

Interview with Werner Katzenstein
October 17, 2001

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Werner Katzenstein**, conducted by **Esther Finder** on October 17th, 2001 in **Silver Spring, Maryland**. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is tape number one, side **A**. And I wanted to start by asking you what was your name at birth?

Answer: At birth it was **Werner Walter Katzenstein** and curious that the German Board of Register said, you've got to have a middle name, and so my father added it. I dropped it when I became a citizen.

Q: Where were you born and when?

A: I was born April 29th, 1922 in a little town called **Wallensen**, i-in the county of **Hamelin**, where -- the "**Pied Piper of Hamelin**"? Near **Hannover**, in that part of **Germany**.

Q: Can you tell me about your hometown? Was it big or small, or --

A: That was not really my hometown. My father was a manager of a farm supply business, and in 1922 - '23, there was the inflation in **Germany** and things were pretty bad for my grandparents in the town of **Herleshausen**, which is in the center part of **Germany** near the city of **Eisenart**. And my father came in '23, and he

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again started to form his own business of farm supplies, which was really the -- the family business, my grandfather had it, uncles had it and th-they dealt with farmers, buying and selling. He started his business in the -- what was it? A laundry house that my grandparents had. And he got on a bicycle and he started to build up his own business. That was in 1923. And th-the town was about 1500 people, a small Jewish congregation of about 15 families. My grandfather was the **Gabbai** of the congregation and I remember on **Shabbas** carrying out the **aliyahs** to the members o-of the synagogue. And I grew up, a relatively normal life, just before **Hitler**, and then in 1932, I started high school in the city of **Eisenart**. High school was not compulsory, it was voluntary. There was a small tuition but not significant. I started there '32, and I went to school by train. At the ol -- the s-students that traveled by train, traveled in one compartment. When **Hitler** came to power April 30th, 1933, they kicked me out of the compartment, they beat me up through the train, they chased me. In the beginning it was pretty bad, that I stayed with in the city of **Eisenart** for a couple of weeks, and then I got back on the train and stayed home again. In school not much changed, that depended on the individual teacher. I can say the gym teacher used me to dust off the equipment. He made me sit on the equipment and he dusted **[indecipherable]** with my gym pants. There were

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swimming lessons. We were three Jewish boys in a class, we were completely ignorant. So that was '33, and the next step was my father's business.

Q: Let -- let me stop you for a just a second, you're running a little bit ahead of me.

I need you to tell me your father's name and what he did for a living.

A: My father na -- father's name was **Joseph Katzenstein** and my mother's name was **Irma**. He eventually built up a very good sized business that he had first a man with horse and wagon making deliveries. Much later on he bought a truck and the same man become a truck driver. My mother was in the office, she had the office, and they sold feed -- seeds, to the farmers, and also bought grain and so on from the farmers that my father sold to the mills. This was -- this is now the early 30's. In 1935, the German government --

Q: I -- I wanted to ask you one more question about your father before you went ahead. Was your father ever in the military?

A: Yes, my father was in World War I. He was in **Poland** and he was in a prisoner of war camp and he was a **[indecipherable]**. He said anti-Semitism was there already then. He remembers a bullet of one his own comrades going past his head. He, in 1919, when **Germany** ga-gave up, they just got on a train and went home. So that was 1919 and I'll go back now to the -- '35.

Q: One more question, did you have any brothers or sisters?

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A: I had one brother who survived, and he lives in the **Detroit** area. My father's -- the German government prohibited my father to buy grain from the farmer, and that stopped the business because the farmer could not buy from him any more. So he made a decision that he wanted to leave. I have something else to **[indecipherable]**, which I forgot. In 1933, when **Hitler** came to power, in our county, every Jewish man was put in the county prison. My father was in there for about eight, 10 days. They were mistreated, but he didn't tel -- talk too much about it. He wanted to leave **Germany** right then and there, in 1933, and my mother said here -- I was born here, she said, I'm supposed to leave? My grandparents said, oh he was voted in, he'll be voted out again. Th-Then, as I said, in '35, he -- we had -- the business wa-was gone and we had to leave. He decided where -- anywhere, but bor -- boundaries weren't open. He had an uncle which lived near **Holland** and he was able to buy two properties in **Holland** belonging to people in **Germany**. You were only allowed to take 10 **marks** out of **Germany**, but he bought two properties in **Holland**, and then we were allowed to move to **Holland**. This was 1937. And we had a boarding house, we had cows. I started farming with a big Belgian horse and what else could we do?

Q: So -- be -- I want to stay with -- with **Germany** for just a few more moments --

A: Sure.

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Q: -- ask a few more questions. When you were a young child in school, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A: I always wanted to be an architect, there was no doubt about that. I had planned that well in advance. But I went -- the high school that I went to was a **realschule**. We didn't have Latin, so you couldn't become a doctor, but it cou -- you could go on t -- to any other education. But then in 1935, when we decided that we had to leave **Germany**, I quit school, I was fo -- when I was -- no six -- '36. I wa -- 14, you were no longer -- had ne -- compulsory to go to school, you could go out on your own. And since we were going into farming, I went to work for a gardener and learned a little bit there. My father knew farming quite well because he advised farmers what to do. So when we came to **Holland**, again, we went into farming.

