

Interview with John Bucur
August 18, 2003

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **John Bucur**, conducted by **Esther Finder** on August 18th, 2003 in **Chantilly, Virginia**. This is tape number one, side **A**. Now, I would like to have you pronounce your last name and spell it for us.

Answer: **Bucur, B-u-c-u-r.**

Q: And what is the origin of your last name?

A: It's Romanian in ancestry.

Q: What does it mean?

A: Oh, it means happy, it means glad. Mostly happy.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born here in the **United States**, in **Youngstown, Ohio**.

Q: When were you born?

A: March 5th, 1925.

Q: And where did you grow up?

A: I grew up actually in **Youngstown, Ohio** and went to college from -- graduating from high school and then actually never really went back again.

Q: What language or languages were spoken in your home when you were growing up?

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A: I'm of Romanian ancestry and consequently both my parents had emigrated from **Romania** and as a result spoke Romanian in the -- in the house and when I went to school, the elementary school, I used to answer the teacher sometimes in Romanian when I didn't know how to speak it in English. But nevertheless, mostly Romanian as a youngster, and then -- excuse me -- as I grew up it just completely changed to English and didn't use it again.

Q: Can you tell me please about your hometown from your childhood? What kinds of childhood memories do you have of your hometown?

A: Well, **Youngstown** at that time was a very thriving me-metropolis because it was on the theater circuit. My father was a very avid theater-goer, so I recall going to the **Hippodrome** and the **Palace** theaters and seeing the old magician shows with **Thurston** and **Blackstone** and those, and seeing **Al Jolson** u-up on the stage in person while in my father's lap, and then later on as his a-accompanying **[indecipherable]**.

Q: What else do you remember about your hometown?

A: Well, I -- I -- of course I remember going to high school, perhaps more so than anything else. I was a pretty good student actually, I was val-valedictorian of my class. And it was during the early wartime, in -- in 1943 when I graduated, and --

Q: I-I'm going to not get the war years just yet.

A: Okay.

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Q: Were there many Jews in your town when you were growing up?

A: Certainly in the area that I grew up in because it was a -- what we call a mixed area. There were Jews, there were French, there were Italians, and -- in fact, it was almost a -- a conglomeration of just every -- every language there was spoken. And as a result, actually when I was younger, I spoke some of the other languages, too. I learned how to speak a little Hungarian and a little bit of Italian, which makes it easier because Romanian and Italian are pretty much aligned. And under those circumstances even as a youngster, we went to each other's homes and so forth and heard it spoken because that's what most people spoke at that time. And, oh, we were at that time, foreigners. My father had ra -- come here, as I said, working in the steel mills and when the war broke out and -- first World War, he volunteered to go and he was in the American expeditionary force, and when the war was over he automatically became a citizen. And he was still a young man, he was only in his 20's and decided to go back to **Romania** and find somebody to marry. And he met my mother and they had a -- a courtship that lasted a short period of time, and he got married there in **Romania** and came here, and brought her with him. And s -- at the time that she came to this country, she was pregnant and I was born -- she got here in February and I was born in March, in 1925. I can always say I was conceived there and dedicated here.

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Q: You said you came from a community with a lot of different people

[indecipherable] different --

A: Ethnic groups, yeah.

Q: -- ethnic groups. How did they all get along, and how -- specifically how did people get along?

A: Oh.

Q: How did the Jewish community get along with the Christian community?

A: We had a ver -- marvelously -- that's -- we had friends that were Romanian Jews that spoke Romanian and actually they didn't call themselves Jewish. I don't think there was any distinction back in those days a-about being a Hebrew or a Jew or whatever it was. And you were Greek or you were Italian, that's fine. And we all played together and we all commiserated with each other when things went wrong, and it was -- the relationship was exceptional, I think.

Q: You told me about your father's livelihood, but you didn't tell me his name. What was his name?

A: His -- his name was **John** also. So I'm really, to all intents and purposes, junior, but he never used his middle name, so I -- but I have, so I -- that distinguishes me from him, cause I'm a **Charles**.

Q: And what was your mother's name?

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A: My mother's name was **Victoria**, and she was -- her maiden name was **Morjiniana**, which just means marginal in nature, coming from the mountain area, and her father's and -- and her -- her parents were from the mountains, the **munchan**, in **Transylvania**, that part of **Romania** that is western part of the **Carpathian** mountains.

Q: What work did your mother do?

A: My mother had finished school and -- at mo -- moment that my father brought her here. She went to school here to speak English, and she was a seamstress for a period of time and during the war working in a -- a -- as a supervisor in a factory making uniforms and raincoats and so forth for the military.

Q: Do you have any siblings?

A: No, I'm an only child.

Q: You mentioned high school, do you remember anything about elementary school, and do you know the name of your elementary school?

A: Oh, I have some nice, fond thoughts of my elementary school because in the fourth grade I had the teacher named **McLaughlin** who was very fond of me and I was a good student and she challenged me in more ways than one, in the work that I was doing because I got special work over and above what she taught the general class, because it was such a mixed group. And it was at that time that my mother and I went to visit **Europe** and this teacher encouraged it, even though I was going to be

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absent for a period of time, and encouraged it very strongly and wa -- I wrote to her and we communicated during the time I was gone. As a result though, I was gone about a year and a half and went to school there, i-in **Romania**, so going back to the - - my parent's homes. And -- but decided at that time -- the decision, that is, was left to me by my parents as to whether I wanted to stay there or whether I wanted to come back here and I chose to come back here, wanting to be back in -- in **America**, and from then on it was just here.

Q: When you were a child, what were your plans for your future, or your ambitions?

A: As -- as a child my own ambitions were always -- they were led by my parents because the thing that they wanted most of all was for me to go to school. And whatever it was that I did, it didn't make any big difference. I always leaned toward being a doctor, and my father said, if that's what you want to be, that's fine, go ahead, let's -- but you've got to excel in school and -- and this was the time. And of course the depression held things back considerably during that time. And we always fared very well, though, because my father had a good -- good job and worked several days a week and so that we always didn't have to worry about whether we had enough food on the table or anything.

Q: What did you do for fun when you were a kid?

A: Well, abs -- I was pretty athletic so I wa -- we played baseball and football. I played a little baseball. We had baseball group that collected in the neighborhood and

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we played other neighborhoods, so we had -- th-that was a real big, going thing. And football, I tried football in high school for a short period of time, but I was wiser than most kids and I quit it. They didn't pay very much in those days.

Q: Did you come from a religiously observant family?

A: Yes. Yes. My father came from a minister's family. Actually, a second family. His father was married and had five children and th-the diphtheria epidemic hit them and all of them died, including his wife, and he was left single and still a young man and a minister. And he remarried and then he had the five other children and my father was the youngest of those five. A-Actually a favorite of my -- of my grandfather. But they -- he was a minister there and my father kept all the -- the **[indecipherable]** and all holidays and -- and -- and I -- I grew up that way cause we were Orthodox and un -- under those circumstances, we went to church. When he came here as a young man, he built the church that was the Orthodox church. They dug it with their own hands and shovels and so forth to put the foundations in and so on, it was just something. The church still stands, too.

Q: The name of the church?

A: It's **Saint Mary's** in **Youngstown**. And then **Holy Cross** is what it's called now cause they moved into a big section of town now, near the **Butler's** Art Museum and the -- and the **Youngstown** colleges in a very, very special section in **Wick** Avenue.

Q: Did you have any favorite traditions or holidays when you were a child?

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A: Yes, Easter is our biggest tradition and most favorite. Not only my parents, but I guess it's because I was a youngster it always is, and it was always a -- one of our biggest holidays.

Q: Why?

A: Oh, I guess it was because of the -- the -- the birth of Christ and all and the story that goes along with it and -- and how it all happened and what it meant to begin with.

