when, I enlisted in the enlisted reserve and expected them to take me up right away. But they said they have the right to do what they wanted to do with the enlisted reserve people, so they said, stay at Suffolk for a while, at least until you finish the year. So I finished the year, and then I wrote to them. And I said, here, here, come take me. I'm through. And they ignored me, and they ignored me until the fall of that year, which was 1942.

When they did take you, what was your basic training and your initiation into the military? What was that experience like?

It was pretty strong. I stayed at Fort Devens for a while, being bored, but then they sent me down to Fort McClellan, Alabama, which had been written about by Walter Winchell as being a hellhole of America, and had the usual basic training there in the cold mud, which in the long run was-- I wouldn't want to do it again, but it was good for me, damn good.

How long was your basic training?

Started out at six weeks, but I think it went to closer to 12 by the time they finished. From there, they shipped me to the sixth motorized division in the California desert, which was training to go to Japan, the islands, et cetera. All the training was motivated toward that. And I had been with them for a while in the desert, eating sand and so forth, and all of a sudden, a Jeep came up one day with a lieutenant and a sergeant in it. And the sergeant jumped out and said, are you George Leonard? And I said, yeah. And he said, you were ordered to go at oh-something o'clock tomorrow morning to Stanford University.

This was almost the first I had heard of army specialized training. Do you know about it? Which was a program to train young men particularly for a long war. They feared that they were going to be light on officers and occupiers later on, and so they got this mammoth program of giving you a full semester of basic engineering or there were other-- there was medicine, for example, with some lucky to get in it-- basic engineering in three months. So I was there in the program.

I went from Stanford to University of California at Berkeley, where I had the training. Stanford was only for a couple of weeks. And nine months, three full semesters, and then all of a sudden, they disbanded the program totally and sent us to-- most of us in that particular unit in California-- to the 11th Armored Division, which was in Camp Cooke, California.

I must say that one of the most important aspects of the training was not only the physics, math, and calculus, and stuff like that, and chemistry, but it was a course that they had, and most people just overlooked it completely, and they overlook it today. They don't really know what it must have been for. It was a course designed to teach us the sociology,

psychology, geography, et cetera of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, all those Asian republics. And the purpose could only have been, well, these armored divisions are going to go on into Central Asia and take it all over.

Then the rest of the story, of course, there is that in the fall of that year, we were shipped to England. And when the Bulge started, we were-- Battle of the Bulge-- we were shipped across the channel.

Tell me about the trip from the States over to Europe and then into the actual theater of war. When did you leave?

We left for England sometime in the summer of '44, stayed in England until something like late November, and were shipped across the channel when the Battle of the Bulge occurred. The trip over on the boat was not a nice experience at all. I mean, we were down on the hull of the ship and the air was bad and the food was bad and everything. The only important thing that happened to me was that I asked one of the sergeants how you bet in shooting craps, and he told me to always bet against the dice. And I misunderstood, and I bet with the dice, and I won something like \$1,000 and gave it to the first sergeant to keeping the company safe or for something or other like that. When I got to England, I sent about three quarters of it back to my mother, and then used the rest of it on splurges in London.

When you arrived in England, what was your rank and your duties and your responsibilities?

When I arrived in England, I was a private first class-- a rifleman. I guess the military occupation specialty was 750-- I forget. Rifleman with a subheading of machine gun. That was it. As a rifleman, I'd become expert in stripping down a rifle, putting it back together, cleaning it, et cetera, et cetera.

Who was your commanding officer, and who were some of the members of your unit?

Commanding officer was a guy named-- don't recall his name now, but he's the one who, going up the hill after we first got bombarded by Tiger tanks in Belgium-- he was the one that got the bullet right through the head. And the first lieutenant of the company, Lieutenant [? Kirkabou, ?] became immediately the captain. And when he couldn't find Labadie, the sociopath, he yelled for me to get him in the command half track and be his company runner.

What does it mean to be the company runner? What exactly is that?

Company runner-- it's a variety of functions-- predominantly to stay close to the captain and maintain communications with the platoon lieutenants, or in our case, the platoon lieutenants get killed off too quickly. They were platoon sergeants-- and to keep contact through walkie talkie type. And in the half track on the move, to get from division headquarters by radio, the code for the next day's march-- translate that code, make sure that the captain got it, and advise him as the company moved forward-- advising meaning the road signs, in many cases, were all bollixed up on purpose and things like that. And you had to use some ingenuity or sense to know which way you were going, things like that.

And this was particularly important for us, because our company and battalion turned out to be the point, pretty much, of the division. And the division turned out to be the point of Patton's Third Army. The exception to that was when the 4th Armored, which was the most magnificent Armored Division in Europe-- I have to give them credit. They had been through France and Italy and France and everything. The 4th Armored was superb. They were on a tangent with us like that moving forward. But other times, we were the point like that, and the foot infantry would be coming sometimes 50 miles behind mopping up towns that we had bypassed, et cetera, et cetera. We just went like wildfire sometimes. And it was a hair raising experience, but at the same time, it was exhilarating, et cetera, et cetera.

When you say the point, let me make sure I'm understanding. You're saying that you were the first to arrive?

The point, meaning the division. The division might move ahead like an arrow, and the point would be responsible for meeting the enemy and dealing with it first. And the most dangerous job in the whole army, practically, was to be reconnaissance. And our combat command-- there were two combatant commands in the reserve-- combat A and B-- our combat command had its own reconnaissance, which meant guys that would sometimes go forward not just in armored vehicles, but in Jeeps-- we called them peeps-- and go until they met the enemy.

And more than once, we'd be going along a road as the point of the army, and find a wrecked Jeep with bodies on the road. You see how dangerous that job was? When they discovered the enemy, they'd usually be dead, that sort of thing. I met a few of these guys-- the ones that lived. Phyllis and I met them. She came with me to the first reunion I've ever been to. Never went to an army-- 11th Armored Division reunion. We went to Reno last August, and it was very interesting.

Were there any Jews in your unit?

What?

Any Jews in your unit?

Yes, ma'am. I didn't know any of these guys and almost any in the reunion, because the ones I knew in my company had been killed off or were dead by then. But there were a few from recon and a few from the tanks and a few from artillery and so forth there. And the guy that befriended Phyllis and me, him and his wife-- he was Jewish, and he had been an officer back then. And the officer-- and I think his name was Abrams-- who commanded the 21st Armored Infantry Battalion when the whole battalion moved together-- he'd get out in front of the tank-- a Jewish officer, a colonel-- and stand up in the turret and a gung ho guy. Let's go like this. He was magnificent. I can't praise him too much.

There was a guy named Jacobson who had been my first sergeant in the States when I first joined the 11th. Jacobson-- he owned a taxi company in Albany. And he was a five striper, which was the typical rank for the platoon sergeants. There'd be lieutenant over them. Five stripes for-- he was a five striper. And he used to do things for me, and I wondered why. And it went on like this. He was favoritism galore. And something happened, and he said to me, you're not Jewish? he said. I thought you was a Heb. He really thought I was Jewish, which is why he had caught on to me.

I must add that when the army specialized training guys flooded into the division and filled up the empty slots, that there were a lot of Jewish boys in that group. I wouldn't say a significant number, but there were quite a few. And they helped 11. Some of the notes I've made, as a matter of fact, show that our company consisted of three or four major groups. One is the old, hard-bitten, grizzled guy who had been with them since Camp Polk, Louisiana-- was usually in his mid-upper 20s, sometimes early 30s. Tough-- I'm generalizing-- tough, et cetera.

Another group consisted of the ASTP that came in, like me, who tended to be certainly more intellectual and capable, because you had to have a certain grade in the army general classification test in order to get into it, which is the only criteria they had for me when they came out in the desert and said, you're going to Stanford tomorrow morning. It was the AGCT test result. That was all. At any rate, there were those two groups plus the third group-- by the time the war ended, all of the kids that had come in from replacement depots and so forth, replacing the ones that got killed and wounded.

So you had some major factions there which colored how Mauthausen was dealt with. Now, if you were in one faction, you tended to have one feeling-- this is a big generality, a really big generality, but you can make some safe generalities. And so at any rate, if you were ASTP, army specialized training, you tended to have a greater understanding of what was going on with the camps, and you tended to be more oriented toward doing something consciously instead of trying to get out of something, et cetera.

Did you witness any antisemitism in the army?

Do you mean that personally, or--

Did you see it?

Did I see it? Yeah, but not much, nothing much. Coming back on the boat-- I was shipped because I had a lot of points through a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart and a few other things. And I had more points than most in my division, and they shipped me to the 79th Infantry Division in Kitzingen, which was ready to go home. And coming back on that boat,

I met and worked with a lot of guys who were Jewish, because at that point, they shoved me into a clerical situation because of a minimum of college I had had and so forth. And the 79th needed that, for some reason.

And I found Jewish guys galore. And they were good-naturedly dealt with among that class, the clerical class. And good friends, and I never really saw antisemitism among those groups. I remember playing bridge with them on the deck, stripped to our waist, coming back in December, because of the warmth, because of the-- what are the Zephyr breezes called coming up from the Caribbean at that time of year? I'll think of it in a minute.

Before you got to England and then into the fighting, what did you know about the treatment of the Jews under Hitler?

Before the fighting, very little. We've been told in army films, orientation films, something about it. We had been told that there was antisemitism and that they were losing their rights, things like that, and there had been uprisings like in Kristallnacht. I did find out about it then. But the camps were not really talked about or even much known. I'm sure that some people knew about it, but it didn't reach us. It didn't reach us.