Q: Still on **Germany**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you walk me through some of the changes that the Jewish community experienced after **Hitler** came to power? I -- now -- you -- you were -- you can talk about the --

A: Well, I know this --

Q: -- years from '33 to '37.

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A: I know this, they had **Winterhilfe**, which was they collected money to help the poor people, the Jewish cu -- community had to do that too. My grandfather, as the president of the congregation was in charge of that, and I was sent out to collect for **Winterhilfe [indecipherable]**. We were four or five Jewish children in town and at Hebrew school we had a teacher. In those days that one man was a teacher, a **Chazzan**, a **Shochet**, he did everything. And I remember synagogue very well. At 1928 it was completely remo-modeled because it was very old, and I -- I remember the services and all those things as a child. Be -- it was part of me.

Q: Do you remember reading any of the newspapers in **Germany** while you were still living there? Do you remember any anti-Semitic literature?

A: I -- I'm sure we read a daily paper, but I-I was too young to really understand or to read it, I -- as I said, I was 12 -- '35, I was -- I was **Bar Mitzvah** in '35, and I mean, I-I -- I don't think I read the paper much.

Q: What were you allowed to take with you when you left **Germany**?

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: What were you -- what could you take with you? You personally, when you left.

A: We were allowed to take almost anything, and we packed with the supervision of the Gestapo. We actually took two railroad cars full of farm equipment and things we needed in the house. I had a stamp collection and they looked it over, obvious it

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wasn't tremendous. And we got almost ready to take everything we wanted except they wouldn't permit my father to take a new car. He wanted to take a new car and they said no way. A -- a little sidelight. My father was suing the German government then, for a tax matter. And they told him, if you sue the German government, we won't let you go. So, of course he had to drop that. And then we went to **Holland** in '37.

Q: Was **Holland** the place that you thought you would stay, or was it a stopping point along a -- a larger path?

A: We lived right along the German border, and my father's aim was to can you go -- continue leaving. I mean, he didn't want to stay there. He wanted to leave in '33, he certainly wanted to go on. And of course, he wanted to take as many [indecipherable] from **Germany** with him. He tried **South America**, you name it, anything. We weren't registered anywhere. And he once had permission to go to **England** to take -- start a training farm for the [indecipherable]. And while he was in **Amsterdam** to get his visa, or permit, whatever, he ran into a German Jewish attorney who knew the immigration laws. And he said, you're a farmer? You don't go to **England**, you go to **United States**. My father said, how can I go to **United States**, I'm not even registered in the quota. A skilled farmer will be automatically inserted in the quota. So we had to present to the American consulate in

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Rotterdam, my father's background and we got permission to come to **United States**. A little sidelight here. My mother's father, my grandfather had come to us, to live with us in **Holland** after we had applied to come to the **United States**, and of course we wanted to take him with us. And sad to say that the American consul in **Rotterdam** was anti-Semitic. He told my father, if he asks me once more, I won't get you go. So my grandfather stayed in **Amsterdam** with a cousin of my father's, and he died a natural death in 1941. But the cousin, husband, they got killed. We left June 9th, 1939 [indecipherable] **Amsterdam** to come to the **United States**.

Q: Tell me about the time that you stayed in **Holland**. How -- how much were you aware of what was going on in **Germany**?

A: Very much so. As I said, we lived along the border, and people came to us illegally and we had a sort of an underground railroad, where we would help the people that came in, got a taxi for him in the town of **Arcen**, where we lived. And he would take them to the nearest Jewish community in **Fendler**. And they would then help these people to get further into **Holland** for -- then they were allowed to stay. I mean, we had cases where people went right back. One of the Dutch border policemen ha -- was forced to put some people back into **Germany**, and he told me, I won't do that again. And you know, thing -- when they were caught they were done for. This was right after **Kristallnacht**, yeah. Yeah, tha -- there wasn't much

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after that. I mean, we got our permission to go, we sold our property and -- until everything was ordered, til we have our tickets.

Q: How do people know how to find you on this underground railroad?

A: Believe it or not, the German border police helped. They said, over there is a -- another Jew. He will help you. There were some German border police that did that. Some came over blind and somehow wound up with us. Since we had a boarding house in addition to being farmers -- also the Dutch border police would bring them to us while they would try to get permission to stay. One or two did, but most of them didn't. I mean, they put them across the border they could turn around, come right back. But what really happened to most of them, we don't know. I know one man, he went back up in **Vienna**. And we even moved from our farm after we sold, to another town near **Fendler** called **Blerick**, and he wrote to Mr. **Katzenstein**, near **Fendler**, and the letter got to us. I don't know whether he survived or not.

Q: Can you tell me what you heard about **Kristallnacht** from where you were?

