

The following is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Alan Lukens. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on June 11th, 2013 in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is track number one.

What is your full name?

It's Alan Wood Lukens. The name comes back from steel and iron companies in Philadelphia. There was an Alan Wood Company and a Lukens Steel Company, and about four generations ago they kind of merged, and a Lukens married a Wood, and their first son, Alan Wood, was an officer in the Civil War. We have his uniform, as a matter of fact.

And then he was the first. The second Alan Wood Lukens was my uncle, and he was killed in the first war, and I was named for him. He and my father and their other brother, Lewis-- all three went over in the first war together. They were all three Princeton graduates, two years apart from one another. And as I say, he was a captain killed in action, where they got the Silver Star. And then my father and uncle were in different outfits.

But then I was born in 1924.

Your date of birth?

February 12th. I've always been very proud of that. Same initials as Lincoln-- A.L. And as a kid, I was always very much of a Lincoln worshiper, as it were.

Where were you born?

I was born in Philadelphia, Chestnut Hill Hospital. My father was a lawyer after the first war, my mother a Bryn Mawr graduate, and they actually met in London.

What were they doing in London?

Well, I think he was there with his family after the war, trying to go through the various battlegrounds in France. She was there. Her father was a very well known architect, Frank Miles Day, the President of the American Institute of Architects, who had built the whole campus at Colorado, enormous amount of construction at Princeton and Yale, and died in 1918. I never knew him, but we have a letter from Woodrow Wilson to him, asking him to please design a house in Washington.

He died in 1918, so of course I never knew him. But he's still quite famous. His picture's at the Octagon there where the architects are in the city.

Let's talk a little bit about your family. Did you have any siblings?

Yes, I had two sisters, and unfortunately, both have died within the last two years. I was the oldest. Next one, Ann, went to Germantown Friends School and Vassar. Worked for a while in the CIA, and then married an Englishman, Stuart Saunders, who was a journalist. And they lived in various places until he retired, and they lived in Rhode Island. She died two years ago, and he died last fall.

My other sister, Frances Hayes, married a colonel in the army. And he was the defense attache in Burma and then Indonesia, had a very interesting career. And they ended up living in Milton, Massachusetts, where he died about 3 years ago. And then she lived there, continued, has four children. And she just died last summer of cancer. So I'm the only one left in that generation.

And your education?

Well, I went to the Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia, where my father had also gone. And then I went to Princeton in 1942. Princeton had a sped up program where I did-- and many others-- the first half of freshman year the summer of '42

and the second half in the fall. And then I volunteered for the army.

I had been president of the Princeton Ski Club, thought I was a great skier. And so I decided to volunteer for the 10th Mountain Ski Troops. I went up there in March of 1943 to Camp Hill, Colorado.

OK, let's back up a little bit.

Yeah, sorry.

No, that's wonderful what you're talking about. When you were a teenager growing up in Philadelphia, had you heard of a man named Hitler? Were you aware of what was happening?

I was very aware. My father was--

Of what was happening in Europe?

Absolutely. I won the Time Foreign Affairs prize at Episcopal two years in a row. My father and mother were both anglophile. They followed everything. And I was in debating groups and all.

No, I was very, very aware of it, and I will never forget having lunch on a Sunday when the news came in on the radio of Pearl Harbor. And my father and I both realized that we would both be involved very soon in the war.

Did you speak or understand any German at the time?

No. No, I had taken French in school, and Latin. No, I didn't have any German. I wish I had later on. I learned some in the army, but that was not very--

So did you-- I'm talking about as a teenager. Did you talk about Germany and Hitler with your parents a lot?

Yes, we did. All the time.

All the time, yeah.

Now we were pretty much an international family. And we kids-- and he immediately, almost too quickly, decided he'd get in. He was in the Pennsylvania Home Guard, and then volunteered to go back in the army as a captain. And ended up being overseas for a year and a half in the-- well, I forget. It was basically a military government.

He studied first at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville before he left. And then he was wounded toward the end of the war and '44 and came home and ended up teaching military government at the University of Virginia.

Were you and your family aware of what was happening in the mid to late '30s to the Jews?

I think we were probably as much as anybody from the East Coast, particularly anglophiles as we were. I don't know. I can't remember specifically, but certainly we followed the newspapers and the radio as well as we could. And I'm sure we knew all about what Hitler was doing. And I'm sure we didn't and very few people did.

Yeah, I meant the book burnings, and the boycotts, and things like that in Germany.

I think so. I don't specifically remember all of that.

OK, so now you're a student at Princeton.

Yeah.

And December 7th--

Yes, well that was before. That was when I was a senior at Episcopal.

Right, right. You were still too young.

And my senior year, and I knew that we'd get in. But then Princeton had this accelerated program to try to get us through as much as we could before we went off.

But anyhow, like I say, I was a ski enthusiast, and I decided along with another whole group of Ivy League skiers that we would volunteer for the 10th Mountain Division. And so I arrived out there in March of '43 at Camp Hale, Colorado-- a camp that was set up in the Colorado mountains, and an awful place as it turned out, because they had new barracks built, and it was all depended on coal stoves. The railroad line ran right next to it, and that all depended on coal, and so half the people were sick most of the time.

And then to shape up us whiz kids, couple of us, they brought in some tough army types from Hawaii who'd never seen snow-- to teach us the old army drill. We were still allowed to ski on weekends at the nearby place.

But it was a very rugged training, and mountain climbing, and rock climbing, as well as skiing. And that went on for about eight months. And then somewhere along in there, there was a kind of an SAT quiz for one person to win and learn-- go to a language school. And I won that, but I didn't realize that I had until suddenly some sergeant grabbed me and said, get on the train. You're going east to learn Turkish.

So I didn't go very far, and I've met some other people in the same boat at the University in Nebraska, where we had two weeks of great fun going into the football games. And after that, we were transferred to Indiana. As soon as we got there, we learned that they'd canceled all the language programs and that we would be engineers. And that program--

Now we're talking about 1943?

This is '43-- the end of '43.

End of '43.

So at the University of Indiana in Bloomington, that lasted all of two months, and they abolished the entire program, which was called the ASDP. It was part of a junior OCS idea-- army specialized training program. They were abolished everywhere, because they needed, as you said, cannon fodder.

And so all of us there at Indiana were assigned to the 20th Armored Division at Camp Campbell, Kentucky. So that's where we arrived fairly early in '44.

So you just turned 20.

Yeah.

Early '44, OK. And then you stayed there for how long?

Well, we stayed there training. I was put in the artillery, which I had a little taste of in the first year at Princeton in the ROTC. And stayed with the 20th Armored Division, and we were very itchy to get overseas, and finally didn't until the end of the year.

And we actually took a ship at the beginning of 1945, which landed in France at Le Havre.

You left from New York?

We left from Boston.

From Boston.

And we did a long 10-day trip, zigzagging to avoid submarines in the convoy.

Do you know the name of your ship?

That's OK. That's OK.

I forget the name.

That's OK.

I remember my birthday took place somewhere on there.

On the ship?

Yeah. Yeah, and we had a big celebration-- mostly illegal, above with my friends.

Anyway, then we got off at Le Have, and we were driven by truck to a small French village outside of Rouen. That was a lot of fun, because I was the only one that spoke French in the whole battery, and made good friends with the French people there.

Now what were the numbers of your unit?

I was in the 20th Armored Division, and specifically, I was in battery A of the 413th Armored Field Artillery. They always had these enormous numbers. That were supposed to fill the enemy by the same as they did in the first war-- 80th Division and so on. I don't think they were fooled.

So there was a lot of fun. I got to know the village, and in 1995, my wife and I went back to the village. And I'd written ahead, and it was a wonderful celebration. And the lady who I'd given cookies to at 12 years old was now 62 and a big matriarch of the village gave us a wonderful dinner with her husband and everything.

The lady who ran the barn where we slept on the hay was still around, and when I was there, the boulanger, the baker, whose first name was Alan like mine, had grown up and taken the place of his father, who I'd know. And so all of those people were there for this celebration in '95, on Easter Day as it turned out. So then anyway, we finally got going.

So this is February now.

What?

We're back in February?

Yeah, OK, well February, finally we got the word to move up. And we went up through-- the division moved up through Holland and Belgium. They had already been liberated. We got lots of cheers from local people. And then suddenly went into Germany where we didn't get any cheers and people glared at us, naturally.

So you never saw combat?

Yes, we did. Not there we didn't, but as soon as we got into Germany--

[PHONE RINGING]

I think I'll let that one float. That isn't my son. Sorry, I could have brought it in here.

Well as soon as we got into Germany, we were in combat. It wasn't as bad as most people had. We drove quickly. We crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge, and-- is that going to-- there, it's turning off.

And we had quite a fight there. We headed south quite quickly. We were supposed to be in the first army, which was in the northern part of Europe-- of Germany. We moved so quickly that we became part of the Third Army, which was under Patton. And we kept moving. We took a Bahn and we headed down to Frankfurt.

You were in combat, as you said. Did you see any dead bodies?

Oh, yeah.

What was your reaction?

Well, I think--

Had you seen dead bodies before?

No.

So this was your first experience.

And we saw-- we lost some of our own people. We liberated some camps. One was some American POWs. That was very exciting. Many more were Europeans with French--

Do you know the names of anybody?

No.

Not now. OK.

I really don't. I've got them somewhere, and I have my-- actually I kept a diary the whole time. But anyhow, we went along pretty quickly, and then the heavy fighting was about the beginning of April as we got closer to Munich.

At that point, we were growing so fast that instead of making us come back to stick with the Third Army, we swapped with another division that had gone in the other direction and ended up being in the Seventh Army, which is the one General Patton said he'd come up through Marseilles and all.

So we ended up with that, and our big target was Munich. We were heading south. We were the only Armored Division there, but there were two infantry divisions-- of 42nd in the 45th-- that were near us. But we were shot at by a German 88s. We lost some people right along the line.

Every night they had the famous Bed Check Charlie, which was a German plane that would come over every night and drop some bombs. And there were some 88s-- the big German cannon that were fired at us. What we had in our artillery was called an M7. It was 105 tank mounted on a-- well, the bottom part was a 105, and then a 105 Howitzer on top of this German tank. It was a very unwieldy weapon. We had four together in a battery. I was the one that had to do the trigonometry and deciding where these four would aim.

So we were, most of the time, somewhat back in artillery. But then as things went fast, many times we were up right on the front lines, and where prisoners were coming out, I took some prisoners actually along the line.

Anyhow, this is all happening toward the end of April, and as we got close to it, we didn't know anything about Dachau at all. All we knew was we were heading for Munich, and we knew the big SS headquarters North of Munich, which

later became an American base, was very heavily fortified. And it was really the SS headquarters in Bavaria-- the whole area.

So anyway, we were heading along quite well.

Is this on foot?

No. We had these tanks-- armored vehicles. And those of us who were not sitting inside one of those or driving them were in things called half tracks. They had, what do you call it?

Treads.

Treads. And armor up to about here, so they didn't do any good sitting up. And so we all went with those. And with the bombing going on or the shelling against us every night, we had to dig foxholes and try to hide.

Anyway, to come to that, we suddenly were on the right hand edge of flank of the 20th Armored Division. Most of the division was to our left or east after the SS barracks. But all of a sudden, we came to their camp of Dachau. We had no idea was there. Neither did anybody up through Colonel in our line of command. But the people in the camp, of course, were listening to BBC, and they knew how close we were.

So anyway, all of a sudden we come to this enormous camp-- totally surprised all of us-- where we saw these watchtowers. And the whole camp was ringed by a moat, and a barbed wire fence. So we got that close. We used our tanks to smash the barbed wire and to cross the moat.

Just at that time, there was one tall building, which was where the German headquarters were. And they had a white flag out, and we thought that was fine, we'd just go on in. But then despite the white flag, they had snipers, and they started shooting at us. And they actually killed our poor Colonel. He was, at that point, his-- I don't know. His Jeep had broken down, or he was standing up on another Jeep.

And I didn't know him well, but, of course, that was a shock for all of us. Later on in life-- way much later-- I got to know his son quite well, who was a West Point Colonel, who helped me much later when I was head of the 20th Armored Division veterans and we had a reunion at West Point. But anyhow we--

So what was the reaction of you all when he was shot?

Well, it was terrible. Then when he was shot, they were also shooting other people from there. Then what we did was get our artillery ready, and we shot a blast at this building. And that was the end of that. After that, there was no more resistance.

So then we went on in. Now, I wasn't one of the actual first ones that went in.

What day was this?

Liberation was the 29th of April at 6:00 PM. Because when I went back later on several times, I was in a ceremony right at that moment. But I was fortunate to be chosen among a few early the next morning to visit the camp.

Where did you stay the night that night? Do you remember?

Oh, we still had to dig our holes in the ground outside somewhere in the camp.

OK. And then the next morning?

It had been quite wet and lousy weather. Then suddenly the next day it was amazing, because the sun came up over the Alps, and you could see all the snow there. Reminded us of being in Colorado-- flat there and then suddenly seeing all

of the snowy peaks.

So some of us were allowed to go in-- told we could, but they didn't help us very much. So we just got a ride, I guess, right to the entrance. And at that point, they wouldn't let us in. But then there was a Polish guy in our company-- battery-- that spoke Polish to one of the survivors, who opened the gate for us.

And then we walked around. We counted 37 of these cattle cars full of dead bodies. These were what the French used to call 40 and 8. In the first war, they were made for 40 men or 8 horses. But actually, they had something like 200 men in these.

And the Germans Nazis had the crazy idea that somehow if they moved all of the prisoners from other camps, that somehow they could congregate and there in Bavaria, and that the world wouldn't know what had happened. And the other crazy idea was that they would do a last ditch stand in Bavaria. So that was the reason for sending people on the trains.

There were very, very few that made it. The ones that had gotten in that day managed to get off, but there were only just a handful really that were still living on those trains.

The ones that were lucky, like a couple of my friends that I got to know later, were sick enough so they were put into the infirmary, and that's what saved them. Because the train didn't come all the way in. Those cars did finally-- a lot of them stopped a couple of miles away. The trains were broken down or whatever, and then they had to March in with dogs, and they would sometimes often shoot the ones that couldn't make it, or at least the dogs were snapping at them.

You are 21 years old, and you see what you saw. Can you describe your thoughts, your feelings-- as you say with no preparation ahead of time.

No, I think there were two different things, and it's hard to recollect what I thought. But the first is the combat part, hiding from shells ourselves, digging foxholes every night, seeing the wounded and seeing prisoners coming out. That was the nice part-- seeing released prisoners.

So the whole wartime part was kind of in a different mode from Dachau. Dachau was a totally different thing, because we had no idea. Because even though Buchenwald had been released, we didn't get the news of that. We didn't really know much about it. It had been in the Stars and Stripes. Eisenhower had very gallantly, I thought, forced the local people to fill in the graves and do that. And even though it was-- I'm not sure of the dates of Buchenwald. Early April, I think. We didn't know about it. Stars and Stripes didn't get to us, and they eventually of course did.

So we had-- one thing was the whole combat part, and the second was Dachau. So the few of us that were lucky to get-- not lucky, were fortunate, I guess, to get in there-- we counted these awful 36 rail cars. And we were then taken down a tour. There were, I think, 20 some barracks. Each originally for 200, each one had about 2000 in it. They have still-- they've kept one there as a souvenir and smashed the others.

Inside the camp when they knew we were close, the French particularly led, well, what would have been a mutiny headed by a French captain, who later became a general and a friend of mine who just died. He was General [INAUDIBLE].

At that point he was a captain, and they decided to have kind of a mutiny-- kill their guards, but then turn the camp over to us and keep these distraught prisoners from killing every German in sight. So they did manage to do this.

But at the end, the German guards were all the worst. They were called Kapos, and these were German criminals who were told that in order to avoid jail or execution, they would have to be guards at the camp, and they were really horrible people.

And so at the end, we saw lots of their bodies. We didn't know whether they'd been killed by our troops who were just there the day before, or whether they'd been probably killed by the inmates.

Anyway, by the time we were there, we were led down. We saw the crematorium where it had been decided to go ahead and, by the Polish prisoners doing it, were ordered to keep on using it, because they had to do something with all the bodies from the trains and those who had died.

Well again, as a 21-year-old seeing this, not only the sites, but the amount of evil that you were-- again, do you have any memories of what went through your mind when you--

I think if you think of some of the prisoner, I mean, many I talked to later and became close friends with. They were men who were originally, say, 200 pounds-- were down to about 80 pounds. They were just skeletons. Our first instinct was to hand out food and candy we were told not to, because their bodies couldn't take it.

And as soon as our officers got in there, we were told to get out, because they didn't want us to get typhus.

Did any of the prisoners come up to try to talk you?

Oh, yes. Oh, my gosh. They came up and hugged us and everything else. At that point, we didn't have all these restrictions and our doctors hadn't gotten there to get us out.

And the other thing was that we weren't supposed to be there very long. As soon as we had this little tour, they said hurry up, we had to go continue to Munich. So it wasn't as if our particular divisions stayed very long, and certainly in the 20th Armored didn't

When they came up to you, how did you respond?

Well, they came and hugged us, really. And I was able-- speaking French. A lot of the French prisoners were in a little bit better shape, because most of them had only been there nine months. Some of the Germans had been there since 1933.

It was an enormous mixture of people. To our surprise, we learned later that only 16% were Jewish. The camp is-- to go back, as you probably know, but in back in '33, it was a German Protestants originally, various other kinds of anarchist people.

Political-- yeah.

Yeah, political ones. And then the really enormous increase came after the Russian front, and that was the worst horrible thing. They had about 4,000 Russian prisoners, and they still celebrated or celebrated that. And the they were all told at one point to race down the field, and if they got down to the other end, they'd be free. And they were all shot in the back.

But when we got there, the melange people-- it was a little hard to make out, but mostly were Eastern European. And the ones in better shape a little were the French, because most of the French had been in the French resistance. And when we came in through Normandy, what they tried to do was to turn over their respective villages to us. And many got caught doing it by the Gestapo. They were too eager, so they were then sent in to Dachau.

But because of that, they'd only been there nine months, compared to longer periods of most of the others, particularly the Eastern Europeans. And they were the ones that had sort of organized this mutiny to turn the camp over to us.

What were the reactions of the other young men in there?

Well, I think we all had the same reactions, pretty much. Curiously, there were really very few from the 20th Armored. We were divided into what they called Combatant Commands. Combat Command B, which we were in, only had our-- we were the only artillery part of that. It was a very small part of our division. And that was just by a fluke, because the division was heading South, and 3/4 of it were after the SS and going straight to Munich. So it just happened that we

were in the right fight.

And then at the same time, after we had used our tanks to open up the barbed wire and all, then you had both the 42nd and 45th division that came in in strong numbers. And that became kind of a hassle later on, because there were two colonels, one from each division, that each thought that they got there first.

And then Marguerite Higgins, who was the first correspondent came from The Tribune, and she wrote in. And I think it was the 45th, and they claim to be the first there. And so did the 42nd. We got very little credit for a long time.

When I went back in 1995 for the 50th, there were only three of us from the 20th Armored who sort of hooked on-- my great close Princeton roommate I went back with, who'd been in the same outfit. Since he and I and one other guy that turned up piggybacked on.

The 42nd Division really ran the reunion. There was a German American who lived in Munich who did all of the work. So we found out about it and hooked onto them. So we got into all of that that way.

But they were still arguing about who got there first and who did what. But I was able then, because I knew the ambassador and the Consul General, to get them to agree. They had no problem with this-- that there would be a plaque for the 20th Armored as well as the other two that already had it.

And that took a while to get through, and eventually we put the big plaque up, and I actually sort of inaugurated it when I went back in 2010. Right at the gate square, it says, "Arbeit macht frei," the main gate. So that was all sort of an ancillary part of this.

Did the officers, while you were inside of Dachau, did they come over-- the American, your officers. Did they say anything special to you about what you're looking at, what you're seeing?

No, because they were just as-- I think they were just as shocked as we were. When people walked around, nobody really cared. When people hugged us, they didn't care whether we were officers or not. And I don't even remember when we walked around, some of us-- I don't think we had walked around with any officers that I can remember.

We went to this crematorium, and then we kept talking to the prisoners all the way. And then we were taken up to the big building where the SS had had its headquarters. They were all gone. They'd either been shot, or they mostly had fled. And that's where, for example, I picked up that Nazi flag at the office and some other souvenirs like that.

But anyway, I mean, all of this took about two hours running around, and then after that, we had to leave.

Keep going. Yeah.

So that was our initial feeling about it, as much as we could have. And then we went right ahead. When you left the camp, did you and the other young men talk about it?

Oh, yeah. And I had pictures, but I don't know. I didn't really keep those. Oh, yeah. We were all shocked, but then we went on and we thought there'd be a big battle over Munich. There really wasn't. It was declared open city just before that, so we drove right through it, and it was mostly a smashed city, but there wasn't any fighting to speak of there.

And then we headed towards Salzburg, and we had a couple of big battles there. But then the Germans, several days before the war, they began to give up, and then we had these tremendous lines of prisoners. Another guy and I were-- we were all sort of fanned out as we were, and we ended up taking a bunch of prisoners.

And as we were heading between there and Salzburg a couple of days before the war ended, we saw all of the Hitler Youth walking toward us from the village where the previous pope was. And I'm sure we passed his-- Feldhausen or something-- his village, because we saw these kids. And we just made sure they were disarmed and told them to keep walking. We didn't know what to do with them.

So anyway, we drove down, and about two days before the end of the war, we were told to stop briefly and no more firing, but keep taking prisoners. And we did.

And then so finally, we arrived at Salzburg on May 8th. And it was a French 2nd Armored Division which were all clothed in American uniforms and everything else, except for the French thing on the shoulder-- converged with us. And that was a lot of fun for me, because I was able to speak. And they had liberated a champagne factory and killed a lot of chickens, so we celebrated VE Day together in Salzburg.

When you left Dachau and moving along and you saw Germans, did you have any feeling of anger towards them after what you had seen?

Yeah, we certainly didn't-- I mean, at that point, we weren't going to go kill anybody, but I mean, we certainly-- I'm just asking about your gut reaction.

It was more disgust. Yes, completely-- that how they would do it. And then some of these poor soldiers, it was quite clear, probably later than them, that they were sort of poor Hungarians who'd been drafted in, this and that kind of a third rate soldiers just thrown into the Wehrmacht at the end.

So I don't think any of us thought much about it. We just kept taking prisoners and disarming them and told them to keep walking-- pretty much is what happened.

Then a weird thing happened right after that. Our 20th Armored Division was told to go after Tito.

Oh. Mm-hmm.

This was absolutely crazy because we'd been driving over the Alps in the narrow road over these tiny bridges where any one bridge could have stopped our whole progress. So we got all the way up kind of to the divide over Austria-- from Austria to Italy, I guess it was. And we were told to stop.

So we were way up there. I remember climbing the highest mountain with some friends-- the Dachstein. And it was kind of a little summer resort. So we sat there about two weeks and had a great time. And then we were told to come back down again. So we came back down and were parked by the Chiemsee, a wonderful lake between Munich and Salzburg, which later became kind of an American rest camp.

So we hung around there for quite a while, and that was fun. And then we spread out to different villages in the occupation. And that part we liked. We were here and there. I was sort of a local burgermeister for a while-- we spread to different villages, although I didn't know much German. But that was interesting.

Did you see any--

That's when Jack Benny and Ingrid Bergman came out in a USO show, and I won a lottery to have dinner with Ingrid. I'll show you the pictures here later. That was fun.

What about the refugees that you came in contact with while you were being a burgermeister?

Well, these weren't so much-- most of the soldiers had gone, and the refugees, there were some there, but not so many. These are mostly just Germans. A lot of them were soldiers or kids that had taken off uniform and come back. There wasn't really any way we can tell what they were.

And it was tricky, because the people were suddenly trying to be very friendly and this and that, and we had all taken over houses so we can sleep in real beds and all that. It was an interesting period.

It didn't last very long-- through the month of June and well into July, and then we were told to get ready to come home

to go to the invasion of Japan, because we had had such a relatively easy time compared to other divisions.

So finally we took this train ride across Germany and France-- took about a week-- to camp Lucky Strike, which was near La Havre, where that was the embarkation point. Sat around there for a week or two. That was fun. We could swim. Went and met some French people, and then finally they put us on the ship.

What was your reaction when you heard that Hitler was dead?

We were all very happy, of course. And what is very interesting-- when I went back each time on the I think it was the 29th-- I'm not sure the day. But I think it was, because we were there, or we could have been the 30th. They ring the bells. They still do it. It's 3:00 in the afternoon. And we were in downtown Munich. I think it must have been the 30th. Not during the war, but when we heard back.

Hi.

Hello, hi. Come say, hello. Wait a minute, we're in the middle here. I'll let you say, hello.

So long story short, we got home, and we were all given a month off, and then happened to be the months-- basically the month of August before we had to go to Camp Cook in California to reassemble, theoretically for Japan.

Fortunately, the war came to an end when we were home. My father was then teaching military government. They'd been evacuated from Europe, was a major in Michigan, and my mother was there, and my two sisters had come from Vassar for the summer.

OK, you're 21.

Yeah.

You had seen death up close.

Yeah.

Terrible, terrible things. Did you feel like a very old person, so much older than when you started?

I guess so.

After what you'd experienced, the fighting and the past?

I don't think I-- I don't know. I was so glad to get home, and I don't think I philosophized about that too much. But had we had to go on to Japan, I think it would have been another problem.

But you had to have a point system to get out, and the ones that had been there longer had more points. It was really based on the amount of time overseas and all. So some of us didn't have very many, and they sent us out.

After we had our month off in August, we went out to Camp Cook, California, which is now Vandenberg Air Base. And just fool around, really. There wasn't anything to do there, but we had to stay in until we had enough time to get out. So another guy just spent the fall sort of hitchhiking around, visiting California, reading a lot. And then, finally, he and I and another guy sort of hitchhiked our way back across the country in time to be home for Christmas.

You were discharged by then?

No, we weren't. I had to go back. We were just fooling around, and we were given a big leave for Christmastime. Then I still had to go back to California.

Then you went back.

Yeah, went back for another two months, and then got back, and I was finally discharged, actually on my birthday.

In '46?

In '46, and went right back to Princeton two weeks later.

How do you go back to Princeton when you had walked around Dachau?

Well, I think that I found that my experience was that Dachau was a special thing. But I think that many in my class had been in the Battle of the Bulge and had a much tougher time than I had. A great many had been in the Pacific, but basically in the Navy-- had missed most what the worst part of it.

Did you talk about your experience with the other student?

Yeah, some people did, and some didn't. I did, and I didn't mind talking about it, maybe because it was a less brutal than something like the Battle of the Bulge, where we lost so many people. I mean, we didn't have that experience of losing so many of our comrades. We did have this Dachau experience, of course.

It's very interesting. Some of my friends never clammed up, and once in a while, we'd be in a bull session back at Princeton, or many years since that at a reunion. And we'd get somebody to start talking who never talked before.

But Princeton was very good. They gave me and some of the others credit sort of for the first half of the sophomore year, because of being in Indiana for a while. And so I went back for the second half of sophomore year. And then finished the two final years, junior and senior.

What did you--

What all did was basically everybody that started in '42 became members of the class of '46, even though we didn't finish until '48.

Why did you major in?

I was in the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs.

As an undergrad?

Yeah.

Oh.

Well, I was an undergrad. And then although I taught for a couple of years, and then I taught at St. Albans the sixth grade, and when I was there, I finished and MA at Georgetown. And then I studied in Spain and France, too, later on.

Did you want to study International Affairs because you had been in the service?

Yeah, I think that's very much what I--

Did that influence you?

Oh, yeah. Very much so. Well, maybe it's my family upbringing and so on. But no, it really inspired me-- the army, being overseas-- to get into foreign service.

That firsthand experience.

Yeah. And I wanted to go back and do more of that. I never had any particular-- I taught for a while, but I never had any desire to be a lawyer or anything else, except the foreign service.

Did you think those first few years after the war-- did you think of your wartime experiences often?

I think so, because what I did was I scribbled the whole thing, and my mother typed up the whole thing. We still have the whole--

You kept the journals?

Yeah, and when Susie and I went over '95, we first went to the French village. She was teaching and couldn't do the part through Dachau, and try David [INAUDIBLE] and Fred [INAUDIBLE]. But we did the French part together. She had to get back to teach.

So I went there that year, and that's when I met some of these-- mostly the French survivors-- and got to know them very well. Then I went back in '05, I guess it was-- yeah, with her.

Now I went three times. Yeah, and then finally in 2010 when I went back, I was the only American soldier who had been there in '45.

Let's talk about your career. So you finished the Woodrow Wilson School, and you taught.

Yeah.

You said then you taught.

Right after that, I went over. I spent a year studying in France and Spain, came back from there looking for something to do. Found, through Princeton, a job in Arizona in a boarding school teaching French, Spanish, Latin, and tennis. And then I did that for a year.

And then I wanted to be back in Washington. And I wrote to the headmaster of St. Albans, who had been a chaplain at Episcopal, Charlie Martin. And he wrote back and said, yeah, you can come and teach the sixth grade no questions asked. So I did that for a whole year.

I would have stayed on. Very much they wanted me to-- I loved that-- and work on the MA. But in the meantime, I'd gotten involved in the foreign service and was selected to go to Turkey in the summer of '51. And I got married to Polly in June of '51, just before that. So that started the foreign service career.

And so you went to Turkey.

Yeah, I had two years in Turkey, first as an assistant cultural officer in Ankara for a year, and cultural officer in Istanbul for the second year. And I learned a lot of Turkish, hoped to stay on.

But that was when USCIS was established and dissolved-- very complicated. Anyway, I couldn't stay in Turkey. And came back, and they suddenly said they needed a public affairs officer in Martinique who spoke French. So I did that for two years, and that was fun-- Martinique, Guadalupe, French Guyana, whatnot.

Then I came back from there. They put me in the news division of the State Department. I did that. I accompanied Romanians around the 1956 election. I helped with the evacuation of the Hungarians at Camp Kilmer. I went up to the UN for a while, various jobs.

And then at the end of '56, I guess it was, they wanted somebody who was bilingual on the international staff of NATO

in Paris. So I got that job. And then we were in Paris for two years, and that was fun, and we did well. The job wasn't particularly significant or world shaking, but life was nice.

And then at the end of that, I suddenly got a call from personnel that the American consulate in Brazzaville for all of Central Africa had died of a heart attack. And they said you put down you wanted to go to Africa, so there you go. So I did.

So we went down at the beginning of 1960.

As ambassador.

No, no, no. This is as consul, then eventually consul general. But I was the only American for 4 big countries at that point. Then that was very, very exciting that summer, because that's when the mutiny took place. I was a member of the delegation to the independence of the big Congo in June 30, 1960.

Five days later they had the mutiny, and all the people-- the missionaries, everybody had to get out and come in. Air Force sent down two planes with helicopters, and we ran from my porch. There was no communication with the other side of the river except by walkie talkie at that point.

This is you and your family.

Yeah, we were all there at the top floor of this old bank, which was curiously where I went back 25 years as ambassador-- the whole bank building was our office. But in those days, the office was downstairs and the top floor was where we lived. Wasn't very fancy.

But that was very exciting. We had the whole breakup of the main Congo, and then my friend-- I had to communicate their request for American assistance, which turned out to the UN. All of that took place that summer.

And then right in the middle-- this is all in July, in the middle of August-- suddenly de Gaulle decided he would give independence to all of those countries. And so then I ended up being the US representative to 4 independences, one every 48 hours-- to Chad, the Central African Republic, Brazzaville, the Congo, and Gabon.

And there I remained in charge of those for a while until eventually an ambassador came for the four. And the State Department said, you don't want to work under him. You've been in charge. Why don't you pick one of the other places and be in charge? So I picked Bangui, the Central African Republic. Moved up there at the end of 1960, got the embassy going there in February. We moved up from Brazzaville.

And then my mother came down, and then they left for England on the 10th of May, 61, which is when the plane went down over Algeria.

And who did you lose?

My mother, wife, and the three kids. They were supposed to have headed to London for the birth of the fourth, because facilities probably wouldn't have been good enough, but that's another story.

And we never figured out why. There was just recently some Frenchman who's been after me trying to dig up what he thought were some kind of a conspiracy that brought the plane down. We don't know, and I wasn't going to dig all that up.

I don't think-- it wasn't shot down, obviously. It could have been a mechanical thing, or it could have been the pilot might have fallen asleep. We don't know. But I got some lawyers-- American lawyer friends to look into it to see if anything, but I finally decided I wasn't going to have lawsuits for years.

And at that point, they handed out, I think it was \$8,000. It was a very small amount compared to what they do now. But

anyhow I decided, I think wisely, I wanted to get on with my life. And then I met her quite soon after that.

You met your second wife.

In Paris.

You went to Paris?

Well, yeah. They offered me a job at the UN or in Africa with Adlai Stevenson, which was tempting, or going back to Paris, where I had so many friends, and I preferred that.

So when I went back there, my closest friend there turned out to be our best man later-- was there in Paris. And she was over as a student. Her brother-in-law was working in the embassy, and I was then General Gavin's personal assistant, which was an interesting job. He was Kennedy's new appointee, and I was introducing people into a protocol line when she came through. And that's when I actually matter.

And your wife's name is?

Susie.

Her maiden name?

Atkinson. And her brother-in-law, Will Staver, was in the embassy. And we've been very close to them over the years. The oldest daughter-- there were four daughters. There's Emily, who is still around here. Her husband, Wells, died a couple of years ago. He was ambassador to Spain. And she actually played golf today was with Emily, so we see her a lot.

So you stayed in Paris?

So we stayed in Paris, and that was in-- and we got engaged in the summer of '62 when I came back home. She had finished studying French and was home. And got married and back in Greenwich at her house, 29th of December, '62. Went right back to Paris, or to France.

And then we were there, I guess, not that long, until that summer when I had the chance to go to a good job in Morocco. So then we went there. We had two years there, three children born, boy and the two girls. And then back to Washington fairly briefly.

And then I ran African personnel, and then suddenly a chance to go and be number two in Senegal. So we did that for three years, and 45 years later is when we went back. Our son was there.

Three years as number two there, and then three years as number two in Nairobi. And then Kissinger mixed everybody up, so I went back suddenly to personnel. Did that for about a year, and they suddenly moved me into being in charge of Spain and Portugal. That was fascinating. Franco was dead or dying in Spain in the Portuguese revolution.

And had a big fight. Not personally as much with Kissinger, but he tried to ruin the Portuguese revolution himself, and I ended up with my friend, Ambassador Carlucci, saying that the way was that the socialists were the hope over there, not the old line right wingers.

Anyway, to make a long story short, that annoyed Kissinger-- that and other things. And he decided that Portugal and Spain should be under France. So he abruptly moved that section of the State Department under northern Europe. My boss, the assistant secretary, called me in one day and said, I'm sorry you haven't got a job, because it's been abolished. But I need somebody good to be number two in Copenhagen.

So we did that for three years, and that was fun. At the end of that, again, there was sort of a hiatus, but then they said,

we need a good guy to be a consul general in Cape Town. So we had three fascinating years down there.

Came back for two years when I was in charge of Western Europe for intelligence and research, and at the end of that, named the ambassador to Congo. Did that for three years until we retired in '87.

So from '84 to '87 you were the ambassador?

Yeah, back in the same place, of all weird things.

But then you retired from the state?

I had to retire, because I didn't have another post, and I was almost 65.

Oh.

You had to get out at 65, unless you had another presidential post. But then for six years I worked for the State Department. I went around to the embassies in Africa and the Far East, teaching them about crisis management, counter-terrorism. Until they decided they didn't have money for that operation, which was stupid. They abandoned that, and then they started up again after the attacks in Nairobi.

But then I did other stuff for the State Department. I did a lot of teaching classes. I did the declassification. I got involved in other things here-- the head of the Explorers Club, head of the American Legion post, President of my Princeton class. So I kept busy.

Sounds like it.

Yeah.

Can we talk just a little bit about how your war experience influenced you? You said it inspired you to go into foreign service.

Yeah, it did. I think there no doubt about that. I think I was predisposed to that sort of thing anyway, because of my family's general interest in foreign affairs and being anglophiles, as it were. And so I've never had any regrets about that. I mean, some people jump faster than I did. I don't know. You never can tell.

But at the same time, I was offered a job in Morocco. I was offered a very good one in Vietnam, but we had just got married, and I didn't particularly want to do that. You never know with all these forks in the lives, but I can't complain. I had a very interesting time all the way along.

I think the foreign service is still a wonderful way of life. It's much less exciting, in some ways, than it used to be. People don't do it as a longtime career. Many people just do it to see what it's like for a while and then jump into something else. Sorry to see that happen. But anyway.

What are your feelings when you walk inside the Holocaust Museum in Washington?

Well, I've done it, I guess, a number of times. Probably not as-- five or six times, maybe not more. Incidentally, one of the people that I met the first time-- he'd been locked up in Dachau. He was a major picked up as a boy, and eventually was a major in the Belgian army. We got to be very good friends. I went to see him in Belgium twice.

He wrote a very long paper in French, sort of an autobiography. He wanted me to translate it. Well, I couldn't do that. But I said look, they can do that at the Holocaust Museum, so I will give it to them.

And I did. I took it over. I'm manufactured or helped him write a thank you note to him-- did all that. And they seem to be happy to have it, I don't know-- reuse it again. But he was happy.

And then one of the times I went after, not only did I get a letter to him from them, but then I went to one of these stores and picked up some medals for him. And I went over at one time, we had a ceremony, and I handed him a couple of American medals and made him happy. He has since died. I was on the phone with him a lot.

But then we go back into some of the people I've kept up with, perhaps that-- I don't know how much time you want to talk about that. But it was basically when I went back in '95 that I heard some of the extraordinary stories of the prisoners.