Q: Did you ever witness any anti-Semitism in your childhood before the war?

A: There -- there was no such thing in no -- not in our neighborhood, no. This was a mixed neighborhood as I mentioned before. None. No.

Q: What do you remember hearing about **Hitler** before the war started? Did you hear anything at all?

A: Yes, from my father particularly because he was in World War I and the stories that he told about that war were easily translated into what was going on there now.

And he was quite happy that I had decided not to stay there because that's when **Hitler** was rising in his power and he said, this man is evil. And some of the things that he was perpetrating against his own -- own people there, even though he wasn't a real German, were pretty atrocious.

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Q: It sounds like your father was quite aware of what was happening in **Germany**, but we-were you also aware of things like, let's say the **Berlin** Olympics, do you remember that?

A: Yes, I do. And **Kristallnacht**, yes, yes, yeah. The reason for that is because my father was a very avid follower of what was going on and s -- and not only by paper but radio had just come in during this particular time and we had a good radio that we kept up with what was going on, and as a result it rubbed off on me because when we talked about it and -- even at church or anyplace else, and the men spoke, the children were there and we listened and we heard an-and participated actually, in -- in many of the discussions that were had.

Q: Do you remember any of the things that were said in church about **Hitler** and what was going on in **Germany**?

A: Oh yes, that -- that he was an evil man that had deposed the -- most of the hierarchy that was there in **Germany** and was taking control at that particular time, and that he had started blo -- marking the Jews and putting a-armbands on them. And he was taking the books that were written by them at that time and everybody was saying that this was an evil action.

Q: Do you remember your friends from your multi-ethnic neighborhood ever talking about events in **Europe** before the war?

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A: Yes, I had one that was pretty close. He was Polish. He had his family and his sister, so -- were older than I was -- or he wasn't, but th-thi -- he had older sisters, and they taught us how to dance, and -- and they were the -- the **hoi polloi** of the area, actually, for that matter. The girls were, they were just beautiful. And they were very, very strongly against anything th -- and they were strong Catholics. There they were, strong Catholics with an Orthodox boy in their midst, and that was me, and -- but we loved each other an-and got along quite well. And they -- they also were aware of what was going on, very, very, very much so.

Q: Did you ever see any newsreels or anything before the war that showed what was happening over there?

A: Yes, I remember the eye and ears of the world that we used to see at -- as -- as a youngster. In between features at the movies there would always be some news thing and we would see what was happening and see the crowds and the way that people were responding and all the Germans were responding to **Hitler**. They were -- it seemed now that I look back over it, as if they were mesmerized by this man and that he was a hypnotist that had them under control, because it was all seeming so put on, but it wasn't just put on.

Q: Do you have any other memories that stand out in your mind from the time before the war?

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A: I guess there -- there -- there would be good times and bad times. I remember that during the depression my -- I wanted to get a typewriter and just to get a typewriter was an expensive thing at that time, it was maybe 50 or 75 dollars, well my goodness. And my father said, well, we will get you the typewriter, but you got to teach yourself how to type. And I says okay. So he bought a typewriter for me and I got the books with it and taught myself how to type. And then went to take it in school, in high school and the teacher said, after I sat down there, she said, you already know how. I'll give you credit for the class. In the meantime, go do something else. So I was -- that was something that really stood me in good stead. I recall that specifically because of -- of how it came about. And most of the things that I -- that I wanted as a youngster, being an only child, I got on the basis that I could earn them and -- and use them. They were not something that was not utilitarian, they were always something that could add to my benefit, or our benefit, or our total benefit, or everybody's benefit.

Q: Do you have any recollections of when **Hitler** moved into **Austria** or **Czechoslovakia**? Do you have [indecipherable]

A: Mm-hm, the **Sudetenland**, yes, very much so. My father was just upset, I mean upset. I remember him personally being upset, saying how could this -- how could this happen, and what is **Chamberlain** doing over there in **England**, mollifying these people, you know, and -- and saying that this is not right. And the people that we, in

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our neighborhood were concerned. And th-they were worried about our being -- going to war. My father didn't want me to go in the service either, and he says, you know, I already did, I spent all my time in the service. Why should you have to go, again? So --

Q: Do you remember any of your Jewish friends saying anything about all these events at the time?

A: Yes, yes. The Jewish friends that I had, in fact one of -- one of mine was very close, taught me how to play chess. He was a very intelligent youngster, he was a couple of years older than I, lived up the street. And he said -- I was playing checkers with one of the other neighbors, and he said, did you ever play chess? And I s -- never even paid any attention to it, I knew what it was, but we didn't have it in school back in those days. And he says, well I'll bring my chessboard down and I'll teach you how, but you're never going to beat me. And I says, oh, come on. Four or five years went by and I finally did beat him. But then that was about the last time I'd seen him of -- really, because I left when I was 17, I went to college and I was in college when I went into the service. So I never really came back to **Youngstown, Ohio** after that. All my memories are from 17 down instead of up. Just going back to visit my folks is about the only thing that --

Q: What did this fr -- you didn't tell me the name of this friend who taught you chess, but wha-what did he say about what was happening in **Europe**?

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A: Oh, they -- they -- they said that this -- this was awful. Why are they picking on the Jewish people and why are wa -- bu-but it wasn't only that, my father was pointing out to them that they -- th-that they were incarcerating people in camps and things like that that weren't Jewish, they were just politically against what he was for, and that -- and that was what they were saying. And -- and so many of them, of course, had relatives that were there, and they had relatives in **Romania**, but most of the ones that we knew were of Romanian ancestry, and so that the ones that were Romanian would eat Romanian food and the ethnic mixture, and they spoke Romanian. They didn't -- the ones that I knew did not speak the Jewish -- the Hebraic language at all, they spoke Romanian. And many of them, when somebody would say, well what are you, said I'm a Romanian. Well, so I'm a Romanian Jew, what difference does it make?

Q: How did you learn that **Hitler** had invaded **Poland** and the war started? Do you remember the moment that you first heard about it?

A: Yes, it was in a newspaper, headlines in a newspaper. Was **Hitler** invades **Poland**, and if I remember the **Sudetenland**, that -- going into **Czechoslovakia**, the same way again, newspaper. And of course the radio subsequently, but it was newspaper.

Q: You mentioned **Chamberlain**, let me ask you, what was the reaction in this country when **Hitler** made his deal with **Stalin**?

A: At that time they thought that **Stalin** was a great guy, because they felt that maybe

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Russia would be our stalwart person and that would be against **Hitler** and -- and the German Reich, except that they had signed the pact themselves at that time. And my father had said, was very wary, he said it-it's not worth the paper it's written on. And he said, it's just not going to be of any consequence. And that's as far as I think I could go on that at this particular time.

Q: What was happening in your life in 1939 and 1940, where were you?

A: I was in high school. 1939, four years of high school to 1943 is when I graduated. Now, I graduated in January of '43 because of the -- the war, they accelerated certain [indecipherable] so we had two graduations, one in January and one in June. I graduated in January and I think two weeks after graduation I was down [indecipherable] off the bus in **Athens, Ohio** going to **Ohio** University. I had picked that as the place to go to school.

Q: Okay. Let's stay in high school for just a little while.

A: Mm-hm, yes.

Q: Do you remember discussions about the war and what was happening in **Europe** and also in **Japan** while you were in school? Did you have any discussions in the classroom?

A: Yes, we did. I was a debater to begin with and we had considerable discussion of the political situation at that particular time, a-side from the ra -- who shall own the railroads, or other topics that we used in debating. But there were other groups, like

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the Greek groups that were -- to put that in context, like the Greek groups that are in college, these were small little splinters like the National Honor Society and other groups like that. YMCA and the [indecipherable] and so forth, and that were very much concerned as to what was going on because we were approaching the age of which we would probably be serving in -- in the army or navy or otherwise if we went to war. And some of my -- my confreres, including myself, were leery about the fact that we would be going to war. And we were young, but I suppose that we got that from our parents, mostly and I don't think that was an individualistic thing that -- I don't think that I was that -- that intelligent to be able to fear that at the time.

Youngsters at -- in those ages are -- you can't beat them. They're -- they can't -- nothing is ever going to happen to them. It always happens to somebody else. So as a result, we didn't fear much other than the fact that we might have to be going to war.

Q: One last question -- I hope it's a last question about your high school and -- and everything else. You mentioned that your community was very multi-ethnic. Was there a -- a group of students who were, you know, more -- no -- traditionally American in the sense that their parents were born in this country, perhaps even their grandparents. And my question is, did they see things differently than you, in your community? Your friends who were, you know, first generation Americans in some cases. Did the people whose ancestry -- no, the people who were more American in terms of generations, did they see things differently than you and your friends did?

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Q: No, I don't think so. I think they were all pretty -- pretty much -- that's why I mentioned the [indecipherable] and the YMCA groups and things like th-there -- they were comprised of the very same ethnic groups that I came from so that we all went to school together and we all learned things together and we were all exposed to the same thing. Perhaps differently intellectually as to the levels, but nevertheless, it was pretty much the same. We've had a 50 year reunion a number of years ago, and many of them showed up and -- that had survived and we lost -- lost some of them in the war, but it was interesting to see that -- the changes that had occurred in these individuals only physically, but mentally they're still in the same area they were in then, at the time.

Q: So you're saying that --

A: In other words, they didn't really move out of their milieu as far a-as that was concerned. Many of them improved upon what they were, but many of them did not.

Q: In retrospect, would you say that you and your friends were pretty politically savvy for your age, considering the situation --

A: I think my friends, yes, yes.

Q: **Pearl Harbor**, how did you hear about it?

A: December seventh. Actually I heard about it by my father telling me that when I came home from school that we had been attacked by the Japanese [indecipherable]

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in the newspapers and the radio and the else -- everybody was talking about it, you know, but that's the only way I heard about it.

Q: What was your reaction?

A: Well, my -- ab-absolute horror, because it was unexpected, as far as we knew at that time. And the horror of the matter was that there was no retaliation. I mean, we -- we were sitting ducks, and they just came and -- just tried to destroy us.

Q: How old were you on that day?

A: In 1941, '25, I was 16.

Q: Did you wish that you could enlist right away?

A: [laughs]. Oh, not quite at that time, I -- I was too inculcated by my father to sa -- want to go to war right away. It was only after I got into college that that happened.

Q: In 1941, in -- before **Pearl Harbor** and immediately right after **Pearl Harbor**, did you have any idea what was happening to the Jews in **Europe**?

A: No. We just knew that **Hitler** was being very strongly opposed to their function and he was selecting them out, as I mentioned earlier. And that's about all that we knew about it.

Q: Had you been carefully following the -- the war news?

A: Yes.

Q: What languages did you learn in school, if any?

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A: Oh, I took Latin all the way through, as much as you can possibly get it, cause it was easy for me, being of Romanian ancestry, and that wasn't a real -- and I -- I -- I took Greek and Romanian, of course, is what I spoke at home, and that was it.

Q: You said that you were a student until 1943?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. I'm going to pause to change tape and we'll pick up in 1943.

A: All right.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: -- **Bucur**. This is tape number one, side **B**. And we were now up to June 1943. I'd like you to tell me how your life changed, and walk me through the changes.

A: Well, as I mentioned to you earlier, in January I graduated in '43, cause it was early graduation and I went to college. I had applied to a number of colleges and we felt that going within the state would be a ma -- more [indecipherable] you save a little more, but th -- and state tuition would be less. However, I didn't have to have tuition, I was val-valedictorian of my class and as a result I had a scholarship. So I had a scholarship for actually four years, but wa -- during the first year at **Ohio** University, a number of us decided that may-maybe we ought to go in the service and -- instead of just sitting around and waiting, that as it so happened, I-I was called up for the draft anyway, so it didn't make any -- much difference. The thing that's sur-

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surprising is -- is that when I was called, we had volunteered, and I was called to go to a railroad station and -- and from there to go to **Columbus, Ohio** where there [indecipherable] four days, and where they were gonna decide what to do with us. The thing that really troubled us a lot was the fact that when I -- I was -- went to the station, my father and mother came with me and we went to the same station that my father went to in the first World War and I si -- was leaning against a poster and he just broke down and cried. He says, I was right there, right there, I saw myself, he said, just going. And I was an only son, I wasn't supposed to go in the service, an only son. Also had a perforated eardrum, which kept just about everybody out, but it didn't make any difference, they needed to fill their quotas back in the old days, and I wouldn't have told -- told them anyhow, so I want -- wanted to go in the service. And the -- the thing that I remember so clearly was saying goodbye at the -- at that time, and -- and hope -- hoping that I would be back again at some time later. And fortunately I did.

Q: Can you give me some historical context? What was happening in the war at the time that you went into the service? It -- you know, give me some background in **Europe** and -- and also the war of **Japan**.

A: Well, a-at that time **England** was having a tough time because they were being bombarded and the -- **Germany** had just developed the -- the -- the **V1** rocket and they were shooting these rockets over and I remember that very well. I was a physics

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major in high school and I was quite interested in the -- that type of development. So I followed that pretty closely from that standpoint and then they developed a **V2** rocket as well later, while I was still in the service. But the -- the context of the war at that time was that, you know, we -- we have to get into that European war because the ja -- the Japanese have already attacked us and we're already at war, and that we have to go ahead and then do something just as my father did before. And I think that was the attitude that many of us had.

Q: How far had **Hitler** expanded in **Europe** when you went in?

A: Oh, he had taken the **Sudetenland** and **Poland** and -- and there was -- at that -- well, he was in **France** and that **Paris** had fallen and -- and was in control of most of -- most of -- actually, most of **Europe** because he o-obviously, yo-you know, he was -- he had taken **Sweden** -- I mean, not **Sweden, Denmark**. That was a Scandinavian country and yes, that's about it and yeah, he was in control of just about everything and he was now starting his Russian front.

Q: Now you're in the service. Tell me about the -- the training. Where were you assigned, and -- and walk me through the t --

A: Well, we went to -- we were taken to Fort **Hayes** in **Columbus, Ohio** and we left th -- th -- in -- in the evening, and naturally nobody is going to be sleeping and all night we were up singing and playing cards and just about everything else. And we got there and they fed us breakfast and then they put us in a room and examined us.

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Th -- I mean, you had a -- an examination of -- of written tests, that were -- one part of it was written and another part was oral and then they had a test for sound, code, **Morse** code, the dot dashes and so forth, whether you're capable. And we were all examined and all that and then you were sent to the places that they thought that you would do well in. I had a pretty high score, they sent me to Fort **Sill, Oklahoma** to school. And the school there was an observation sound and flash school, and we had it quite nice as a matter of fact. And some of my confreres that went with me went to the cavalry and some of them went to the tank outfit and to the -- the mule teams and -- and also, depending upon what their capabilities were, or what they felt their capabilities were and whether they were intelligent enough to handle it. And actually while I was at Fort **Sill** and th -- learned that that school there, I actually got a minor in engineering because it was in engineering that we had to learn how to use a -- a -- surveying equipment, **Theodolites** and -- and the various other methods of -- of marking out areas o-of importance against the enemy, that is. I'll describe that a little later, if you want.

Q: So you went through this training program, and then what happened to you?

A: Oh, the one -- then we were da -- moved overseas.

Q: When you were sent overseas, what was your rank and what was your assignment?

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A: I was a private. We were all privates, nobody had any rank in our school, of any kind. And we went -- well, actually we were -- in part we were one of the largest convoys that ever crossed the -- the **Atlantic** Ocean, it was thousands of ships. Our ship and our equipment that was given us, was as if we were going to be going to **Africa** because the African theater was still in full force at that time, and we had some equipment that was all -- and we -- we -- we knew that's where we were going. We ended up in **Reykjavik, Iceland**. And from there we watched the skyline and then dropped down into **England** from there. And in **England** we got new equipment and new things at a new camp. Actually, we went -- we were stationed at **Cardiff** in **Wales**. And from **Cardiff** in **Wales**, then we were sent to the unit that would need you. And our unit was sent to an area called [indecipherable] in -- in **Devonshire**. And it was a -- we commandeered a big castle that was there and had nice quarters and -- and so -- and trained and trained our people there on the wartime basis instead of the Fort **Sill** basis, where I had the initial training. War is a little different than the books tell you all the time. So we trained there and then from there we moved on a number of occasions, as if we were going to go on invasion, but we didn't. And then they moved the whole unit to **Bournemouth**, which is a resort on the channel, a beautiful place. And about every other day we would go out as if we were going to invade and we didn't, and months went by and -- until June sixth, and June sixth the invasion occurred and we were still on the ship. And we only landed **D** plus two, but

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we started out on the -- the fifth and went out and -- and went in and pulled back, went in and pulled back. We were artillery people, actually, and the work that we did, there was no place to work, as yet. So as a result, until they had taken land, there was nothing much that we could do. So they held us back a-as much as they could. Plus the fact that the bombardments of the Germans was pushing our ships back.

Q: Tell me about those two days between --

A: This was **Omaha** Beach.

Q: Right. But the two days you said you -- you didn't get there til **D** plus two.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: What was the experience of those two days?

A: It was -- actually, it was rather jocular. Everybody wanted to get in there and get in there and fight, and go -- and -- and get this thing over with. And after the f -- the first few hours in that you didn't land, and waited to go in, you knew that you were going to be going in soon enough, it was, as I said jocular, right, everybody was pretty happy about going in.

Q: Did you have any idea what was happening to the people who were on the beach at -- you know, the first ones?

A: Yes, we saw it.

Q: You could see it?

A: Yes, we could see it. We could see from -- from our ship just exactly what was

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happening, and th-th-the jocularity I'm talking about only was an in -- an internal feeling of wanting to get out there and do something. We were not happy about what was happening to our people because they were -- it was pretty bad because the tide came in and they -- they had dug in and the tide, some of them drowned in there, in the tide. And they were -- th-the -- **Omaha** Beach, if-if you've seen some of the newspaper articles and so forth, show there's -- there's are -- there's a large cliff that comes down there, that we had to scale that particular cliff before we could go ahead and occupy any territory. And they were having a tough time because there were pillboxes all along the line and they were pretty well en -- they were pretty well entrenched. But as you know we -- we did do it. And **D** plus two, we went in.

Q: Where were the members of your unit from?

A: Most of the members of my unit were all from the east of the **Mississippi** River. But we were all pretty much, you know, cause we were picked out by our grades from the exams that we did as to whether you were going to go to -- and there was a - - there was a time there that they wanted to put us in the **ASTP**, which was army specialized training program, in which th -- you know, if you got into that program you didn't have to go to war, which of course was a foolish thing because that -- that wasn't so. What **Roosevelt** had done was he created this large army specialized training program and took the flower of the youth [**indecipherable**] the kids that were intelligent and knew everything that was going on, and under those

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circumstances he suddenly says, well I'm going to close that up and then send them overseas. Then he sent the best and the flower out there because they're the ones that could -- could make decisions quickly and rapidly, rather than having a -- other groups do-doing it. But we didn't go -- we didn't get into the **ASTP**.

Q: Were there any Jews serving with you at the time?

A: Yes, one of my group -- closest friends in the various unit that I was with, the 17th Field Artillery Observation Battalion was **Theodore Singer**. And he was also a chess player and I told him that he would never beat me. And we played and we pretty much evened out all the time when -- he's a very, very brilliant man. He has since died.

Q: Who was your commanding officer?

A: **Brown**, Captain **Brown**.

Q: Did you witness any anti-Semitism at any time in the military?

A: Never.

Q: Did you witness any anti-foreign sentiment any time in the military?

A: No.

Q: Did you have a chance to read "**Stars and Stripes**" in those days?

A: Oh yes, absolutely, very -- we enjoyed that very much, with **Bill Maudlin** and his cartoons.

Q: I'm going to ask you about "**Stars and Stripes**" again later --

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A: Okay.

Q: -- I just wanted to make sure. Tell me what action you saw. Now we're at -- at **D-Day** plus two.

A: Well, we, actually we got stymied at **Saint-Lo**. We had gone inland that far and the action that we saw was getting our units in t -- into function. Now, an observation battalion is a flash and sound unit. And by flash meaning that there are outposts that are put out into no man's land and you can have two of those outposts, generally and they look at the enemy territory and they see the flash of a gun, and they have an **[indecipherable]** to take they can adjust on their instrument where that flash occurred and then they triangulate on the flash and they send it back to a central point behind, and then that's pinpointed and those coordinates then are s-sent to our artillery and our artillery fires on them. That's flash. Now, the s -- the sound unit is a little more complicated is because they -- we sunk microphones down a -- a distance of about a foot and a half or two, in a semi-circular fashion in no man's land so that the sound that traveled from the gun that fired there in the enemy territory would hit microphone number one, before it hit number two or three, and in succession you would draw a line to the microphone that was hit and then pinpoint where it came from, within about a foot and a half, actually. So we'd call those coordinates and of course the artillery loved us. They said, they're -- they're our boys because they're the ones that tell us where to fire. We can't see a thing, yet -- un-un-until we have a

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coordinate that's set on. And th-those microphone, sound travels 1100 feet per second. As a result, as that hit the microphone, it triangulated in on that [indecipherable]. We'd call it back and they would fire.

Q: How long were you at **Saint-Lo**?

A: Oh, we were at **Saint-Lo** quite awhile. We lost our captain, Captain **Brown** went out reconnoitering, he wanted to see whether one of the towns over there was taken or not, and there was a little pocket of Germans that th -- supposedly it was taken, but wasn't. But we were stymied at **Saint-Lo** for a long period of time, and nevertheless, as he traveled with his driver the Germans came up and they shot him. The driver escaped and was captured, and we -- we captured him back later on, but nevertheless, we lost the captain. That didn't -- we were battery **B** of the 17th observation battalion.

Q: Then what ha -- you were there for awhile, and then when you finally were able to move, what happened next?

A: Oh, one -- once we were able to move, we moved rather rapidly. In fact, sometimes they moved so rapidly we didn't have a chance to set up and the -- our artillery would argue with them, hey, wait a minute, once you set up, what are we going to fire at, you know, until we get somebody out there. And we were the only unit in -- in -- in the **V-corps**, th-that area, so as a result it was a little difficult for them to really have a target, otherwise they'd have to just time fire everything. Nevertheless, the thing about it was that our -- our -- our feeling was that they were

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moving too rapidly. But we moved ver -- very, very rapidly and once we got up to the **Argentan Falaise** area, that -- that -- that was the -- that -- they called that the **Argentan Falaise** gap in which we encircled about six or seven companies of Germans completely. And un-under those -- while there, we were a -- stopped because we had -- had circled them and the continued to fight down to the last. So we -- we went back into functioning again. And right about this -- this particular time we had heard that there was a -- another sound and flash observation battalion being sent from Fort **Sill**, th-the 285th. And that's the one that had the massacre occur at **Malmedy** in **Belgium**. And that's at the time of the big push that the Germans -- the -- the -- pushing us into the ocean is what they were trying to do. The Battle of the Bulge, as they've called it. And we had conferred with the eight -- 285th when it came there that they can't function the way they did at Fort **Sill**, that this is war, and that -- that it's a different thing. But they were young, with young officers and young -- young companies and they just went the wrong way. Actually, what really happened was that the leader, one of their lieutenants was going down the road, and there was -- the road signs were made out of wood in those days and they pointed the direction of where they -- you were going and -- and he said, now this is the route we're supposed to take, instead of looking at his map and being sure. Well, the Germans had turned the -- turned the sign around, and they went directly into the Germans. And they got caught by the **SS** troops and about a hundred and some -- 20 of them or

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so, were massacred right on the spot. And several of them did survive that we finally got to, but it was a pretty bad situation.

Q: You mentioned the term time fire. I don't know what that means.

A: Oh. Oh, time fire is when artillery fires a shell and the shell will hover, essentially, over an area and -- and discharge. In other words, it doesn't hit into the ground, it hits up above the ground and it's timed so that it'll go off before it hits the ground and that's why they call it time fire. It's rather frightening because it covers a greater area of destruction than -- than the one that hits the ground.

Q: Did you take any prisoners?

A: Yes, we did. We -- well, we caught th-the numbers of them in -- in small pockets, maybe five and 10 at a time. But the -- we were quite good with our prisoners because most of the ones that we took were old -- old -- old German army. They were not the young SS troops. If it were the young SS troops, they would not survive, they would have been killed.

Q: Why?

A: Because they were the ones, they were the killers, and we all knew. And we -- I -- we could identify them. They had tattoos on them and usually what happened was somebody would come along and say that we just got so many prisoners, but we couldn't afford to have men take them back and -- and take care of them, because we needed tha -- our own help and our own men with -- our units functions coordinately

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that you couldn't spare the men. And if they were **SS** men they would go back with them and -- and if they tried to -- to break away to -- to escape, they shot them.

Q: What did you know at the time about the difference between the general

Wehrmacht and the **SS** as you [indecipherable]

A: Well the -- the old army, they -- they understood a lot better about what it was to be a soldier. They were not the killer that we foresaw in the young people that we met there. The **SS** troops were just unbelievable, just as bad as **Hitler** was unbelievable.

Q: This judgment that you have of them, was this from firsthand experience or had you been told about the difference in the s --

A: No, fir -- it was firsthand as well as told. I mean, it was the -- it was handed down from soldier to soldier and from ev -- and we really di -- we spared the -- the old German army, the **Wehrmacht**, the old army, the Germans, th-they knew they were captured, they were a prisoner and that was it.

Q: Did you have much contact with the civilians as you went through?

A: Not very much cause we were always pretty active, but we did meet some -- some here and there, particularly when we were moving through some area that had been cleaned out completely a l -- a lot earlier, like when we went to **Paris**, for instance, and we -- we were in **Paris** and we were -- actually we were -- stayed at **Le Bourget** Airdrome, th-the old name, and we had leave to go out into **Paris**, if you wanted to,

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but you -- you had to go in -- in pairs or threes or fours because there were German snipers in -- living in houses and living with the French that were killing off our soldiers when they were gone. So you couldn't -- couldn't go unless you went in in twos or threes or more. And so as a result you didn't get to see much of **Paris** because nobody wanted to go out into something like that.

Q: Can you give me an idea of the route that you took from **D-Day** plus two to **Saint-Lo** and then take me through some of the progression that --

A: Wow.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Well, **Paris** is a -- the -- we started in **Paris**. Then we had the **Argentan Falaise** gap. We had th-the Battle of the Bulge. And then we -- that was at **Malmedy**. And then from there we went up and -- and crossed the **Rhine** and of course I remember crossing the **Rhine** very well because we captured the -- the **Piper Heidsieck** champagne factory and put guards on it so that other units couldn't come and -- and get the wine and the spirits. That -- that was -- that's quite something. That was quite something to see. They left it intact, they did not destroy it, because they could have. Why they did, I don't know. They even left the caretakers there with them. They had wines and -- and -- and cognacs and so forth that were aging in -- in these subterranean tunnels. Casks as big as a house, you know, th-the -- unfortunately sometimes our soldiers would go down there and -- and get a bottle and then forget to

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turn the tap off, you know, and the -- course the caretaker would blow his mind. He doesn't mind if you're going to drink the stuff, but for God's sake don't let it run on the ground. So that's why we se -- we sent guards there and we'd have our trucks go back every week or so and -- and come back with a -- a couple of loads of -- of champagne and wines and so forth. And then it was distributed to everybody else.

But up until that time **[indecipherable]**. And then we crossed the **Rhine** at **Rebagen** and from there on we moved into **Belgium** and I remember being in **Liege** very well. And I remember that -- hiding in the sewers of **Liege** during the Battle of the -- of the Bulge, and so forth. And during Christmas of 1940 -- '45. Couldn't have been, '44. Christmas of 1944.

Q: While you were in **England** and also when you crossed the channel, did you hear any of the Nazi propaganda?

A: Yes, **Axis Sally** was very, very -- she was -- she was something. In fact **[indecipherable]** we liked to tune into her because we all knew what a doggone horrible person she actually was. She survived, I understand, the whole -- the whole bit, and anyway died as an old lady, from what I understand, in prison somewhere. But anyway, yes, there was quite a bit of German propaganda, and they used to drop leaflets on us, and even out in the field the -- they would drop, you know, your -- your girlfriend is now doing around with somebody else, you'd better go home. Things like that. The -- the why are you here because you're not doing any good.

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You're just killing people, you know. But there was th -- there was a lot of Nazi propaganda from that standpoint. Everything, of course, you know, from their side of the -- the pond.

Q: Once you got into operations in **Europe**, how much did you know about what was happening to the Jews? Now, you're already fighting. How much did you know at that time?

A: Quite a bit. Actually, we got most of that from our "**Stars and Stripes**" if we were ever able to get one and see th -- we knew what was happening and -- and what they were doing and that's how I knew about **Kristallnacht** and that -- when they -- they burned th-the -- they burned all the books and all that. That's -- you know, all that was earlier but this is what all recapitulated and told to us a number of times, was in our -- our "**Stars and Stripes**". And we of course heard it from our own commanders and everybody else that were there who were well informed on what was going on, pretty much. We did know that there were camps, and we were -- my unit actually was one of the first ones to go into **Buchenwald**, and --

Q: Be-Before we go into **Buchenwald**, I want -- I wanted to know just how much you really knew and how much of it did you believe before you actually got firsthand experience?

A: Well, we knew that there were camps. We did not know what was happening inside the camps, because even the people around those camps, and I can tell you that

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now because I talked to many of them, claimed they did not know, but that's not true. I think they all knew. I think all the Germans knew what was going on. They were bringing in -- oh, excuse me -- they were bringing in people into these camps at a certain number and the camps could only hold a certain amount, and they had to go ahead and get rid of that amounts that's going to be displaced. So even if they weren't close to dying, they would go ahead and kill them in order to make room for the new groups that are coming up.

Q: I think I'm going to pause so we can change the tape.

A: Okay.

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 **John Bucur**. This is tape number two, side **A**. And you had been telling me that you had crossed the **Rhine**, and then tell me what happened after you crossed the **Rhine**.

A: Well, we -- actually were going in -- into **Germany** itself at this particular point and we were approaching a -- **Weimar** and -- and that particular area. And the third army had come in to the fight for about several weeks or almost a month or so before, and they were pushing out farther even ahead of us. And we were moving quite rapidly, at a -- as a matter of fact. And we were just taking the towns as they came, and as we came to **Weimar**, that's where we came close to **Buchenwald** and **Buchenwald** was very close to the -- to this large city and we were told that when we were on bivouac there that there was a camp here, and that it -- it was a camp of -- of political as well as Jewish prisoners. And we said -- not we said, they said they would take us through the camp. And there was a select number of us that went through and I had a camera and took some of the pictures that we have here. And I -- I have to tell you this, that there was probably one of the worst things that I've seen in my whole lifetime. And I became a surgeon after all this, and I've seen some pretty awful things in the operating room, and everything tha -- injuries from cars and **[indecipherable]** but it was nothing like this. This -- this was a -- a horrible situation

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that should never have been allowed to occur. And as I've mentioned earlier, I -- the people claimed that they didn't know what was going on, but you could smell the camp from miles away, because they had crematoriums and they would incinerate some of the people that they had, once they died, and some of them that hadn't even died yet, for that matter. I understand that they were functioning at full blast when the camp was captured, and that they were trying to clear their -- their rooms in the crematorium, and there were some of -- of them that were still alive, and they were just pushing them into the -- into the furnaces while they were still alive. So we knew a little bit about what was going on there. Then when we walked in to see it, to see that there was a -- a basement underneath the crematorium in which they had big hooks, like sky hooks on the wall, and they had bodies that were hung on these sky hooks and they would hang them there until they either died or what happened to them, and then put them on an elevator and send them up to the crematorium, and there dispose of them by burning them. And the stench, as I said, was -- why these people didn't know something was happening there was beyond me. But they had quotas that they a-apparently had that said that they had to have at least 80 people die per day because they had to replace them with 80 new ones that were coming in. At least that's the smallest number [indecipherable] there would be more than 80 that died during the day. How some of these people survived as long as they did, we could not understand. When we came in, there were some of them that were still

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walking around, but we were warned not to try to feed them or try to do anything.

They were under medical con -- surveillance and so forth. But it was just atrocious and that's wa -- that's how I got these pictures that I -- that I ha -- that I took. Th-This was still there cause it was still fresh. This hadn't been -- hadn't been cleaned up or moved or anything, and that's why they wanted us to see it.

Q: What was the passage of time between when the camp was first entered by the American soldiers and you got to go in?

A: Oh, I think there was -- it must have been a week or so -- oh, perhaps -- it might have been two or three days, or a week. I really don't know, because th-there was talk about it earlier and we -- and -- and one of the visits was scrubbed and I do -- I don't know what the reason was, but then we eventually did go. So it had to be -- it had to be s-several days, but these bodies, they wouldn't let them just sit there all the time, so it had to be pretty fast. It had to be.

Q: Why did they tell you not to feed the prisoners that were walking around?

A: Oh, because if they got food, their stomachs were contracted to an extent that food would kill them. And so the -- and -- and they, of course, didn't know, and so th -- but the soldiers, who -- we were very good about that. Everybody wanted to help them, to give them something, candy bars, anything that we had, but that -- that wasn't doing them any good. So that was the fear.

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Q: I'd like you to -- to walk with me through the camp. For -- a-approach the camp with me as in your -- no -- as you remember approaching the camp, and take me through the entire experience. First, what did you see as you approached and what did you hear, and you know. You told me that there was a stench, but what else?

A: Oh, th-the stench, of course, was overpowering as you -- as you walked in, but there was a large gate as we walked into that, and there was a compound where there were posts that were stuck in the ground, and I understand that those were whipping posts, and a [indecipherable] somebody was chastised and whipped and -- and so forth on these posts and tied to them, and left there sometimes overnight and otherwise. And then there were a series of barracks that were -- were approximately 15 or 20 feet apart and they were maybe 150 - 200 feet long, and maybe 25 or 30 feet wide. And there was an aisle in the middle of each barrack and as -- as we entered on the first barrack that we entered, there were still people in th-their area, these were some that had survived, obviously. And they were in their niche, as they were -- as -- as they called them, this is my spot. Surprisingly enough, we also saw some that -- some women that were kept as prostitutes for the camp people. And they were, of course, favored by the Germans because they wanted them to still continue to function. But anybody in the camp that had anything to do with them was immediately ostracized amongst the people, from the way I understand from -- I talked to several of them for that matter, I talked to some of them that spoke

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Romanian and -- and they were Romanian Jews, and not political prisoners and they op -- from what they told me, you know, these people that were ostracized that way were shunned completely and actually, eventually they would die out. Th-The Germans would -- would have them killed or -- or something would happen to them, or something would happen to them amongst them, for that matter.

Q: When you spoke to some of the prisoners, can you remember exactly what they said to you?

A: They didn't believe that they were re -- that they were free, that they could possibly be free. That this couldn't possibly be happening to them. Their -- that freedom was the next step that they were going to see. They all anticipated dying.

Q: And the women that you said that were the prostitutes at the camp, do you know what their ethnic background -- were they Jewish?

A: N-No, they were just all -- I -- no, they were not only Jewish, no. They were all -- all ethnic groups. I'm sure there were Greeks and Italians and --

Q: What else did you see inside the camp besides the prisoners? Did you see anything of the way the guards that were --

A: Well, we went to the crematorium and as -- I saw that, th-the ovens. There were six or -- six or seven ovens in there that I can remember. And they were just like what you see, you know, in -- on television today when you see the mortuaries, with - with the slots that go in it, the fire underneath it and the -- and th-they were -- there

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were still bodies that -- they turned off the fire, but there were still some bodies that were still there, that we were able to see. So the -- and we saw d-downstairs where they -- the hooks were. They -- they said that they reserved this for -- for fliers, for -- for our air force people. Why that would be as -- I don't understand, but interrogation or something like that, I don't have any idea why they would want to interrogate once they got to this particular camp is beyond me. I should think that by the time they got there, they were pretty well interrogated.

Q: Had there been any Americans liberated from that camp, to your knowledge?

A: Oh, there were some, but I didn't see any.

Q: Did you see any part of the camp where the Germans had lived, or the guards had worked or anything?

A: Yes. I'm glad you mentioned that because I almost forgot about it completely. The commandant's wife had quarters there, and I believe they called her the bitch of **Buchenwald**. And she had lamps in her -- ooh, that still runs up and down my spine now just to say, lamps made of the skin of the prisoners. Lampshades, that is. And she had lamps that had bones that was the supporting **[indecipherable]**. And furniture and furnishings apparently that was woven and -- and -- out of skins.

Q: What kinds of skins? What skins did she --

A: Skins of the -- of the actual camp inmates, the human skin. Yes, dermal, this type of skin.

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Q: When she would select a skin, for whatever purpose, was there -- could you tell if there was any reason why she selected this particular skin?

A: I was given to understand that she was quite particular about what type of skin she was going to use, whether it was clear or whether it had blemishes on it, or what. But I don't know anything else, other than that.

Q: Did you see any skins with tattoos?

A: Yes. Yes. They tattooed their own, too. The **SS** men were tattooed. They had a tattoo over their arm as you -- you know, that's the way we identified them many times.

Q: Besides her quarters or her office, whatever area of -- of her --

A: I saw her living room, that's the only one that we were escorted through. I didn't see any other part of -- she had an office, I understand there, and everything. She -- she pretty much almost ran the camp, from what I understood, rather than her husband, if -- if she had a husband.

Q: Is there anything else about the camp that comes to your mind right now?

A: Nothing other than the fact that it was a relief to leave it. And then -- and then upon leaving it, you got a feeling of -- of real loss, of -- you know, when we went in there, you go -- you went through **Weimar** and the -- the German people were there laughing and scratching and having fun and enjoying themselves. And then when we came back out again, they were still there, but it didn't mean anything. And it felt

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to us that they were not sincere, that they had to know what was going on wi -- up until then there was a doubt, but we knew that they knew. There was no question about it. We didn't feel there was.

Q: How long did you spend in the camp?

A: Oh, I s -- guess we were there a couple of hours.