A: I was in **Holland**, I wasn't in **Germany**, and I know the -- from the Jewish point of view, we were permish -- we had permission to do anything. We were -- don't -- didn't have to observe the Jewish laws about **Shabbat**. We just helped the people that came. That's -- I mean, I -- I -- as we heard -- of course we heard the news and so on, what happened in **Germany**. That year, '38, my grandmother died on the last

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day of **Hanukah**. And of course my father didn't go back to **Germany**. I went back -- I was a 16 year old and I went back to the funeral. I'm here. I was -- I came back again.

Q: What was your -- what was your legal status as you were going back and forth from **Holland** to **Germany** for this fu --

A: We were Germans. We were Germans. We were German citizens. In fact, we had to go to the German consulate in **Mastreif** then had the **J, Jude**, put into our passports. We had G-German passports. Look, our legal status in **Holland** was that. When I came to **United States** we were enemy aliens. I went into the army as an enemy alien.

Q: When you left **Germany**, were you able to say goodbye to family and friends?

A: Not really. There was one German farmer who wanted to say goodbye to us, but he couldn't do it openly. And he got on the train with us to say goodbye and went with us a couple of stations and then he went back. So -- but otherwise, there was no saying goodbye. The relative -- we had no relatives in town, maybe we said goodbye to the Jewish families that were there. By the way, I -- the record at the Holocaust Mu-Museum, I know that all the people that didn't get out shortly after we got out, they all got killed.

Q: Did you have any regrets at all about leaving **Germany**?

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A: Not at all, I'll give you a -- a **[indecipherable]** question. You know, I mentioned I was in the American army. And we have a reunion -- ma -- the company, not the division, I was in hundred infantry division. And we had a reunion and one -- the wife of one of my comrades asked me how -- how -- what did you -- how did you feel like fighting the Germans? I said, very gladly. They would have killed me if I wouldn't have go-gotten out. No, there was no regret about leaving **Germany** for a second.

Q: Is there anything about your time in **Germany** or in **Holland** that we haven't discussed that you'd like to mention before we move into the next stage.

A: Probably after you leave I'll remember, which is normal. I mentioned my father's experience, I mentioned our experience in **Holland**. Nothing outstanding. We had -- we had the boarding house and people coming across the border. Ha -- ha -- I remember I had to sleep in the haystack a couple of nights once because we had so many people. But nothing outstanding.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in **Holland**?

A: No. Not at all. At least we didn't. My wife told you the experience of her father, but we have personally -- that personal contact we had was absolutely good. I -- I don't -- I could mention something, but it's not off the record. You want to stop for a second?

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Q: No, we-we'll continue.

A: Okay. I-I met somebody recently, here, whose mother came from the same town where I lived in **Holland**. And it's a small world, but th -- I didn't know her. I knew her family and we -- there are many people that we both knew. So, she lives right here. I haven't met her yet, we just talked on the phone.

Q: When you left **Holland**, did -- did you have any expectations about what your new home, where you're going to be arriving soon, was like?

A: No, our aim was to become farmers. Whe -- when and where, we had no idea. My f -- they were German Jewish real estate agents who took you under their wing and tried to sell you a farm. We were [indecipherable] into **New York** and my father entered a federal land pact in, I think it was **Somerville, New Jersey**, and he bought a farm from a piece of paper. We had -- had three houses. Had over 120 acres, 150 acres, and he bought that on a piece of paper. This Jewish Agricultural Society, we had some money fro -- obviously from selling our property, and the Jewish Agricultural Society gave us a second mortgage to build a chicken coop. There were Jewish people in the area who were very helpful and I know there was one family, they picked up my mother every week to go to **Camden** to the **shircha** to go to the butcher store and so on. I mean they were very helpful.

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Q: Were you helped by any Jewish agencies or were they just individuals who helped you?

A: No, we ha -- no -- the Jewish Agricultural Society, but o-otherwise, these real estate people were private salesmen and they -- they didn't help you.

Q: Nobody like **HIAS** or anybody else?

A: No, no, we were not involved with that.

Q: Okay. Before we get too much into your life in the **United States**, how did you come to the **United States**, how did you travel here?

A: In the [indecipherable]. Was a new boat. We went third class, we couldn't afford anything better, and was the time of the World's Fair and the people were coming from all over the world. E-Eventually, after we were in **New York** we rented a room with somebody in **Washington Heights**, and two of my uncles were wor -- had jobs at the World's Fair and eventually we wound up -- I said, everybody is coming, why don't we go? In those days the subway was a nickel. And we went out there to look and the thing that impressed me most was the ice water dispenser at the General Elec -- General Motors exhibit. That impressed me most. My mother was very disappointed. There was a place that sold root beer and it didn't taste at all like the beer she expected. We looked for farms and as I said, we bought a place with three houses. The first we moved into one house, good one -- two story, and

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then we sold the two newer houses to je -- also German Jewish families that had come. One family came from **Berlin**, one family came from **Frankfurt**, and we moved in the old house, which had nothing. The -- the hot water was made on the stove in the kitchen. No heating system. Water, we had a well, and we had a -- we had a pump in there, and we couldn't afford a deep well pump, so a plumber came and he built a platform in the well from which a regular pump could supply us with water. There was a Jewish plumber in **Camden** who would underwrite a loan so we could build a heating system, which of course he built. So we got a heating system, we got hot water and we started farming. At first I worked with a team of horses. Took a few years til we could afford a tractor, but again, we raised chicken feed. We grew corn, we grew wheat, and that we used for a chicken feed. The salesman for the feed dealer sold us our first car. This was 1939 - '40 - '41 -- '40. And he -- was oh, I think a '26 - '28 **Chevy** or **Ford**, whatever. But now we had a car. My father had to get a driver's license, but that was no problem. And --

Q: Tell me how you found out that war had broken out in **Europe**. How did you learn about it?

A: Oh, we had a radio, we listened to the news, we got a daily paper. So we knew one what -- knew what was going on in the world. And of course, **Hitler** came into **Holland**, what was it, we left June ninth, he went into **Holland** May first. So we

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knew that we got out by the skin of our teeth, and we could breathe a little heavier, although we were worried about the [indecipherable] that were left behind. I had, in the meantime, '39 - '40, most of the relatives that were in -- were left in **Germany** had gotten out. There was one uncle who was interned in **England** in the **Kitchener** camp, but he got permission to come here and he came too. Came to us first, working on the farm.

Q: When you came to this country, did anybody ask you about your experiences in **Europe**?

A: Not that I remember. I -- I didn't go to school, I was 17, I was old enough to stay out, and maybe I'm regretting it or not, but my brother went to high school, and literally I went with him. I had all the books. I learned lot of history, I learned a lot of things by just reading. I'm still a -- learning.

Q: Were you able to keep in touch with people that you had left behind in **Germany** when you came to the **United States**?

A: In the beginning yes, but then when in '41 the **U.S.** entered the war, even postal communication was difficult. Eventually the ones that were left behind got killed.

Q: But in the correspondence that you were able to get, what kinds of things did they write about?

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A: Literally nothing. The -- look, the mail was censored, they knew that. And they just that we do fine -- look, I -- we are now translating correspondence like that, we're -- a-at the museum, and it's all -- the letters are repetitive. That's all the s -- because that's all they could tell.

Q: So you were in your late teens and working? Was that something that you wanted to continue to do indefinitely, is -- to do the --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Is that what you wanted to do?

A: Well, fr -- I -- I loved farming, and some people can't understand that, but I did. I raised chickens, we grew corn, I worked with a tractor and my father built up a retail route in **Camden**. And the nearest congregation was in **Haddonfield, New Jersey**, or **Haddon Heights, New Jersey**. And since we were fairly observant, we didn't go to synagogue except at the high holidays, where we usually went to **New York** where a -- my uncles lived. So we went there. We had some -- some family in **Philadelphia** found us, distant relatives and we went there occasionally. Like when my brother became **Bar Mitzvah** on the farm, some -- he went to **Philadelphia** to get his **Bar Mitzvah** lessons, and then from **Philadelphia** they [indecipherable] for his **Bar Mitzvah**.

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Q: What stands out in your mind about the time from '39 when the war broke out in **Europe** until **Pearl Harbor**?

A: Well, there was really -- I mean, the war was going on. We knew that and we were very glad that we were in the **United States**. And I had to register for the draft [indecipherable] enemy alien. Legally, we were not alle -- allowed to leave **New Jersey**. We weren't supposed to go to **Philadelphia** or anything, and once in awhile we asked for a travel permission, but usually we went when we could. And I got registered for the draft and my father tried to have me deferred because he needed me for the farm. But after many, many applications, eventually he was denied and I had to -- to register and I was drafted in March of 1944, as an enemy alien. I only became a citizen after I was in the army.

Q: Tell me your reaction to **Pearl Harbor**. When you heard about it, what -- what did you think?

A: Oh, I was shocked, of course, absolu -- heard it on the radio, and in a way a -- this happened, so we're in -- totally involved now. I mean a -- in a w-way I knew that I ha-had to go in and a -- a -- it was a hundred percent American, even though I wasn't a citizen yet. And I felt very glad that things had come to that point.

Q: Tell me about your military service. When exactly did you start and -- and what training did you receive?

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A: Well, I was drafted March 27th, 1944, which later on turned out to be my wife's birthday. And I was sent for basic training to Camp **Blanding** in **Florida**, infantry basic. I was classified not for i -- outright infantry, but infantry in -- **I** and **R**, Intelligence and Reconnaissance. Not that it helped any. Was still infantry basic. And when that was finished I had to report to Fort **Mead**, **Maryland**, and supposedly to go to the **Pacific**. But then a rule came out, anybody over 23 goes to **Europe** and since I was over 23, I a -- I mean a -- over -- I-I was reclassified to go to **Europe**. I was then sent to the hundred -- to join the hundred infantry division in **Fort Bragg**, **North Carolina**. Company --

Q: Let me pause because I'm afraid I'm going to run out of tape. Just one minute.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Werner Katzenstein**. This is tape number one, side **B**. And you were telling me about your military service, the very beginning of it --

A: Military service.

Q: -- yes.