Now, I'm going to ask you to go through your combat experiences from when you got into the fighting. If you could please walk me through the steps that you took across Europe and some of the battles that you were engaged in.

Well, the baptism of fire, I've mentioned it consisted of our-- Company C was leading the division that day. And we hit the crossroads where the German Tiger tanks were zeroed in. And zeroing in, of course, is a process whereby they keep on shooting and a spotter with field glasses tells them with where they're landing. Go 20 yards to the right. Go third-- blah, blah, blah. So they zeroed in that point, and we came across there. They gave us all hell. And half tracks were getting hit, and so on and so forth.

And I jumped out of the track, went over here into one of the early holes that had been made by the 88, and stayed down there with my face down. And when I came up something like 20 minutes later, that was the most horrible experience, of course, I had ever been in-- that one right there. I was to hit worse experiences than that, but that was it to that date. When I came up, the guy-- one of the track drivers, a lovely, lovely guy who had loaned me his suitcase when I went home on furlough just before the company shipped out-- he was up against a track with his head bashed in from a shell. Things like that.

But we didn't have time for anything except jump in the track, a track that's functioning, and get out of there, and go on. And that was when we came up a hill and the real captain got a bullet through his head going up that hill. And then when going down another hill, the smoke screen, the one I told you about, and John Doles came in the picture. For four days and four nights, it was a question of going from one scene like that to another, and all night long staying up, grabbing naps with someone else, staying awake, that type of thing. And cold, cold, cold-- this cold seeps in you when you live with it. And all you've got is some C-rations mostly, which is wrapped stuff.

And after four days and four nights, they pulled us back and sent us to a place in Belgium where there were houses standing and it was relatively peaceful. And we just went around and sifted through the houses, taking rooms where we could. And we had a very delightful experience there with a mother and her daughter and a husband who were very sweet to us. And life became almost normal for a couple of days-- three days.

And then they shipped us off again, and this was just as hair-raising as the first-- just as hair-raising. And there was one example where one of these jerky type higher officers came up from behind and said, we're going to attack in half tracks, which nobody had ever heard of. And the half tracks went in staggered situation over the brow of a hill, this one there, and then the next one come up, the next one come up. And Tiger tanks were off in the woods about 200 yards away. And they started-- and I was on the fifth track, the headquarters track, which had started out as the first one. But the three or four on the left had gone a little faster, and now they were one, two, three, and more. And the Tiger tank started picking them off.

And I watched as the guy, our half track driver, put it in reverse quickly, as quick as he could. In the meantime, some of our guys are either dead, wounded, or being taken prisoner. And I watched a German motion to a couple of guys from the next track who had jumped out not to go that direction, but to go that direction with them. And that was a hair-

raising experience. We lost permanently two or three tracks, I think. Couldn't be started again or the treads were ruined. And had to go on lower-- what do you call it? No, I think we took from reserve. We took some half tracks from reserve. You always have a combat command A, combat command B, and a combat command in reserve. So we took two or three of their tracks.

From there, we went toward the Siegfried Line after many, many days more mopping up. And we mopped up in one town-- I think it Chenogne in Belgium, just beyond Bastogne, or just south of Bastogne. By this time, the guys who had been holed up there and kept by the Germans were all freed and the situation was normal. We took this town and stayed in it at night. And at about 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, horrible firing occurs, and we run upstairs and look out. And in the darkness, we see the tracer bullets going over our heads. Tracer are the lit-up bullets-- coming from up there, and the Germans are counterattacking. And boy, oh boy, did we get out of there. And as we went out, the 101st Airborne Division paratroopers are coming up in the darkness on either side of the street, trying to retake the town. And they retook it, but then we found out later that they had been brutalized and driven out again.

So we went on toward the Siegfried Line after all of these experiences. And this is all a clear cut situation of just pure combat, no example of coming across civilians in distress, like in camps or anything like that at all. It's just pure combat. And we come in to [? Herscheid, ?] Germany, and we bunk up in houses. And I'm delivering messages for the captain. And it's pitch dark at night, and I'm delivering messages through the woody area, and I come across a single file of men with no helmets on. And you could barely see in the darkness like this-- barely see-- starlight or something.

And I go up to the rear one and touch him on the shoulder to ask him whether he's company C or what. And it turns out to be a German patrol. And I absolutely defecated in my pants, practically, and dived off the side of the road into the woods. And there was all kinds of shooting. And I kept on going like this, like this, like this, and came across a series of houses. Went into a house and found that it was the headquarters that night of an infantry division which was alongside of us. And they--

I'm sorry, I have to interrupt you, because we're about to run out of tape. Just one moment.