Q: After your visit to the camp, did you have any conversations with any of the civilians in the town?

A: No. No, we went back to our units.

Q: Where did you go next, after **Buchenwald**?

A: I can't recall actually what our next thi -- but -- but we ended up in **Liege**, and then through **Liege** into **Germany** itself, but we were close to what we call **Cologne**, and that was just about pretty close to where the war was gonna end.

Q: Do you remember the date that you walked into **Buchenwald**?

A: No, I don't.

Q: I also just wanted to ask you about the time of day that it was when you went into **Buchenwald**. Was it the morning or the afternoon?

A: It was morning, mid-morning, sunshine-y day.

Q: Did you see any children in the camp?

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A: Yes, little ones? Yes, they were in there, their bodies were piled up there just like everybody else's. And the only way we knew they were children was their -- their size.

Q: You said you spoke to a couple of the prisoners there in Romanian.

A: Yes.

Q: Did any of the prisoners, either the ones that spoke to you or the ones that you just observed, did any of them stand out in your mind?

A: Not really.

Q: Were you aware of any acts of revenge or retaliation against the guards in this camp? Had you heard of anything?

A: No.

Q: And when you got there, had there been any burial of bodies yet?

A: No. Na -- that's why I got the pictures of -- they had none of that.

Q: And do you know if any of the civilians were brought into the camp to see it?

A: I'm sorry, what?

Q: Were you aware if any of the civilians had been brought into the camp to see it?

A: No, I wasn't.

Q: Okay.

A: Who went with you into the camp?

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Q: There was about nine of us altogether and it was -- mostly we were the -- the part of the 17th Observation Battalion that was the headquarters [indecipherable] and we were the officers. The officers and ourselves. I was a sergeant and our master sergeant, myself and two lieutenants and a major were a-all together.

Q: How did the other people that were with you react?

A: Well, we all got back home and we still -- we had to have -- we all sat and talked about it and then some of them actually got drunk, but I was a teetotaler ab -- by about that time. And there was a -- it was pretty sad. They just -- they can see -- they felt that th-this was the reason we were fighting, that we were there to stop this and we all felt very strongly at this particular --

Q: When you got back to your comrades, did you tell them what you had seen?

A: Absolutely, yes. And they believed us. Not everybody had the opportunity to see it, but they did, they -- they believed us.

Q: And by the time you had visited the camp you had already read about --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- the things in -- in “**Stars and Stripes**”? Okay. In correspondence with your family and friends at home, did you tell them about what you had seen?

A: Yes. I wrote and -- and I had saved them, many of them, but when we moved somehow they got lost. I don’t know what happened. My mother had saved all my letters and everything, and all my correspondence. She gave everything else away

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that I had, all my memorab -- she -- she gave it all to the Salvation Army. But no, I -- I -- I can't say that there was any special thing.

Q: Tell me a minute -- for a minute, about the photos that you have and -- and how you came to be in possession of these photos.

A: Well, these were photos that I took with my camera and at the time it was a small, little camera and there are photos of bodies that have been stacked outside the barracks itself, and you can see the emaciated legs and arms and so forth, of the people and several show the ashes after the crematorium, the burnt ashes and there was a -- as you can see, this was several days after because see, they have two little wreaths over here. Had to be -- but they left them there for us to see cause I guess nobody would believe them.

Q: In the picture you have here of the ashes, what else is in the picture besides ashes?

A: Well there's a rake that shows the -- the -- they're trying to keep them together in a pile.

Q: And in this photo the ashes are dark, what are these white things?

A: That's bones. Residual bones.

Q: So we --

A: You can have these, if you like. A-And just promise to get them back to me.

Q: Is there anything else about your -- your visit to the camp that you wanted to add before we move on?

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A: I don't believe so, I think that covers.

Q: What did you do during the next couple of days or weeks or whatever, before -- you know, after that, until the end of the war.

A: Actually, they took our unit out because we were relieved by the 285th and we were sent to **Czechoslovakia**, and we ended up on a -- a beautiful resort in **Kadyne, K-a-d-y-n-e**. And this was supposed to be [indecipherable] of rest and relaxation, but i-in anticipation of the end of the war, and indeed we really had it very nice there. And the war did end, **V-E** day, it's -- the European war only. And of course we, the unit we've been such old tried and true soldiers who'd been there so long, we didn't have to worry about being sent to the **South Pacific**. But that 285th that I mentioned earlier, they were the youngsters and they were -- mobilized them and they were on their way immediately. And I wanted to -- I had enough points, because you got points for the number of months that you were there, to be discharged, and I said fine, I want to go home. And they said, well it'll take quite a bit of time because there's -- it's going to take preference to get these troops moved into the **South Pacific**, so we need all that transportation. I said, well, I've missed so much school, I'd like to apply to go to school here. I had heard about an American school in **Biarritz, France**, and they says, okay. And I applied and within 24 hours I was on a train on the way to **Biarritz**. And as I was on the way to **Biarritz**, we were -- we had stopped in -- in **Nancy, France, Nantaise** as they call it and the newspapermen were

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howling and yowling that we dropped an atom bomb on the Japanese. That was **Nagasaki**, or -- or **Hiroshima**, which one of them was first. And that this was anticipation of the end of the war. And on -- on the next station that we stopped at, they said that probably the war would end. And then I understand we dropped another bomb subsequently and then the war did end. But in the meantime I went to **Biarritz**, and this is on the Bay of **Biscay**, on the **Atlantic**, it's a big, beautiful resort that the Germans used for their officers. So we went into a city -- I w-went into a city that was pro-German. They didn't want us in there at all, cause they had it nice. The German officers treated them well, and you know, gave them food and you know, they -- they -- they lived very well. So th-th -- it took us a long time, that is months to go ahead and -- and si -- and make inroads into the fact that we were the ones that freed them, and that freedom was a heck of a lot better than just being subservient to Germans. But I just continued my college courses there, and -- and I got full credit for them, and on the second or third -- second of December, 1945, my semester had ended and they said, y -- okay, you can go home now. And I got on a ship and in five days I was back here and on December 7th, 1945, I was discharged from the service. **Pearl Harbor** day.

Q: What courses did you take when you were studying?

A: Oh, I took Abnormal Psychology, which was very, very great, because the French had th -- all these abnormal people, they were allowed to have their own enclaves and

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everything. So I -- I had a -- a -- a field tha -- to work in easily. Homosexuality was a -- a n-not very well known at that time, at least in this country it wasn't, or if it was it was behind bars somewhere. But there they were -- they -- they lived an open life.

And we studied i -- Abnormal Psych. I took, surprisingly, enough German. I needed a language, so I took German and I had English and one other subject, chemistry.

Q: During your time in the service, did you meet anybody famous or infamous?

A: In the service itself, no, but I met him after the service. And I can't think of his name, it's the -- the German that defected here that worked on the atom bomb. He lived not too far away from us in -- I can't think of his name and I know it just as well as I know my own.

Q: Well, maybe it'll come to you later.

A: Maybe so. He's the one who worked on the atom bomb. Di-Did all -- di-did -- and had -- had worked on the V2 and V -- V1 initially there, and came here and -- oh gee.

Q: Maybe it'll come to you.

A: All right.

Q: We can get back to that. When you were discharged, what was your rank?

A: I was a sergeant.

Q: And did you have any military honors?

A: Well, I had five bronze stars and a Medal of Honor and all those others, and I was injured once, but a whole bunch of us were injured when one of those V2 hit -- hit

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our unit, but it didn't -- we didn't walk down to get our Purple Heart, so we didn't -- there was no in -- no serious injury.

Q: When you came back, what did you tell people about your experiences overseas?

A: Well, I think ma -- th-the -- the most outstanding thing that they wanted to know about was -- was the -- the camp. And then that, of course, was something that was ingrained. That's why I remember as much as I've do -- have al -- although I've tried to put it out of my mind. It was -- they wanted to know if it was real or not. There -- th-there are some people that say tha-that it was all a put-up job. Tha-That is, of course is not -- not true. And this is only one camp. I mean, there were Polish camps and there were -- they were all over.

Q: Was it difficult for you to return to civilian life at all?

A: Not at all, because I was home, as I said, December seventh and one week after that I was back at college, where the dean had said when I left that there will be a place for me no matter when I got back. And I called him, he was still there, and he says, come on back, **John**. And I went back and s -- went back into pre-med, you know, a pre-medical course and continued. Went through summer, trying to catch up to the years that I'd lost, and caught it all up and graduated 1940 -- '48, actually when I went to medical school in 1947, because my grades were so good that they wil -- they were going to give me credit for a year of medical school towards graduation, so that I could b -- be in medical school for a year and graduate the

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following year. So I got my degrees the following year, I'd already had one year of medical school at the time. So it was kind of nice. Actually, I had almost caught up to myself. So then four years of medical school, graduated 1951 and was an intern at Western **Pennsylvania** Hospital in **Pittsburgh**. I went to **Pitt**, and subsequent to that, while I was at **Pitt** and I had the -- been an intern and an extern as well. My grades were good and when you were a good student you could live outside, and I lived in the hospital. And the-they challenged me quite a bit as to what I was going to be and I was going to be a surgeon. And they said, well, wen -- we're going to send you to school. So here comes school again and I says, fine. And they sent me to University of **Pennsylvania**, the graduate school of surgery. And I spent a year there doing nothing but surgery. And while there is when I met the great **Bailey**, the heart surgeon and -- and I was challenged there by being an assistant --

Q: I-I'm running out of tape.

A: Okay.

Q: Just one moment.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **John Bucur**. This is tape two, side **B**. And you had been telling me about your medical training and you were up to being in --

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A: They sent me to the University of **Pennsylvania** and while there I spent a year doing nothing but graduate surgery, and surgeons from all over the world who were gathered there and I was the baby, by the way, I was the youngest one in the class. And while there is when **Bailey** did his first heart surgery, at **Harmon** Hospital there. And we as students there were allowed to go out and ob-observe all the types of surgeries that were done within the university's per view, and at the University of **Pennsylvania**, Dr. **Grof, G-r-o-f** was the neurosurgeon there and he asked if I would help him on one of his craniotomies, operating on the head. I said, I'll be glad to, because I had a lot of experience in surgery from where I had come from. And I did. And I was so taken by him while we were operating that he challenged me to the point whereby he said, I will get you a residency, if not right here, I know where y -- I want you to go. And I said, are you -- he said, you'd make a great neurosurgeon. I said, well I -- I just wanted to be a surgeon at that time and he se -- I says, but that means another five or six years. And up until that particular point, you know, I **[indecipherable]** I wondered whether that was a wise decision to make, but I'm -- I dil -- I was delighted with what we were doing, so I said yes. Anyway, then he was one of my champions as far as referral was concerned and I applied to several places that he had w-wanted me to go, and ended up under **Jack French** in **Long Beach, California**, the **V.A.** hospital, and spent five years there. And in that fifth year I was chief of neurosurgery at the hospital because **Jack French** got married, and he wa --

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married the diva **Dorothy Kirsten**. In -- in her day -- she's the one that was thrown out of **Russia**, by the way, because of her attitude. They said -- of her American attitude, that is. *Persona non grata*, they called her. This was back in **Stalin's** days. Anyway, the thing about it was that he -- and he wanted to take a year off as a sabbatical and he says, you're going to be chief. And I went from, I think it was 9,000 dollars a year to 30,000 dollars a year as chief. Wow, talk about living it up. I still remember that very well. I was married at that time and we had our first child there in -- in **Long Beach**. And things were pretty tough on 9,000 dollar a year and we lived just a -- where **Disneyland** was built. And the kids in my youngster's age group were asked to come to try out **Disneyland** before they even opened it. And so he got to know pretty well what the rides were going to be and everything else. But we didn't stay there, I wanted to come back east again. The **California** type of life was not my type of life. [indecipherable] as I always say, the -- there was always somebody running around with somebody else's wife. And it was just different. A bar on every corner, school three sessions a day. Some of them were four hours apiece and they'd have the three sessions, three different groups. Th-They were crowded. So anyhow, I-I wanted to come back here, and I came. When I finished I came back here. And the reason I did come to this particular area is because before I went overseas I was stationed at Fort **Mead**. And when I had got leave while I was stationed at Fort **Mead**, I came into this area and came into **Arlington**, and I loved

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Arlington. Arlington was just gorgeous. Still is, but it's -- it's -- it was just gorgeous. I said, one of these days I'm going to live there. And that's what I did, I came here. There was one other neurosurgeon here and we went into partnership together and everybody in the **District of Columbia** kept saying, what are you -- what are you going over there, that's on the other side of the river. Nothing is every going to happen there. So the thing that happened is we built all these hospitals and I was the founder of **Fairfax** Hospital, the founder of **Northern Virginia** Doctor's Hospital. The founder of National Orthopedic Hospital. So we built our own hospitals and we -- w -- and it -- it -- it was quite nice and had a nice practice, and I practice in what -- what I refer to as the golden age of medicine, where there was no Medicare or Medicaid and not everybody was entitled to everything under God's creation. They got treated free in most of my practice. Back early on, 40 percent of it was gratis, it -- it was free patients, so -- but I made my first dollar when I was about 36 years old. And everybody says, boy, it takes a long time to be a neurosurgeon. It does. And I think it's going to be even longer, they're going to make it longer.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Well, actually I have three and I'm -- I'm in my second marriage, we've been married 22 years. And she had two, so we have five all together. And all -- all of them are out of school, graduated, they're all in their 40's. They're attorneys, no doctors. Lot of attorneys. One's a judge. So we're -- we're doing very well.

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Q: What did you tell them about your experiences during the war?

A: Oh my, as -- as they were growing up, they -- they know most of these stories, cause they would ask me, and I -- I -- I -- we would sit sometimes after dinner and just -- just talk about things in general, and th-th -- these subjects would come up. And they'd ask -- they ask particularly about the atrocities and the camps and so forth, knowing -- and they know, of course that I have th -- had these pictures and they all saw these, so they knew that this -- this was something that did really happen.

Q: Do you ever speak publicly about your experiences?

A: No.

Q: In what ways do you think that this experience has changed you in your life?

A: I can't say maturity because once you got into the service you became mature no matter whether you wanted to or not. I wasn't -- when I came back from the service - - I -- I went into the service as a young college boy that probably had a beanie on his head. I came back from the service as a mature man that never belonged to a -- a fraternity or anything like that, because that was a lot of bunk, as we felt coming back. So we set up our own organizations. But I think that my entire wartime experience gave me a sense of understanding of what man can do to man. What -- what had happened in **Germany** should never happen again, and I understand that it's been happening in some of these other countries, in **Africa** and otherwise. And that just recently **Idi Amin** just died and he was one of these **Hitlers**. He was -- and

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he was responsible for millions of deaths as well, and he -- he doesn't have the notoriety that **Hitler** had obviously, but I think he -- the -- the people [indecipherable] know that he's done this.

Q: Is there anything else that you'd like to add before we conclude? Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you want to talk about?

A: No, but it's just been wonderful to have you ask me the questions, because it woke up memories that I'm going to be talking about for the next couple of weeks, I think, a-again. And I want the children to know and remember some of those things and I think that's a good thing. And so I want to thank you for asking.

Q: I want to thank you for doing the interview with us today.

A: Oh, my pleasure.

Q: And this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **John Bucur**. Thank you.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview