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Interview with Mr. Edmund Motzko
By Sandy Kibort
April 20, 1982

Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: I'm Sandy Kibort on April 20, 1982, at Mt. Zion Temple, St. Paul, Minnesota. Would you start with things like your name, when and where you were born, and just about yourself as a person, not necessarily as a liberator.

A: Well, I'm Edmund Motzko, and I'm presently living in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, Main Street U.S.A., "Sinclair Lewis's" birthplace. I'm semi-retired. I was born in Barabeau, Minnesota, and I attended school and graduated from high school in Clarissa, and after graduating from high school, during the depression years, the job outlook wasn't very good, and I became interested in the armed forces. I joined the National Guard in June of 1940 in Long Prairie, Minnesota. In February of '41, the National Guard were federalized, and we went into service, which was supposed to have been for one year. We went to camp in California. When we were taking our last convoy trip for the year before being released, we went to San Francisco, and while we were in San Francisco, where I was on pass, war was declared. That was December 7 in '41. As far as my family is concerned, my family background goes clear back to Austria -- the family tree side of it. I have a wife and two children -- boy and a girl. One's a loan officer in Bernidji. The other a teacher -- elementary teacher -- in Hibbing.

Q: Your family and your community and your surroundings where you grew up -- what were their feelings about Europe, even before the war? Did they feel it was a very separate entity from the United States?

A: Well, being that their parents were from what they always referred to as the "old country," they had their feelings towards it, I'm sure. But I'm sure that on both sides of my family that, being that their parents were immigrants to the United States, they felt real fortunate that they were American, that they were free and able to raise a family the way they wished, instead of all the poverty they had in Europe.

Q: When Hitler came to power, how did your family….

A: Well, I was in the service at that time, already. Even before that, we kept reading about it in the paper and hearing it. But I don't think no one gave it a great deal of thought.

Q: How about it when the Americans declared war. Did your family and your community in general feel that that was the correct thing to do?

A: Well, I was already in the service then. I suppose they felt bad in a way, but they were honored in another way, knowing that they had two sons that were going to fight for our country. That was my brother and I. Of course we were in San Francisco, and people were quite excited about being attacked -- it was very possible -- and if you ever saw people in a state of fear, that would have been the place to be, in San Francisco. The people of this country truly do not understand what war is about.

Q: You mentioned before that you were in San Francisco when the war broke out, with the National Guard. Did you then just go ahead and sign up with the regular army?

A: Well, no. Being in the National Guard when war was declared, we were automatically federalized. You had to stay in then. It was a national emergency and that was part of your life from then on. We were originally the 217th Coast Artillery Anti-Aircraft Unit. That was a defense for the western United States on the Pacific, and when we went to San Francisco -- this was the first convoy, or maneuver, that we ever made -- we picked up live ammunition en route, and after war was declared, we all kind of thought, "Gee, somebody knew something,' Because, why did we pick up this live ammunition? We were, as a unit, in bad shape, to hold off any enemy, because we had very poor equipment, and the equipment we had didn't work. But we were there.

The people didn't care -- on any coast, I suppose -- didn't care much for the serviceman. They disliked them. They could smell the mothballs, I think, in your clothing. But after war was declared, things went in complete reverse. It was kind of like a fairy tale. They were really looking for you then. They wanted you for their protection. I ended up on Treasure Island and the civilian population couldn't get to us. We stayed there for months without getting off the Island. There were several alerts. We had on the phones, at night, that the Oregon refineries were shelled from a Japanese submarine, and people got pretty excited -- including us.

Q: How did you finally get transferred to Europe?

A: They were already preparing for the invasion of Europe, and there was a unit that was back at the camp where I originally went, that was unable to pass their overseas test. They were out in the desert and couldn't pass it. So they decided

that they'd take out the nucleus of this group that was in the Bay area and put them in with this particular group and send them overseas. So that's exactly what they did. Then we got back to Cape Hawn, where I was transferred into the 548th Anti-Aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion. They put us with them, and then they said they were ready to go overseas, so then we went to the east coast, which is normal. You're on the west coast, so where do we ship out? We had to go back to the east coast. We went to New York, we shipped out, went to England. I crossed on the Queen Elizabeth. I don't know how many thousand troops were on it, but we went unescorted, that being a ship that traveled quite fast. Submarines weren't able to keep up with it. We landed in Southampton and they took us on a troop train across England to Camp Blackshmuir, down by Liverpool, where we stayed before we crossed the channel into Europe.

Q: When was this now?

A: It would have to be probably in September, I suppose, in September of '44. We crossed after D-Day and we landed on Omaha Beach and we caught up to our division we were supposed to be with. That was the 102nd Division, and they had chased the Germans through France, and they were in Holland and Belgium, in that area, when we caught up with them. When we first heard enemy fire was, I think, Thanksgiving Day of '44.

Q: Were you involved in any of the fighting?

A: From then on, yes. That was where our combat started. In Holland is where we actually started out, Holland and Belgium, and then we stayed in the Siegfried Line until after Christmas, until after the Battle of the Bulge. But kind of an interesting little sidelight, you know, they transferred us -- this group of National Guards -- into this outfit to get them to go across, and I was a little hesitant about being with this group of fellows. They were from Detroit, Michigan. At that particular time, they were a group of what they called Zootsuiters, and they were a difficult group to get along with, and we thought we'd probably have problems, and wasn't too anxious about going into combat with them. But after going into combat, the first night they turned from boys to men overnight, and they turned out to be a first-class fighting unit. It was a terrific group after that.

Q: When you went overseas or even stationed in San Francisco in the Bay area in general, was there anything coming through in the newspapers, or on the radio, about what was happening as far as the Jewish genocide?

A: Not very much. If it did, it didn't have any bearing on me, I don't think. There probably was stuff coming through the local newspapers. We didn't pay too much attention. It seems like the Stars and Stripes, we watched more of that. So there was probably things that were coming through on it, but it didn't register with me or stay with me.

Q: So you weren't particularly caught up with Hitler persecuting anybody?

A: No, but we knew what we were getting into when we were going to fight Hitler. We knew that from their methods already, from what they were doing in Russia and through there, that we were up against a very shrewd operator, and his men would be practically animals, and they were.

Q: Did you hear anything in particular about what they were doing to the Russian army?

A: Oh, yes, we were fully aware of that. And they told us that that was part of the deal, before we went, that if you were ever captured, that you would only give your name, rank and serial number. They also told us that you're gonna be tortured to the point that you'll be forced to say something, but you weren't supposed to, that torture was one of their big items over there to get the information out of you, and they said that there's ways of torture, and there's things we don't even know about the way they're going to torture, yet. And that was very true. There was no end to their torture to get the information if you were captured.

Q: Did you actually liberate a concentration camp?

A: We went through one town -- I think it was after we were over the Rhine River, and I can't remember the name of the town exactly -- if it was a concentration camp, a labor camp, or whatever it was -- but we opened up the gates of this one, and we told these people, "Leave," and of course, they just stood and looked at us. They couldn't understand what we were trying to tell them. I just happened to be downtown, and there was a lady come running across the street to me -- a German. At that time during the war, we weren't supposed to fraternize with the Germans. She spoke perfect English, and she says, "I'm from St. Louis," and she says, " You can't let those people out of there! They'll kill us!" I say, " That's tough." I says, "In the first place, what are you doing over here?" And she says, " Well," she says, " I'm from St. Louis." And I says, ' Yeah, but what are you doing over here?" And she says, " Well, before the war, my mother was ill." She came over to see her mother, and she says, after war was declared, she was forced to stay there -- which I didn't believe. And I says, " Well, these people have suffered. Whatever they need, you just have to give it to them," I says, " It's their turn now." And I left her. But she practically went into hysterics. She says, " You <u>can't</u> let those people out! They'll kill us!" I says, " That's tough!" (Laughter)

Q: And do you remember at all where this was, or what kind of shape these people were in?

A: Well these people didn't look too bad. I think, you know, they were slave laborers. But you know, they looked like the rest of them. They were underfed

and everything like that. They came through this barbed wire fence, and got in this town. They were looking for food, so like all the rest of them, they were hungry and starved.

Q: Did you expect to run across camps like this? Had the Army told you that this might be part of the course?

A: Actually we were looking for these camps of our prisoners., mainly. You know, we knew we were going to come into some of this stuff, but we had no idea that we were going to come into this other stuff that we were running into -- especially like the one at Gardelegen, because at that particular point, from that time on, they were beginning to find all these various camps, like Auschwitz and Dachau. And we were well aware of them, but nobody knew exactly how terrible they were until you actually saw them yourself. Just like our commanding officer told us, " You won't believe it, until you see it. And, after you see it, you still won't believe it!" (Laughs)

Q: So there were stories circulating within the troops that there were these concentration camps.

A: Oh, yes. But I think another thing we should bear in mind, it kind of shocked me to see all this, but, by this time of the war, we were pretty well indoctrinated as to killing Germans and other people, because we saw how the Germans killed our men. Like, the American soldier was fond of souvenirs. And I, myself was one of them, and I was looking for binoculars and pistols and everything like that. But I know one particular incident where a fella had a German Luger, and we found him alongside the road. He evidently picked it up. They (the Germans) found it on 'em when they got 'em and they -- to show us, that were coming behind him -- they took this German Luger and put it in his mouth and they killed him, and left the Luger sticking in his mouth. And that was just to let us know, "That's enough of that!" It didn't stop us any, but at the same time, when we saw this, we were out for revenge. And we felt we could out-do them if we could ever catch some of their SS troops

And from then on, after we crossed the Ruhr River, our trophy catch was to get an SS trooper. And that's what we kept watching for. They were the ones that had a tattoo under their arm. That was the ones we really wanted to torture, because we knew that in the pillboxes and stuff -- where the Wehrmacht was in -- that's a German civilian soldier -- that if anyone left there, that this SS trooper would shoot them. Even the soldiers, (when) we captured 'em, they told us to watch out for the SS. And then when we did get one they really worked him over, too -- what torture we could think of, and we could think of quite a little of it -- but I wasn't too much involved. My first experience with an SS trooper was after we crossed the Ruhr River. There were some German soldiers walking towards our lines. And at that particular time, they were advising the German soldiers to get rid of their uniforms and dress in civilian clothes and then come into our lines, but

this one German soldier come up to -- there was a couple of us -- and he was still dressed in his uniform, and he was a good looking fella. Spoke perfect English! And very cooperative. And, by golly, we got him back to the P.W. cage and we found out he was an SS trooper. That was our first one we run into. See he had made the switch. He was caught. He was doing anything to save his skin. And from then on, of course, we were well aware of what to look for -- these tattoos under their arm, and we treated them accordingly then.

As we got going then, across these rivers, we gained momentum and we got behind the bulk of the German Army, and then there was pockets of resistance where these Germans were. I can recall this one little woods we went through, and they told us there were Germans in there. We had a convoy, there must have been four or five trucks, and the Germans ambushed it. They were looking for gasoline to get their tanks going -- they were already running out of gas -- and they ambushed this convoy. And it was still burning when we got there. And they had taken these fellows that were in these American vehicles -- American soldiers -- and they had run 'em alongside the road, and when they couldn't run no more, they shot 'em in the backs, and they were still there when we came. It was a pretty hairy situation --when we got to this little town. They were taking in German prisoners, and you could see why we were treating 'em pretty rough then, because what we had seen. It just turned ya! And to carry this out a little further is that, when I saw I was no different from the rest -- when I saw a dead G.I.. Sure, it didn't bother me, but I wouldn't go over and touch him, but if they saw a dead German soldier -- it could be laying right alongside of 'im (the American soldier) -- they'd go through his pockets looking for rings, watches and everything like that. They'd never touch the G.I. – the American soldier – but they'd really work over the dead Germans! Of course, that's a part of war. If they can do something to you, you want revenge, and you can out-do 'em or try to out-do 'em.

Q: What did you finally liberate? What did you come upon?

A: The Gardelegen atrocity. That was in Gardelegen.

Q: Can you describe the surrounding area to me?

A: I think it was kind of like a farming area. I didn't know until afterwards there was an airport there where they trained the young Germans to be pilots, and so, in this respect, this community was well off, because they had this group of Germans -- select Germans -- to be pilots in this area. We had no idea of anything like this being there.

Q: Why were you in the area?

A: We were at Bismark, Germany, one night, and we took over a creamery. This was shortly before we got into Gardelegen. And this creamery had fresh butter,

and we thought that was great. It was unsalted, but still. At that time we were way ahead. The Germans didn't even know we were around. And this fella was out in the morning, pickin' up his eggs from the farmers, and he had fresh eggs, so we took over a couple of cases of these eggs, and we fried 'em in this butter, and we really thought we did have something! Because we were eating all this dried, powdered eggs and what-not. First thing, when we hit these towns, the town crier would come out, and we'd have him yell that the Americans were here, and they had to turn in all their pistols, photo cameras and knives and stuff like that. And I can remember that in Bismark, this woman came and gave me a pair of binoculars. And she was telling me about these binoculars, that her German husband had been killed in Africa. Of course the binoculars, they were made in England, so evidently, he took 'em from some Englishman, I suppose, that was killed in Africa, or he took 'em off some prisoner.

That night, the German tanks got a hold of some g as, and it was a very quiet evening, and you could hear these big Tiger-airs, we called 'em -- that was their big tank -- and they were running around the countryside. It was more or less to scare ya. And of course there wasn't much you could do with one of these large tanks, because they were just a mass of armor. It was pretty frightening! You could hear 'em for miles -- they made that much noise -- at night. We had a gun emplacement, a 40- millimeter, and this tank practically drove over this gun emplacement, and they didn't dare shoot at it, because it would have been no use, and they'd have given away their position. But I think it was between Bismark and -- I can't remember the town -- where we opened up these gates, where this one camp was, of slave laborers. We were just moving up to Gardelegen, just coming into it, when we were told about this atrocity.

Q: Who told you?

A: Well, it was the 102nd Division that run into it, and then one of our battery units, a platoon or fighting unit, "D" battery of the 548th was with 'em, and they run into this. Then they told our commanding officer, and then the commanding officer relayed it to us, which I have in my records as Friday the 13th. It must have been in the evening, so we didn't get there 'til Sunday morning.

Q: What month and year is this now?

A: This is April of 1945.

Q: Were you people ordered to go look at it, or get rid of the Germans around there?

A: No, we weren't ordered to look at it. He says, " There's probably some of you people that won't -- can't look at it!" But most everyone went. I know I went there twice.

Q: What compelled you to go in the first place?

A: Well when he said -- after looking for revenge -- when he said, seeing this, " You have to see it to believe it, and then after you see it, you still won't believe it!" I was quite curious! And it was something.

Q: Did you walk up to it on foot? Can you tell me what it was like?

A: No, we drove up there. At this time, we already moved into Gardelegen. We took over a farm on the edge of town, and moved into this farm. Wherever we went, we always selected our homes, as to what we wanted, and we'd make these people move out, and we'd take over their homes or whatever it was. And we were at this farm and so from this farm we drove out -- which was a mile or two out of town -- to this atrocity. And it was something you would never forget, to see two piles of bodies still smoldering when we arrived was…you can imagine the stench, and everything. A lot of 'em couldn't stand it, got to the building and turned and walked away. But it didn't bother me too much, and I did go inside, and I walked around and looked at all the bodies.

Q: What exactly did you see as you approached?

A: Well, from the road it was a burnt out building, but we sensed that something great, large, had happened.

Q: How did you sense that?

A: W-e-l-l, you could tell from the door, the doors being burned out. They were all charred, and what-not. You didn't have to get very close, and you could see the piles of bodies in the doors and stuff. Then I know I looked at this one -- they had to open the doors enough, then so I could see this one pile, and I walked down to the backside -- and then I saw this other pile of bodies, still smoldering. Course then as time went on, ya just got braver. "I saw this, now" ya know, " I want to see everything. I'm gonna see." And I had a camera which I had confiscated from a German, a Zeiss-Ikon. Film was a big problem! All through there I had film being sent from home. And I picked up this camera mainly so I could get hold of some German film. So I was rather limited on film, and I started taking pictures. Of course, in this outfit, anybody who wanted pictures, they were always coming to me because I was having fairly good luck taking pictures. After you get into combat, you weren't allowed to have any pictures. They were to be all censored, so the few pictures you did take, if there was a combat area, they were either confiscated, or they were held for you for so many days until you left the area.

But when we hit this particular area, he told us we could go see this and he told us all censorship restrictions were lifted and that we could take all the pictures we wished. At that time, my film was limited. Had I known before, I could have saved film. But he says, " You can write home about it. You can give the name

of the outfit, the name of the town and give any information you wish to and it will not be censored." And this was a first. So with that, we knew that this had to be something really terrible. And of course by then we had heard of some of the other atrocities, so we had a pretty good idea of what we were getting into. But in the course of the time I was in the service, I would imagine I had taken approximately eight, nine hundred pictures. I was in the service from June of 1940 until November of '45 -- I was going to be the first in and last out -- and of course, with all these pictures, it's a picture story! I've been interviewed before, and people are amazed at the pictures I had taken while I was in Service, compared to a lot of people. And I was fortunate enough at that particular time, the pictures I did take, I did write on the back of each picture as to the date, place, and what had happened, and some of the people that were involved in the picture.

But getting back to the Gardelegen atrocity, on the inside, I didn't have any flash bulbs or anything like that. I had taken time exposures, but there was a scene on the inside -- there was one on one end of the barn -- there was a kind of ledge -- cement ledge – and looked like a father and son sitting there! And they died in that position with their arms around each other, and they knew that they were going to die, and so they just put their arms around each other and they had their little tin cans that they had for food and water sitting in between 'em and that's the way they died. I tried taking pictures of 'em, and I think they did print 'em but I'm certain that if I'd a saved the negatives and had 'em reprinted now, I'd a had a picture. I felt real bad about it – that I threw my negatives away.

Q: What was the size of the building?

A: Well it was quite large. I would say, 25 by 40 feet maybe. It was a large, tile building with a tile roof. I suppose comparable to a machine shed around here, but I think it was primarily used for where this agricultural area stored potatoes. In the fall of the year, they took their potatoes or some of their harvest and put 'em in this particular building, because it was completely empty and I never did find out exactly what was in it. But it had a dirt floor.

Q: How many people were in it?

A: In this atrocity, in this particular building, there were 1,016. They had marched 'em into this building and set up machine guns after they got 'em in there and closed the big doors and then they tried to set this fire. They had about a foot-and-a-half of straw on the floor that was saturated with gas, and the first round of attempt at setting it afire, they put out -- they squelched the fire with their human bodied by laying on it. The second time they blew a hold in one end of the building with a Panzervoss, which is an anti-tank weapon, and then from there they threw in various types of grenades -- such as phosphorous -- any grenade that would get things to burn. And then, also, in the same thing, they opened up with machine-gun fire to make 'em lay down, and with that the fire took off. And I think that -- to add to some of the horribleness of this, looking at some of the

bodies -- they threw in phosphorous grenades. And wherever this phosphorous got on human skin, it just turned green -- with great big green spots -- and continued to burn on the skin until it run out of oxygen or until it burned out. So there were some pretty horrible burns. (Sigh)

Q: Do you know what type of people they were? Or why those people had been put in the building?

A: No, I really didn't, ya know. After I saw the T.V. show Holocaust, it brought back memories as to seeing this label on these people. And I saw those labels, but they were so dirty, these people -- all their uniforms -- were charred from the smoke and fire, they were all kind of black -- but now I can recall vividly as ever that they had the Stars of David. Their identification was on this and I had never given it a thought until I saw the show Holocaust.

Q: Was it all men? Or were there children?

A: Well, it was all men. But there were some awful young looking ones too -- I would say like this one looked like a father and son -- I would imagine that person to me looked like probably sixteen, eighteen years old. They had buried 500 before we got there -- I believe that this was going on to be another atrocity covered up -- had we not arrived, they'd had them all buried, and we probably wouldn't a known about it.

Q: The Germans were burying them?

A: Burying them! Evidently they took slave laborers to bury these people. They buried them in tiers. After they get one tier, they cover 'em partly with ground, and then they'd start another tier. It was a bulldozed ditch right in back of the barn. It was better 'n half-full already. And for 500, that was approximately half of the people out of the thousand and sixteen. But then there was those that did escape them!

Q: How did they escape?

A: I came back again on the following day, and it was taped off. I couldn't get back into it -- I didn't have very much film, anyway -- to take some more pictures. Then they found out that there were people turning themselves in that said they had escaped this atrocity -- which was about eight or ten of 'em. And in the process I was selected to guard these eight or ten because they knew that the Nazis would attempt to get somebody in to kill those people because they knew we were holding these people for witnesses from the civilians on those people that had done this. So, our primary job was to guard these people from the civilians and the biggest fear was that they'd drop in German paratroopers, possibly in the evening, to kill off these eight or ten. They took these eight or ten in a house in

Gardelegan, and the people of Gardelegen had to clothe them -- give 'em new clothing -- and they had to bring food rations for 'em every day, with a wine ration. And then with this group of eight or ten, there was one we picked out as the interpreter, because he could speak English, and his name was Bondo Gaza. He was a Hungarian Jew and just a wonderful person to talk to! No end of talk, you know. And of course this was our communication -- between him and the rest of them that escaped -- and his particular escape was that as he got out away from the building -- evidently got out before the fire, him and another one -- and an SS trooper and a dog were patrolling the building, and the dog and the trooper came up to this fellow behind him and the dog sniffed at this fella and this SS trooper shot him. And he thought without a doubt he was next, and he laid there, pretending to be dead, and the dog passed him up, and he crawled over to an airport -- this is where they trained the Germans to be air force pilots -- and he stayed there 'til the Americans arrived and he turned himself in

There are so many things he told me. Had I known how important it would have been, I could have found out much more about these other people. But it was just telling me about himself. Evidently in civilian life, he was a musician of some sort. And he was really gifted! And just absolutely a terrific person1 and I can't recall where he told me he was from. He certainly kept us aware of what was going on because when they got their wine rations, sometimes they got a little bit too much, and the first thing they were always going to do -- we had to keep them 'em from doing --.was there was this one German radical, in there, and they were going to slit his throat. And so, when they got their wine ration, our primary duty was to watch out so they didn't get to this German radical.

Q: How did you feel through all of this?

A: Very bitter! They brought in several of 'em that were involved in this atrocity! Whenever they brought 'em in, we'd line up these people that escaped in front of this house -- on the sidewalk -- and they'd march these fellas out in front of us. And we knew that the European people, to spit on somebody is about the worst thing they could ever do. And they are what ya call first class spitters! They'd march this fella, the prisoner, out in the middle of the street, and these fellas could spit clear from the sidewalk out into the middle of the street, and they just plastered this guy to no end. Of course, that was their revenge. They just thought that was something terrific, that they could spit on this guy, because he was involved in this. I was quite interested -- ever since -- to find out what they had done to 'em. I never did know if they executed 'em or what they actually had to do with the atrocity. I never did find out, and I've always been curious about it.

Q: What has this whole event done to you?

A: Well, it's made me aware of the fact that I think that this country we live in is just so darn great, and that people don't appreciate it. It's sad, to think that we've got something in the United States, this freedoms we have. To see what they can do

to people in other countries, is just unbelievable. It makes you appreciate to have the freedoms we have.

Q: I see you have with you a letter that you wrote to your parents at the time?

A: This is a letter I wrote concerning the atrocity -- shortly after. It doesn't get to the point of where it tells of the burial of these people, but it brings us to the point to where I'd seen and taken the pictures, and it might be of some interest. Like I say, this is the first letter that I had written home where we could tell where we were, and this was on the 13th, so you can see this is quite recent:

Germany
9th U.S. Army
102nd Division
544th Anti-Aircraft, Automatic Weapons Battalion
April 19, 1945

Dear Dad and Mom,

Now that they've sent the V-mail, it's about time I write and answer your letters number 23 and 24. The clippings and stamps were enclosed in your number 24 envelope. Thanks. I am enclosing our 102nd Division patch. This is the Ozark division. And if you look at it from the proper angle, the large yellow band encircling it is the "O". You can see the "Z" and the half-moon below is the "ark" part, marking it "Ozark."

Our weather isn't too worse here. Had the regular March winds and the coolness today. Had a washing machine here, so I managed to get my clothes clean once again. Washed them in gas first, and then in the machine. Turned out cleaner than I expected. One thing I can say -- that I got all the grease out of my O.D.'s and fatigues -- which is better than the quartermaster laundry can do.

Golly, Jeanette Motzko (which is a cousin of mine) writes a pretty regular and a nice letter. I answer them as often as I find time.

This last week is the first time any of us are doing any writing since we crossed the Rhine. The architect's home in Krefeld was a plus and all comfort. We just got our PX-rations this evening, which is the first rations of this sort for quite some time. We got candy, gum, peanuts, and fruit juice -- even some film, but I was unlucky in the lottery or hat draw.

We are eating very well lately. We found 10,000 fresh eggs, and we are in a creamery. Eggs fried in butter, are darned delicious to us. Just don't seem to ever get tired of the combination. The German butter is minus the salt, and it isn't near as good as ours.

No, you won't have to fill out those forms, unless you move from your present address. Then you send it to the Adjutant General.

Well here's something that isn't fit to write home about, but probably by now you have heard and read all about it. All censorship restrictions are released about this terrible incident, so we are able to write about it. This concerns the horrid, gruesome Nazi atrocity that happened at Gardelegen. I saw it, and there aren't words appropriate enough to tell of its terribleness. The Nazis are every bit as cruel, and even with more beastly habits than we actually realized.

To get on with the Gardelegen Flaming Death House, there were approximately about 1,000 various war prisoners that lost their lives here. They were mostly Russian, Poles, Jews, their own political radicals, and one American Negro soldier has been identified so far.

To get on with the story, this group of PW's numbered 2,000, which were in Prussia. With the Russians putting on the pressure, they marched this group 1,000 kilometers -- or 600 miles -- to this front. This journey took about 20 days with meager food and water rations. Hanover was to be their destination, but with this same city being taken by the 9th Army, Gardelegen was next in line. About 1,000 completed this forced journey. The balance died or were killed en route. During this time they were being guarded by their own fellow prisoners, which were clothed in the Wehrmacht uniform, and equipped with Nazi rifles. They were overseered by the terrible SS troops, and were to be granted their freedom because of their previous mentioned duty.

This group was herded to a large brick barn on the outskirts of Gardelegen, which was prepared with two feet of straw, saturated with an inflammable material which covered the entire floor. After all were herded in, they forced in the guards at the last moment too.

At 6 p.m., Friday, 13th April, a German SS non-com came in and ignited the straw. This attempt was soon beat out. Resorting to their beastly habits now, they opened up with machine gun fire to make them lie down, and during this time, they tossed in various grenades, especially those of the incendiary and phosphorous types. There was no quelling of the blaze this time. Those who attempted to escape from the four large doors were soon mowed down by machine gun fire.

The fire burned all Friday evening, and the next day, slave laborers were forced to dig large ditches for their burial ground. The burial was well under way, and another Nazi atrocity being covered up, when our division captured this town and

found this death house. I visited this horrible scene yesterday, and two piles of human torsos were still smoldering.

We were allowed to take pictures, so I took one whole roll of film, but the memories will vividly portray this ghastly scene with greater meaning to me. It really makes one's blood boil!

Here's practically a miracle that goes with it. Sunday a.m. a Frenchman crawled out from under one of these piles, very much alive to tell of his past experience, which was all torture. We never heard of his exact condition. I don't think there will be words appropriate to describe some of the ghastly scenes inside. Some tried to dig under the dirt, and in their vain efforts, they wore flesh and bone up to the second joint of their fingers in their futile attempts. Some were blown to pieces by grenades. Phosphorous burns added to the terribleness. There were some that seemed to be so very young, between fourteen and sixteen years old..

This is not the makings of a good letter, so I will end this here. It just goes on to prove that the Nazis need no sympathy whatsoever. No treatment or punishment can be too cruel for these people. They deserve many more hardships than they are now receiving.

Well, it's getting nigh on bedtime, and I can't think of too much more to write about for the time being. I had planned on writing to Buddy this evening, but I will have to postpone it until tomorrow. No more now.

Your son,

Edmund.

And that's the letter. To go with that, I was quite surprised -- as mothers are, you know, they're great savers -- and after she found out about my going to Washington D.C. for the Holocaust Liberators Council, she says, "I think I've got some letters yet." And she dug around, and she dug out a whole pile of letters that were tied in a ribbon, and, in sorting through this pile of letters was this particular letter that I read. My 85-year-old mother is still living, and I'm very grateful to her having saved this letter for me.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add about the experiences of the war, what it's done for you since?

A: Well, I think that it makes me totally aware of what a great country we have. And when it comes to Memorial Day, I think how fortunate I am to be home here, where all the fellas that were killed over there aren't here. So I've dedicated myself, every Memorial Day, to march in the Memorial Day parades, and so far I've participated in 36 of 'em, and I hope to continue on as long as my good

health continues. And I think that's part of my duty, for these fellas and people that just didn't get back home. And I consider it an honor to do it.

Q: Thank you very much.