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A: I joined the hundred infantry division at **Fort Bragg** and we prepared to go overseas. We had some more training, obstacle course and so -- and so on, under fire. And then, eventually, we got ready to go. I think, yeah, it was **Yom Kippur** when we left **Fort Bragg** and we went on to **Camp Kilmer** in **New Jersey**. We only spent a few days there. Since I was close to home I got permission to go home a couple of times. But then when we boarded the transport and we ar -- and we're in a convoy of the hundred infantry division. We left about that time, we arrived **[indecipherable] Gibraltar** in the **Marseilles** area around November first. And then we went up through the mountains t -- into the **Vosges** mountain range. We actually went on the line around septem -- November first and -- where we relieved the 45th infantry division. We went out on a patrol and I think the patrol of my first platoon was the first combat action of the division. And we went back and then we got into combat from -- attacked a few towns, took a few towns. And on the sixth or seventh November in the town of **[indecipherable]**, I got wounded. You know, the saying is you take the town and the high ground beyond it. The Germans were on the high ground. We were in the town. And I was lucky I got not -- I got wounded and came out to a field hospital -- or a field hospital to a -- in a battalion he -- first aid station, then to a field hospital where they operated on me to remove the shrapnel from the wound. It was in my buttock. And I remember clearly s --

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everyone saying, who do we have here? **Katzenstein**, pronounced in perfect German. And I was hoping this wasn't a German doctor. Anyhow, I woke up the next day in a field hospital, believe it or not, a German, wounded German prisoner of war was lying next to me. Curiosity, I started talking to him. All I have to give you is my name and number. He wouldn't talk to me. Maybe he thought we were pulling a trick, but I was there and then I was -- I don't know, four or five, six days. Then we were put on a train to get to the nearest hospital, I think at **Besançon**. And on that train there were only sitting and walking patients. I couldn't sit. They had to put up a stretcher for me in the supply car. And I was there a few days. There was some movie actress with us, I don't remember who it was. And as I said in the beginning I was classified lightly wounded. They took me now off on a stretcher and I stayed there, I don't know, a week or so. And there they sewed up the buttock wound. Stayed there, I don't remember, til they thought I was well enough. And the doctor was very kind. A milit -- a medical officer is out to get you back to the front too mu -- as quick as possible. A doctor was try to keep you in the hospital as long as possible. And this one said, evacuation to the rear.

Q: To what?

A: To the rear. And I wound up in a hospital which at one time had been a -- a German hospital, a army hospital in the **Exon Provence**. And stayed there for

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awhile. I remember there was a case of a German prisoner of war who had lockjaw. And somehow they found out I spoke German, so they took me and our doctor and a nurse into that room. The doctor wanted to give him massive dose of antitoxin, and I had to translate to the German medic what they were going to do. I really don't know whether the man survived or not. I stayed there a little while longer and then I wound up again in the field replacement hospital, where I volunteered for **KP** on Christmas. I had experienced that on Jewish holidays I didn't have to -- to work, so I figured here let's have somebody Christian have a chance to have the day off. So on Christmas I volunteered **KP** duty. Came back to my outfit -- what was happen -- November sixth -- around January sixth or seventh, and first to the kitchen and then they brought me up front. And we were in a position right in the **Maginot Line**. And we were pretty scared to begin with. But a infantry platoon is 40 men when they are full strength. When I came back, my platoon was 20 men, of which I knew 10. So you can imagine what they had gone through while I was away. But from then on, through the end of fighting -- I mean, I had some more experiences, but combat was combat. We went through the **Siegfried** line, we went down towards **Mannheim**. One thing, once we were in **Germany** we didn't dig f -- dig foxholes any more, we slept in houses. And one of the worst battle ec -- battle experience I had was the city of **Heidelberg**. **Heidelberg** was sort of on a hill at the

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Neckar river. And the Germans for some reason or other, put up stiff resistance, very stiff. Some companies had gotten across the **Neckar** river, we were still on the other side. But then we had to go across. And on broad daylight, under German fire, we crossed the river. Not everybody made it. Then we went up the hill and through the **Knorr** soup f-factory that was on top of the hill. And the tanks of the soup concentrate had been hit with artillery. We actually went up the hill in **Knorr** concentrate. And we had to take the factory. After we took the factory, we had then take -- fought street by street to take the city of **Heidelberg**. I mean, the Germans were just unbelievable. Then we had finally took the garrison, which they were still holding. And after we took that, they gave up -- at the le -- what was left, they left. And that -- a day or two, I -- later I was supposed to go on furlough, and I remember they sent me back to battalion headquarters, and that was the morning that President **Roosevelt** died. Company captain that I knew told us that **Roosevelt** had died. Went on furlough, first they put us into a German town, but then they decided no more resort in **Germany**, and we were sent on to **France**. Then spent there a few days, went back -- Passover they pulled us off the front line and gave a **Seder** in a German hotel. The hundred infantry division had a Jewish chaplain, **Herbert Eskin** was the name, I remember him well. And we had a **Seder** there. Wasn't much of a **Seder**, you know, but you were away from combat for a few

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days, and then we went back. And I don't remember the date when we stopped fighting. When we got to the outskirts of **Stuttgart**, we actually went into occupation. We occupied a town here, occupied at town there. And that was the end of combat. The war was -- wasn't over yet. I tried to get to military government. I mean, I figured I had enough at the end of the [inaudible]. But -- went to the nearest -- no, I wrote to military government. A friend of mine was the sec -- the company clerk. And we wrote and they sent back, sorry, it has to go through channels. So it went through channels. Company commander who during combat wouldn't let me go, when he came back, he okayed my transfer. And then I went to military government and I wound up in a county right next to the county where my father came from. And th -- this was the northernmost county in the American zone, and that was the first county in the British zone. And there was an uncle and aunt of my father's that had come back from **Theresienstadt**. And of course I went to see them. And everybody in the **States** sent me packages for them. And then military government was very interesting. It was the starting up of German government. First we -- they needed travel permission for anything they w-wanted to go. The starting of political parties -- at first political parties were only permitted on the county level, and then, of course it spread. And --

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Q: Just -- just one moment, let's let this -- sirens pass. **[tape break]** Okay, we're back, the sirens have passed.

A: There isn't much more to tell after that.

Q: Let me ask a few questions. I wanted to know your beginning rank and your ending rank of your military service. Your rank. Your military rank.

A: When?

Q: No, what was your military rank?

A: Oh, I -- I was a corporal. They promised me more if I would stay. They wanted to keep me in the worst way. When I had enough points to go home, I went home. They couldn't keep me another day.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in the military?

A: Not really. There may have been a few guys that were not -- had no experiences with Jews, but in combat, there was no question.

Q: When you arrived in **Europe** for your military service, how much did you know about what was happening to the Jews?

A: Well, when we went into combat, we knew -- this was '44 -- we knew that there were concentration camps and we knew that people are -- were getting killed, but not that much in detail.

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Q: Did you ever read the “**Stars and Stripes**” magazine while you were in service?

I don't --

A: Yes, we got that regularly. And I don't think there was too much in there about it. I don't remember, anyhow.

Q: Where were you on **V-E** day?

A: **V-E** day, I -- we were still -- I was not military government yet. We were in a town -- I think was **Kinitling**, whatever it was called. We were doing occupation duty. And we were getting ready to be shipped to **Japan**. Hundred infantry **[indecipherable]** we were supposed to go out by way of **Marseilles**. And when **V-E** day came we were unhappy that they changed our orders, because most people went to **United States** first and then go to **Japan**, even though we were supposed to go to **Marseilles** and then go to **Japan**, but for us it was over. I mean, the -- we did occupation duty. Was interesting, I mean, we started schools in -- within our units and I taught chicken farming, I taught German, and we had all kinds of talent. We had a guy with a Master's degree in English, you name it. The most liked class was car repair because, you know, that was everybody's interest. We had all kinds of interests there and that was very interesting. I ran the day room and I was giving news broadcasts to the company from what I heard on the radio. But this was now '45, you know, the war was over, so there wasn't much happening any more.

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Q: When did you realize the full extent of the Holocaust?

A: I think I'd -- I- didn't realize it until I came out of the service, til I came back home and really learned of things that had happened. When I came home, th -- of course there was more information available. But during the time in the service, it was not too much.

Q: Let's pause again. **[tape break]** Okay, we're back. Apparently there are a lot of sirens out there. After the war, while you were still doing occupation service, what efforts did you make personally to try and find family or friends who might have survived?

A: I'll be honest, I didn't make too many efforts. As I said, I was in military government. I knew -- I found out who was killed and where the others were that I knew by then, and I really didn't make too many efforts. I now feel guilty about that at times.

Q: When exactly did you leave **Europe**?

A: To come home? Oh, April 30th, I guess it was '46. Was -- my birthday was April 29th. And my brother at that time was stationed at **Fort Dix**, and I of course ha -- I went to **Fort Dix** to get discharged and our -- my birthday present was a Broadway show at **Fort Dix**.

Q: How had things changed in the **United States** when you came back?

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A: How what?

Q: How had things changed in the **U.S.** when you came back?

A: Well, I remember there had been gasoline rationing and I think there were still things being rationed. Things -- the economy was trying -- now had to change from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy and I think one of the biggest mistakes was when people said to go back the way it was before. There was no way of going back the way it was before. That didn't exist any more.

Q: How had you changed during your time in **Europe**?

A: Well, I sort of, I guess made a promise to myself, since I survived, that I would become more observant. And I did this gradually, I mean from -- during the war, everything was permitted, but then I did this gradually. I -- at home, on the farm, I never did any work that wasn't necessary, even before the war. And now there was no business on **Shabbat**, you know, people didn't come in to buy eggs or things. And it got known. My parents were not quite as observant as I was, and of course I became even more observant when I got married.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

A: Blind date in **Brooklyn**. She doesn't like it when I give the complete story, so I won't. If you want to take it off the record, I'll take it off the record. I can't do that to her.

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Q: I don't want to get in any trouble here. Just tell me briefly, what -- what was your wife's background? Was she born in this country?

A: She was -- when I met her she was a legal secretary in **New York**, and when she came to **Vineland** there was an attorney in the neighborhood who asked her to come in to help. She stayed there for quite a few years to help. And when I came to **Vineland**, I worked for my in-laws. They had -- my father-in-law and his brother had a -- a big farm at -- a chicken farm, at first. And then when the chicken business went, as they say in Yiddish, **indraya**, he switched to dairy farming because he, after all, that was his experience, too. We --

Q: I have to ask you to translate. I know what that means, but you need to translate.

A: Oh, it means, in the **[indecipherable]** literally translate, in the **[indecipherable]** it's just done for. The reason for this was that, you know, all these people that came out of the camps and had come to the **United States**, chicken farming was a very attractive business. You didn't have to speak English with the chickens. And the only way at the end that the feed dealers could compete with each other was well, they extend more credit. And when that done, overextension of credit, with no help from the **U.S.** government, chicken business went down the drain. So my father then went to dairy farming. We converted chicken coops into cow stables and I was able to do most -- I was able to do plumbing, you name it. You do everything

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yourself. We had hurricanes. Oh yeah, hurricane **Hazel**, and -- destroyed in our area many chicken coops. In 1955 I decided I couldn't make a living on the farm, because my wife's paycheck had to go to the feed dealer to pay for the feed bill. So, my father had a small route, detail route in the **Haddonfield, Haddon Heights** area, **Cherry Hill** came just in existence. So I decided in '55, I'm going to start knocking doors. And after a year or two I built up my own route and I built up my own business, and worked well.

Q: Just for the record, what -- what's your wife's full name?

A: **Inge Eva Katzenstein.**

Q: Do you have children?

A: Yes. We have three children. We have our oldest son, **Michael** lives in the **Boston** area, has two boys. Our second one, **David** lives in **New Jersey**. He has five children, four girls and a boy, and our daughter lives in **Pittsburg** and she has a daughter and a son.

Q: I wanted to ask you about some of the historical events.

A: [indecipherable] what?

Q: Historical events since the war. How closely did you follow the **Nuremberg** trials?

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A: As close as I could here, in the news I mean. And I knew some of the people that were being tried, I am -- I knew their backgrounds, you know, from experience.

Ribbentrop, Papen, I mean all -- I knew the German governments then, and I knew who did what, and we knew who was lying. And I was not asked, you know, to get involved. I mean, I know people that did, but I followed it. Look, what's his name? **Ribbentrop** was the foreign minister. A cousin of my mother's was an **ob-gyn** in **Berlin**, he delivered **Ribbentrop's** son. Was in those days -- later on, Pope **Pius** the 12th, who was in **Berlin** at that time, my mother's cousin knew him. H-He worked in a Catholic hospital. I mean, this was '37 -- '36 - '37. He got out, but that had nothing to do with it.

Q: Did you feel that justice was done at **Nuremberg**?

A: Yes. They -- I think they did go -- very well that -- I don't think they let many stay alive that should have been killed.

Q: Also, in -- at around that same time period, the **U.N.** debated on the partition of **Palestine**. Was that something that was of interest to you?

A: Yes, that was of interest to me, because after all, we did want a Jewish state. And at the time that seemed to be the only way possible to get it. And of course, the rest is history. What's happening now we all know very well.

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Q: There are some things that happened in this country, a-after the war -- you know, in years since the war. The Korean war and the war in **Vietnam**. Did these have any impact on your life?

A: Well, I followed them as much as I could. Whether they were justified, I don't know. Did -- I gave them thought, wh -- ho -- whether we did too much, or not enough, I don't know.

Q: Also in this country, I wanted to ask you about the Civil Rights movement. Given your personal background, how did you feel about what was going on in this country?

A: I am for the Civil Rights 100 percent. I know this, in the army basic training, one of the lieutenants I worked with was a college professor from **Georgia**, and I questioned him, how can you treat the negroes like this? And he says, the negro has to stay in his place. I mean, of course I didn't agree with him, but who was I to argue? He was a college professor. But the Civil Rights, absolutely.

Q: Did you follow the **Eichmann** trial in **Jerusalem**?

A: Oh, whatever we are able to hear here, yes.

Q: Did you feel that the way it was reported here in this country was -- was fair and objective?

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A: I -- I really don't know. They did s -- report as much as they wanted to. Look, I know a friend of mine here started an organization to protest to the **Washington's Post** anything that they report that's detrimental to **Israel**. So I-I mean we -- the papers do one thing and not always what we like. Look, what's happening between our government and **Israel** right now is ridiculous at times.

Q: Is there anything else that you wanted to share about your professional career? Because I have some questions about your retirement.

A: Well, I enjoyed it. You know, I built up a retail route, 1955, and knocked doors and eventually got acquainted with an awful lot of people, and I think in many cases I became a member of the family. At first we were parents talking about children. They we were talking about par -- children's education, and eventually about children's going out and gr-grandchildren. So -- this is, by the way is not just -- that I had just Jewish customers. I knocked doors to door and I sold chickens and eggs and you name it, and I enjoyed it.

Q: When did you move to **Washington, D.C.**?

A: I guess it was -- be in to -- I think December '98.

Q: And why did you move here?

A: There were several reasons. Number one, my wife's mother had been mentally deteriorated, and we ha -- and physically also. We had her in a home in **Atlantic**

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City. And then, my sister-in-law lived here for over 20 years, and she's said the home here in **Washington** is much better, so we had her transferred to the Hebrew home. And for me again, one of the personal reasons, I tried to slowly liquidate my business. I'd gotten to a point where I was making many monthly deliveries, many deliveries twice a month, and when I decided I was going to go only monthly deliveries, then we decided to come here. Also religious reason. The synagogue in **Vineland** where I went to on **Shabbas** closed down. And the oth -- there was another synagogue but on **Shabbas** I had to walk 40 minutes, and I was getting a little too old for that. And then here, where we moved to, I have a 10 minute walk to synagogue. We are walking distance to four different Orthodox synagogues and -- and from a kosher point of view everything is right at your fingertips. I'm enjoying it.

Q: How did you get involved with the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum?

A: My brother-in-law, **Kurt Pauly** had volunteered there already for a number of years, and we decided, if we can contribute something, we can. And yes, they could use people that translated German into English. And we got and they were very happy to have us. And we've been doing this now for a long time. We go in at least one day a week and it's sometimes not so nice to do what we're doing because we

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can read between the lines how people are suffering, and most of the correspondence that we translate is of people that did not survive. And I'm very glad we're going.

Q: Do you speak publicly about your experiences?

A: We ha -- didn't volunteer at the museum for the speaker's bureau, we haven't been asked. Yeah, I think we volunteered once, but we haven't been asked. Our former next door neighbor is a schoolteacher here in the **Montgomery County**, or **Howard County**, I don't know. And she arranged for us to speak to a public school, one day not long ago. And it was something we enjoyed, and the children enjoyed, and th -- there were a lot of questions. I guess they were 10 or 11 year olds, and they -- I guess that they had seen -- what is it, the **David's** world, or something they had seen. Or --

Q: "**Daniel's Story**"?

A: Yeah, or -- no, also **Anne -- Anne Frank**. They knew about that and they asked us many personal questions and we enjoyed it. Look, we were in **Germany**. The city of **Cologne** invited people, and we were there, I guess it was '86 - '87. And they bent over backwards to supply us with kosher food and so on. And there also we wa -- we asked to speak to schoolchildren, school students. And we asked to

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higher school students. And there the questions were, of course, completely different. And the point I always made is -- how shall I say it?

Q: I'll pause. **[tape break]** Okay, we're back, now that you've collected your thoughts.

A: The point that I made was repeating something that a German mayor told me while I was in military government. And this was 1945. And he said, Mr.

Katzenstein, I hope that the occupation stays here until this generation is dead. And this is what I repeated to the German high school students, because many of them told us, my mother is still a Nazi. I mean, this was now '87. So this is what a German mayor told me, and that was sort of the point that I made.

Q: I'm going to pause and change tape.

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Werner Katzenstein**. This is tape number two, side **A**. And you were telling me about your -- your visit to **Germany**. Was that the only time since the war that you've been to **Germany**?

A: Yes. No, no, we were recently, but that had no connection. We were back recently going to **Belgium**, going to **Germany**, and to **Amsterdam**. This time, my sister-in-law, we went together again, the two couples. And our oldest son came to **Cologne** and to -- they went from cemetery to cemetery to look up the places where the family, my wife's family came from. And we went to the house where my mother-in-law was born and you know, many places like that. We went to the house where my wife grew up. But that was just recently. When I was back in **Germany**, that was the city of **Cologne** and they invited people that were born in the **Cologne** area, there were 40 people, 20 from ger -- from **U.S.** and 20 from **Israel**. That was a very interesting experience, but I don't think it showed us much, that the Germans had changed that much. I know this, Friday night they took us to synagogue by bus and then we walked back to the hotel. And they had two men walking bus -- us, officially that we wouldn't get lost. I think it was for security reasons. They were -- in '87, I mean there's -- **Germany** is still you don't feel a hundred percent secure.

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Q: Is there anything that you and I have not spoken about today that you would like to add before we conclude? You had some thoughts before that you were kind of working on.

A: I really can't think of anything specific that didn't come up -- you know, a few things did come up, but as I said before, going back to **Germany** was nothing joyful. Yes, when I came home somebody said, how was it going back to your home? Coming back to **New Jersey**, that was going back home, not when I was over there. Yeah, we came back, I went back to farming. My brother, by that time was in college and he -- he took chemical engineering. He found quickly engineering was not for him. He went -- he became a chemist and he's doing well.

Q: All right, if -- if you have nothing else to -- nothing else to add?

A: Can't think of anything at this moment. Probably after your gone 10 minutes.

Q: Okay. I thank you very much for speaking with me today, and then this will conclude the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Werner Katzenstein**. Thank you.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview