

INTERVIEW WITH DONALD NOST
BY RHODA G. LEWIN
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Jewish Community Relations Council,
Anti-Defamation League of Minnesota and Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: This is Rhoda Lewin and I'm visiting with Donald Nost on Tuesday evening, February 3, 1987, for the Holocaust Oral History Project of the Jewish Community Relations Council Anti-Defamation League. If you would start maybe by telling me where you grew up, where you went to school, what your education was and things like that before the war started.

A: I was born and raised in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. I was born on November 3, 1917, and went to school beginning about 1925 at a local grade school in Fergus Falls - Lincoln Grade School. And then progressed to the Washington High School for my high school education. I got out of high school in 1936 at the very height of the Depression. In smaller cities like Fergus Falls, which I think at that time was about 8 or 9,000, employment for this high school class was virtually nil. There was a few of the graduates that were very fortunate and were able to go on to school. I was not one of them. My family was not too well-to-do and had suffered heavily during the Depression. My father worked in southern Minnesota, in Worthington, right down near the Iowa border, and he would send us money while I was in school, and then after I was graduated, we went down to Worthington. And of course Dad liked his adopted town as most people do, just like Bonnie (picture of his daughter) there; she loves her adopted California, Dad loved his adopted Worthington, and thought that I wouldn't have have any trouble getting a job down there which of course was not true. The intervening years were filled with part-time jobs, working for Montgomery Wards two or three days a week, and all that. All in all it wasn't a very good time, and suddenly my sister came back into the area. She had been living in Chicago. She had been married to a very strong, almost a Nazi-type, German, she found out, to her sorrow. His name was Rudy Doderlein.

Q: What do you mean by Nazi type?

A: Well, he was a member of the Brown Shirts in Chicago, and they were strong, believe me. And Dorothy particularly loved to tell the story that one night he told her that they were going to a meeting. And Dorothy says, "What kind of a meeting?" This was probably '38 or '37. Well, he says, "A meeting." And sure enough they got there, and lo and behold, it was right out and out Brown shirts and they had the Nazi flag up there and that was at the time that the Graf Spee had just been sunk, and it was one of the most beautiful battleships ever built. It had been sunk over there by Rio de la Plata in Brazil. And they were

celebrating it. And they were singing the Horst Wessel song, and Dorothy just despised them all, because she looked at them, and she thought they were American citizens, but they were acting just like people over there in Munchen. So at the height of the festivities, with all the beer drinking and everything, Dorothy got up and started to sing "Hail Britannia," and they threw her out! They threw my sister out bodily, into the street. And that so-called man that she was married to, stayed on, and drank, and celebrated. That's when Dorothy decided that she was going to just have to leave, and as quietly as possible, without any fanfare, so she made all her plans. She worked at the Palmolive Building, which is, as I understand it, sort of in the hub there, not too far from Marshall Fields. She put little things aside here and there for her traveling, and all of a sudden one morning when she went to work from River Forest, which is quite a long ride in, she waved goodbye, and from there she just simply got on a train, and came up to Minnesota. And that was the end of that! And she was pretty happy. But it was a really bad experience, and we could hardly believe it, because up here in Minnesota we didn't have anything like that, that we knew of. Of course you want to remember we spent some time up at Fergus Falls and down in Worthington. You see, we were never here, in town here.

Q: There was an organization like that in the Twin Cities but not out in the smaller communities.

A: But you see down there, they were pretty rampant about it. Even in later years I understand there's been some resurgence of that down there, where they've gone and got their uniforms on again. Pretty bad.

So, things went along as they do, and finally Pearl Harbor came along. At the time of Pearl Harbor I didn't know anything about it. We were over in Minneapolis at my Aunt Jessie's, who had a cute little basement apartment in one of the older sections of Minneapolis; I'm sure it's practically a slum now.

Q: That depends on where it was.

A: No, I've forgotten. My mother was there, and her sister Ethel, and her sister Jessie, and the two husbands were there, and I was there, of course. My dad was not. It was one of the only times I saw all the three sisters together. And they were up to get some cataracts removed from my grandma's eyes. My maternal grandmother was there; my paternal grandmother had died way back in '23, I believe. That's the Nost stone down there in Red Wing. (Points to photos) So there we were all day long, talking family and old days and everything, and in the meantime Pearl Harbor was going on. And at that time, of course, a lot of people didn't have radios. I didn't know if poor Jessie had a radio or not, but no television or anything like that. All of a sudden we're coming back from Minneapolis on an intercity bus that came down Summit Avenue, and we got pretty close to where Dorothy's apartment was, which was 1290 Grand - those apartments are there to this day, and they look just like they did - we

heard the news kids hawking the newspapers, and shouting and all that, and we got off the bus down here, and learned Pearl Harbor had been bombed. The first thing I wanted to do was to get into it, and so I had registered for the draft up home, up in Fergus Falls. Well, they were very adamant that I wasn't going to enlist. "Cause they didn't want to lose me as a draftee." (Laughs) I'll never forget. I went down to that beautiful old court building that's in downtown St. Paul here - it's recently been restored, thank goodness; they were going to level that and make a parking lot out of that, too - and I went in there and I told the army recruiting people about that, and of course they laughed and laughed, and said, "No, we need you, sign here." And so I just did, and I volunteered in.

Q: When was that? Were you one of the people who enlisted on December 8th?

A: No, this was one month later. This was January 7, 1942. I get that mixed up. Sometimes I think it was '41, but I always remember, the end of the year.

Q: It was after Pearl Harbor.

A: Yep, it was January 7 and there I was in, and we were over at Fort Snelling, and I remember that I had a good friend who had been in World War I and also had a tour of meritorious duty in World War II - Lt. Paul, he came out a full colonel in the South Pacific - and he told me, "You wanna get in, now here's what you wanna do, boy," and he's got a lieutenant's bars. So I say by golly, "Yes, sir," and he was a friend, too. He gave me a wonderful hunting dog. So he said, "You wanna enlist in the Air Corps. Take the test. You can do it. Become a cadet and become a bombardier. We need bombardiers." He said, "I don't know about pilots, but we need bombardiers." So I went down, and told them, and they said, "Well, we're sorry, we haven't got any openings for the Air Corps. They're all filled." But I took my time and thought about it a little bit and I says, well, I'd go into the field artillery and so I got to Fort Sill for basic field artillery training, and I remember all the enlisted men were given the option of going to officer's candidate school, that is, men that had, in quotes, "enlisted." I imagine now that that would be looked on as being rather against other people's rights, but after all, we hadn't waited for our number to come up, we had enlisted, so therefore we were called up. I remember there were about a half a dozen of us, and we didn't know what we were called up there for - everyone was just kind of, oh, "What's going to happen next?" And they had this artillery colonel - Artillery is a very proud branch of the service, an old branch - and finally it was my turn, and they said, "How did you happen to enlist?" And I explained that I had gotten into the artillery because it was my second choice. And he was kind of looking down at my papers and everything and he looks up and saw second choice. "Second choice artillery; what's the matter with you, boy?" And I said, "Well, sir, my first choice was to go into the Air Corps. I wanted to become a pilot." And I'll never forget what he said. He hollers over his shoulder to his aide, and says, "Here's another one of 'em." So, that was the beginning, actually; and then after serving some time in the tank destroyer battalion - in those big maneuvers in

1942, where we were running all over Louisiana and east Texas there, and all of a sudden my call came to take the test, which I passed, and I went into aviation cadets. However, the "plebe" thing got me. I was too free a spirit - I was too much a kind of a lone hunter - not a loner, but I just couldn't stand it. I mean, it really got me, and I developed a terrible case of food allergy. And it got so the cooks absolutely hated me because I got down to the point where I was eating grilled hamburger and milk; tomatoes, vegetables, starches, coffee, tea, sour fruit juices - the list was just endless, and of course at that time they knew very little about allergy. But basically what it was was the fact that I was so overanxious to try to make this. And they were so overanxious to push all these petty things upon me, which I didn't have time for. I wanted to go ahead with the training and all that, and I was doing all this kind of stuff. I hate wire coat hangers to this day. I left one of my bunk one time. I had to sign my name about six or eight times because I had left that coat hanger unattended on my beautifully-made bunk. I mean, there wasn't a ripple in that bunk, but still there was a coat hanger on it, and boy, I suffered for that. I just suffered. So, to make a long story short, after that I stayed in the Air Corps, and I became a chemical warfare teacher. Chemistry was always very interesting to me, and a lieutenant that we had, Lt. Moore, a very nice fellow, taught me how to talk. I don't mean extemporaneously, but how to talk calmly and decisively before a large group of people and put a point across using visual aids, training aids, even live ammunition, and so forth, to demonstrate the use of toxic gases and smoke and explosives in a wartime situation. It was 23 months that went past very, very quickly. I'll never forget how quickly it went by. And finally I found myself there all alone facing an investigation by the Inspector General's Office, which goes around to army units at all times, including peace time, checking out, seeing how they're doing, what is your staff here, what is your supplies, what do you do. I don't mean are you worthwhile, but what do you think, are you really doing a job here that's important? And I told him no. (Laughs) I told him I didn't think I was doing a job here - and I wanted to volunteer myself out of here, and I wanted to go overseas. And he said, "Really, corporal?" And I said, "Yes, sir." There was three majors, and all the rest of the men had left. The lieutenant had found a convenient excuse to leave, and the civilian secretary, I don't know where she was, and my fellow compatriots whom I worked with in teaching - there was at least four of 'em that I can think of - Bill Hart was one - they were all gone. They just left Nost right there. "Take care of the I. G. when they come," and I got pretty mad, and I told him, "You bet, I'm ready to be transferred out of here." He says, "Well, we'll do what we can." And he took down all the notes of what else we were doing there, and finally left. Well, it took less than two months, and I was out of there and on my way to an infantry training camp, and on my way overseas. Got in there about Christmas time in '44 and got overseas in January of '45. Luckily for me, I didn't go right up to the front, because if I had gone up to the front I wouldn't be talking to you today, because I would have gone up to the front with this outfit right here (shows photos), the Seventh Army. I ended up in B Company, Third Platoon, Headquarters Squadron, 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion. What armored infantry does is ride on the backs of the tanks, and

protects the tanks, and the tankers just love the armored infantry because they're the eyes - they practically have no eyes, except those little slits in the front - and we're on the outside protecting them, and they just loved us. They had just come back from being very severely mauled during the Battle of the Bulge. They held the lines up there at St. Vith and Malmedy, and at one time did have to retreat. But it was a fighting retreat, and within five or six days they had fought their way back. The Germans took 55 miles, and within just a few days the Seventh was battling them back. I came as a replacement for all those people that were lost. As a matter of fact, the truck that we came up on took a dead soldier back from the very same outfit, the 23rd. All these things get compressed into a very short microcosm of time, as they say today, from about the 25th of March until the 8th of May. Just all compressed in there, where we'd drive just day and night, because, unknown to us, we had a difficult mission. We were actually trying to defeat the Germans before they inflicted total disruption to the British isles because of V-2's. They were able to keep shooting those V-2's, it seemed, irregardless. I don't know what they were making 'em out of, I don't know if they were making them out of packing cases or something, but the monsters kept flying over, and they'd go up to about 5,000 or so, and then they'd come straight into Germany, just full speed ahead. And the reason we were doing that was because of this unconscionable space-age weapon that Hitler had finally given the okay to. Speer went and inspected it when the end looked imminent and came back and said to Adolf, "Hey, those V-2's aren't bad. They can cause a lot of damage over there across the Channel, if you will stop talking to the astrologers, and listen to your scientists for awhile." And then, of course, he had Werner von Braun there. Bob Newhart on television, he's got a good skit about him, when he comes over here, about "Werner von Werner." They had 'em there, and they were doing beautifully. So we just smashed in there, just absolutely roughshod, and it was really something. I look back sometimes, and don't understand how I even made that, even those few days. But as I say, they were compressed together. We went from town to town to town to town.

Q: Can you describe it a little bit, the fighting?

A: Well, I was a radio man. I carried a forty-five pound radio on my back. I remember when we first came up into a kind of cold, nasty valley that the Germans were holding the other end of, and we were on one end, and it was really cold, a cold March day, and we came into this really small, small farming village, and I remember the guys were in there, and they were trying to get warm and I remember it was the first time I kind of felt sorry for the enemy, because I'd never seen many of 'em up close before. There was quite a few dead ones outside there, but inside this little place there was a spoon maker. He made spoons, wooden spoons. And he had little billets of hard wood that he carved these spoons out of. And he had very crude machinery to help him make these spoons. And I'll never forget the guys were burning the spoons in the stove. They were cold. They'd been out all night and all the day before and God knows how long before that and here was a stove and here was some wood to put into

it and they were putting it, and he was so shook. I felt sorry for him, but I thought, well, they brought it on themselves. (Laughs) And I kind of went up to the stove and got warm, too. And I'll never forget, there was a man there who - I found out afterwards that this company, B company, his name was Britton, he was captain - and he was kind of a tall, gaunt individual and I don't know how many times he'd been wounded, at least three, possibly four, and now they'd told him that it didn't make any difference whether he wanted to stay up or not, he was going to be sent back. He was going around to each man in the company, in B company, and wishing them well, and shaking hands, and he came up to us new guys, and said, "Now, you wanna be careful now, and listen to the fellows who have been up here. Be good soldiers." And then he left. He was a pretty nice fellow.

Q: Now, you were carrying this forty-five pound radio. Was this to communicate with the other units that were fighting in other areas?

A: This attack was being carried forth by CCA. That's what I was in - Combat Command A. CCR on the Right - Combat Command Reserve - and CCB over here on the left, which was back a ways. In other words, we had two back-ups, and one forward unit that went ahead. And I rode the third tank. I think in that short time we lost about four or five tanks. And what the Germans would do is they'd wait until the last minute around the turn when we'd come to these winding valleys and then they'd shoot at the ground in front of the Shermans, and the '88 would rocket up and cut the bottom out of the tank, and kill the tank commander and the driver, and sometimes kill the gunner, also - they were generally a three-man crew in the tanks - and we seldom got anybody out of those tanks. And then of course the shells inside 'em would explode, and everything else. It was pretty bad. And then of course the column would grind to a halt, and the infantrymen would all get off and take defensive positions, and the people that were handling the bazookas would move forward, and bazooka the enemy Tigers, sometimes with pretty good results, sometimes with no results, because the enemy would simply disappear, just take off, and maybe hit us again later in the afternoon, or maybe the next morning. And that's the way it went. I remember one time we got hit late one March evening, and the tank went up in flames right ahead of me there, and we jumped off. And they have these cute little kilometer posts over there, and I love 'em, they're only about 20 inches high and maybe 8 or 10 inches square, and they'll have a kilometer number, and I don't know if that means 8 kilometers to the next town, or to the last town. And we'd been told, "Don't ever jump into the ditches if you get hit, because lots of times the ditches are zeroed in with enemy fire from up ahead." And I remember I was behind one of these cute little kilometer posts, and it seemed like a tremendously safe place to be! (Laughs) I looked down and there was this inviting ditch right down there and I thought, gosh, I could just roll over and roll in that ditch, and I'd be completely protected from the road and from this presumed attack which was gonna come any minute, and all of a

sudden down the ditch came these fireflies, these tracers. If I'd jumped down in that ditch, I'd've been riddled.

Q: You wouldn't be sitting here today.

A: No. So we'd get up, and then we'd make a hit, and then it would just be to dash forward, past everything, and finally, along in early April, we mopped up a good part of the Ruhr pocket and the Rose pocket. And they were large entities that had been passed by and that still had a considerable number of troops. The Ruhr pocket, for instance, still had 100,000 troops in it, and the 7th, alone, it says here, took 45,000 prisoners out of that. It's in the little book there. And so as we went along we finally came down to this town, and it was called Hemer. And I'll never forget it because we'd been shelled all afternoon and you're never gonna believe it; we'd been shelled by our own guns. (Laughs) And we were pretty mad. I couldn't get any communication back. And of course my little radio wouldn't go back to battalion and I wasn't in the artillery, anyway. I was in a very small battalion, company battalion, that was it. After we started to get hit, we worked our way up onto a big hill, where luckily there were a lot of big boulders, that were about half the size of this room. And that's what saved our life, because otherwise, the shrapnel would have got us, for sure. It did wound some people, but it wasn't nearly the casualties you'd expect, because of these boulders that protected us. And boy, we were really under those boulders. I never saw such nice rocks in my life. And they were big! They were kind of alike a giant had taken a big handful of these boulders and threw 'em out on the top of this hill, there. The artillery that was supporting us had a gun off. And what that gun did was kept throwing shells right into us. The lieutenant, the forward observer, couldn't get his radio to work, he couldn't get back to the fire control base, and I'll never forget, he finally put it together, and he just kicked the daylights out of it. I turned around to Thatcher, who was the sergeant, and I said, "Well, Sarge, looks like that's it." He just kicked the hell out of the radio. And (laughs) it made the radio work! Some piece of broken wire in there, when he kicked, slopped over and slid together, and he was able to get back to the fire control, and all they had to say - all they had to say was, "We had a gun off." And that was it, that was it. They didn't say, "We're sorry we almost killed you. We're really Americans, too." They didn't say that. They just said, "We had a gun off." And here they had been throwing those gigantic big 105's in there on us, full of high explosives. Those things were about 20 or 25 inches long, at least, and then 105 mm in diameter.

Q: Like the size of a giant grapefruit or something.

A: Yeah. They came roaring in, and it sounded just like express trains. If you've never been shelled, it's hard to explain. It was really something. So we were pretty well shook when we got to this town. We got into this town here, and we went in there pretty easily. We didn't understand; we thought we were going to be hit by something else there. Word came back that there were a lot of SS up

there. And of course everybody was pretty askance at those rascals, because they were probably the best soldiers that were around at that time. And I know that's a terrible thing to say. And I've been castigated for saying it on several occasions, but my further description of this kind of shows that they were the kind of soldiers that obeyed orders regardless. It didn't make any difference. Now we were the same way, but we did kind of bend the corner once in a while, to make things work. For instance, I was told one time to carry my radio directly across this field, and when mortar fire started coming in, I backed up and went around it this way, instead of going across that field. And I'll never forget, the lieutenant was kind of mad, and he says, "Why, Nost, didn't you take the radio right straight across? You should have taken the shortest route." I said, "Lieutenant, didn't you see that mortar stuff coming in there? There was mortar fire coming in on that field. If I'd run out there, you wouldn't have a radio, let alone me." So he said, "Well, yeah, but..." But you see, if an SS oberlieutenant had told some corporal to take the radio across, he'd have gone across that field. He'd have gone across that field and that would have been it.

When we came to Hemer, the town was pretty quiet and virtually sort of deserted and it turned out all the civilians were all in their houses, and we rolled in there without any problems. I made a few notes here. We arrived at Hemer about April 10th. Now it states in the book April 14th, but I think that's a little bit off. But that's not important. The importance is that when CCA fought their way into Hemer through all these problems, including being shelled by our own guns, we (reads from book) "freed 23,000 former Allied soldiers, mostly Russians, in one of the largest prison camps to be overrun in the war by any force. The deplorable conditions that existed in that camp brought harshly to mind the brutality of the enemy that the 7th was fighting." Now this was a little different, as I explained to you. This was not the horrible camps like they had in Poland. It was just as horrible as an end result, but it didn't have the connotation that they were going to take human beings and turn them into some useful products, like some of those insane madmen did there in Auschwitz and Belsen and the other places. Here they had a simple expedient, it was simply starve them to death. And then as they died, we'll haul them out, I would guess; I don't know; I didn't make a close inspection of the camp. I was up there at the front gate when our tanks smashed the gate and let out the skeletons that could still walk, along with about maybe a dozen or so Allied air crews, air corps personnel, that had been shot down. They were pretty well fed yet. They hadn't been there very long but they hadn't had anything to eat for about a week, which is not too great. The prison camp itself was on some open area near Hemer, outside of town, of course, and consisted of big, gaunt, dark buildings, surrounded by impenetrable, just absolutely impenetrable fencing. I'll never forget it. The guards, of course, had fled, as soon as the Allied troops were heard to be that near. They'd shed their uniforms. We'd find uniforms all over. Shed their uniforms and try to melt into the civilian population, you see, and then go around with the same thing that I've heard of a thousand times, "Me no Nazi, me no Nazi." Like hell they weren't. But anyway, the guards were gone. But the town

was in good shape, you know, because the SS had left, and what the SS did, was it retreated just outside of town, into some bluff positions. These are bluffs a good deal like they have around Red Wing, Minnesota, where my folks came from, those big bluffs that come out. And they had established artillery positions on those bluffs. We got into the town there, and took over one of the better looking houses, my platoon did, and I went into the house and there was this kind of heavy-set burgher there, and he was pretty mad about how things were going. A beautiful, beautiful big baronial type house, probably from the 1880's, with beamed ceilings, and there was deer heads all around on the wall and heavy mahogany furnishings, a big, heavy, beautiful library table. I took and swept everything off the library table and put my radio and stuff on there, and my guns, and started cleaning my carbine, and set up shop. And he came over to me,. He was pretty mad. He didn't care too much for having his library table used for a work bench and he came over to me and he said, "The swine, the prisoner swine," - he could talk pretty good English - "the prisoner swine are eating my rabbits." And I just laughed and laughed, I said, "So what? I think that's fine. They're not swine. You're the swine." With that, of course, he left me pretty much alone. This fellow was pretty well loaded. The part of it I thought of today, thinking about you coming and telling the story, the bad part of this is that that man probably lived out his life right there, in that same house, in this same, almost feudal luxury. He had a little aproned maid, with a little white cap, and she wasn't a big German hausfrau, she was a very good-looking young girl that he had picked up. I remember he went over to her, and he said in German to her, because he didn't think I knew any German, and at that time I knew more German than I know now - you had to know some, and you had to understand pretty quick - and he said words to the effect, "Don't worry about those Americans. 'Morgen frie they will be all todt'".

Q: By tomorrow they'll be all dead.

A: All dead. That made me pretty mad and I went over to Thatcher and I said, "You know what that old so-and-so just told the maid?" And Thatcher was a tough veteran, he had two purple hearts and was still up on the line - one of 'em had cut up his face pretty badly - and he was from Texas, he says, "Don't pay any attention to these damn krauts. We've got to set up a guard here on the perimeter." And he put out the times that each one in the platoon was going to be on guard that night. During all this time, the poor skeletons had been rampaging all over town eating rabbits, or anything else they could. Then when it got dark - I'll never forget - all kinds of little spots of fire sprang up. It reminds me a lot of the Easter fires they have in Texas that they celebrate, you've heard of that? Well, they had an Apache attack in Texas one time and they didn't know how to handle it so they decided, "We'll start all kinds of little fires on the hillside there, and make the Apache think that there's a lot of troops there, a lot of people." And actually there was just children and women and a few old men that were tending these fires. And still, when the Apaches saw all those fires, they didn't attack right away, and when they decided to, by the next day,

reinforcements had arrived. They call it the Easter fires. Up until a few years ago at least they still celebrated that in this little town, the Easter fires. I thought of that, because what these people would do, they'd take these little cans that they'd find, little old soup cans and stuff, and put water in 'em, and grass, and make grass soup. (Starts to cry)

Q: It's hard to remember those things when you talk about them, I know. Can you get back for a minute - you said you drove your tank through the gate of the camp, and you said the fence was so strong. Was that a wooden fence?

A: No, it was reinforced barbed wire; many, many layers of barbed wire with steel posts that were set in concrete. I remember looking down one perimeter, there, of the camp, where you could look way down there and it just went on for, it seemed like blocks. I didn't go down there. I just felt so sorry for these people that I just couldn't. It wasn't a question of anything else but sorrow; it wasn't revulsion or anything like that. And we gave them - of course, a forward combat unit doesn't carry much food with them, mostly gasoline and ammunition, that's our main thing - K-rations. We gave 'em everything we could, and then finally they started stealing from us, and I remember I was talking to Dillon, he was our medic, and I said to Dillon, "Well, this is pretty bad," and they were stealing the jeeps and what were we going to do? It's pretty hard to club a man. And he says, "One thing they're doing right now, they're closing the gates to the camp." Because more and more of 'em summoned up enough strength to try to walk out to freedom and you see, there was no freedom, really, yet. It was coming, and during the night the quartermaster came up, and the medics came up, and then there was some freedom. But you see, with just us guys, all we could do was to stop the brutality. We couldn't give 'em freedom, because we didn't have food for them, and even this town didn't, really.

Q: Didn't you say there was a storehouse, there was some food?

A: Oh, yes. The town was in very good shape, and it was sort of a town like South St. Paul. It's not on the scale of South St. Paul, but on a small scale it was a meat-packing town. And these people all looked it, I mean, really! They weren't feeling any pain. And so many times, I think that it came out afterwards, that the people in the nearby towns claimed they didn't know anything about these camps. But they did. I'm sure they did. It would be pretty hard to miss this place. I'll never forget it, I'll never ever forget it. As the evening rolls along, pretty soon it was my turn to go out on guard duty. I remember I was out there by the half-track - this was our home when we weren't riding the tanks - I was out there by the half-track, and all of a sudden the shelling began. The army had brought up corps artillery, which is artillery beyond regiments of artillery. It's the artillery that would be contained in a whole army corps. In other words, hundreds of guns. And all night long the guns, the shells, roared over the town and just burned the hills. The hills just burned all night. And wiped out the SS entirely. Wiped them out completely. We drove out of town the next morning

and not a shot was fired. They stayed with their guns, they were waiting for us to come out, they stayed on their guns. All night long the hills burned. The shells, using a new deadly technique, called TOT, Time on Target, each midget area was shelled repeatedly, not by a number of shells, but by time, such and such length of time. And it sure worked. I've never (laughs) in my life seen anything so spectacular as that night when our blessed artillery wiped out the SS. It was really great. Then we rolled out of town the next day. The prisoners were being taken care of. The medics had arrived and the quartermaster had come up with food that they could use, not the kind of food that they were getting like rabbits and grass soup, but something that was good for their poor bodies, that helped them. The end of the war was just about a month away. But then on April 13, disaster struck again. We lost four dead, and four wounded on the 13th, and I was fortunate to be one of the wounded and not one of the dead. We had lost another tank, and one unit of infantry went forward on foot and into German territory, and the Germans shelled the bridge that we were going to, and just before this happened I was down in the ditch there, and ducked down along with the other fellows and the lieutenant said, "Nost, you're never going to pick up Company down there in the ditch. Why don't you get up on the road? If you get up on the road where your antenna can be up, maybe you can reach Company then." And I'm standing up there with my head bent down, talking into the radio phone there, trying to reach Company, when all of a sudden I heard this express train go overhead. It hit the bridge right up there, and I was right in the periphery of it, and the shrapnel rained around like that and my clothes were all cut, I got hit in the leg and knocked down, and I couldn't see, but along at that time there was four of the fellows that were killed. I remember the little Dutch boy - we had a Dutch boy in our outfit who had suffered under the Nazis in Holland; you know, in Holland, the Nazis were very, very terrible - and when the 7th Army came through, his family, I guess, had been wiped out, and he just wanted to come along as a volunteer, so the guys gave him a uniform and a Browning automatic rifle and all the ammunition he needed and he was wonderful to have along. He's over there by the side of the road, I can see, and I'm laying there by the side of the road, too; I didn't know how bad I was hit, and I had just regained my eyesight, so I was pretty happy. My eyes have always been the most important thing. I holler "medic" and the medics came over. I said, "What's the matter with my eyes, I can't see." I remember the medic said, "There's nothing wrong, you haven't been hit in the eyes." I said, "Good." And then a few minutes later my eyesight returned. And he said, "You've been hit in the leg, though." And I said, "Well, I don't care about that. Forget about that. Go and help those guys. I can see now." I didn't care about anything else. And there was the poor little Dutch boy over there. He'd been hit and he'd been cut open from hip to the shoulder. He'd just been slashed by that shrapnel. You know, that stuff is so terrible. It's red hot. Just like jagged knives. And then the four people that had been killed. I'll never, ever forget. I tried to tell a couple of the girls at work about it; I was trying to tell Kay and little Jill one time about it. They said something about, "Oh, it was April 13." That was the day. I always try to do something kind of fun on April 13. Betty and I were going out to supper

that night or something, and Kay said to me, "What's so special about April 13?" I knew I couldn't tell 'em. (Cries) Finally Jill says, "Well, Kay, we'll have to have Don tell us his story some other time." I finally did tell them another time. Suddenly that tableau, that scene by that railroad bridge and the road and beyond, it came so clear to me after all these years. Just in the flash, I'm right back there.

Q: It was the day you didn't get killed.

A: Yep, that's right. There was such a nice fellow there, I'll never forget, he was from Pittsburgh, or Philadelphia. I know he had at least two kids and I'd been talking to him the night before. He was a sergeant. And he was just all shot to pieces. He went back in the ambulance with me. They had a stretcher there and I just sat in there, because all I had was a bad leg. I kept asking the medics, "How's so-and-so?" I've forgotten his name. They said, "Oh, he's not very good." We got back to a wrecked farmhouse and I remember I sat in there and they kept giving him morphine. I had had some first aid training, nothing like those fellows, and finally I said to them, "You medics keep giving Sergeant so-and-so morphine. That could practically put him into shock, or kill him. Because I'm pretty sure, he looks to me like he's in shock right now." Well, they said, "That's what we're doing. We're giving that so he won't wake up."

Q: Was that a form of euthanasia?

A: Yes. Well, actually they were giving him a peaceful death because he was completely broken up, wasn't anything that was whole anymore. The only thing that was keeping him alive was his youth. Outside of that, if he'd been a man of my age now, he'd been dead. I sat there and I really felt bad and finally his breathing became shallower and shallower and finally he died. And three days later we were back on the campaign trail, back slugging away. Pretty soon the thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of Germans started to surrender. Finally we didn't know what to do with them. (Laughs) I'll never forget it. The only thing was they knew we weren't going to kill them, and they were afraid that if they got captured by the Russians, the Russians would kill them. And I'm sure a lot of them were killed by the Russians. And then as we got closer and closer up toward Berlin - we were headed right into Berlin - and all of a sudden the Allies had got together, Roosevelt and Churchill, and had granted Stalin the right to take Berlin, and all. But you know, it's really too bad, in a way. In another way it was punishment for some very, very bad evil doers, but they wouldn't've surrendered to us, they would've surrendered to the Americans, but they wouldn't dare surrender to the Russians and so a great lot of them died fighting the Russians.

Q: Now, this camp in Hemer, to get back to that for a minute, they were all men.

A: They were all men, and they were primarily Allied soldiers, Russians, French, British, those few Americans and Poles. And I don't know if there was in this camp very many Jews, because it wasn't your extermination camp, like I said, like the other awful ones over there to the east. It was a camp where the people were being systematically eliminated simply by starvation. They weren't going to waste knives or bullets or rope on them, they were just going to let them fade away. And some of those people could hardly walk. I'm sure that even after the medics came, and were able to give them suitable foods, like milk and easily digested things, cereal, soft cereal - I'm sure that it didn't always work. They just died anyway.

Q: Yeah, because when you were giving them your K-rations and things, they were eating those.

A: Even that wasn't good for them. I think the troops ran into that, I heard afterwards, when I was coming home, the other fellows that had been in some of the worst camps, there in Germany, that really, they didn't know what to give the people. They didn't know what to give 'em because almost anything you give 'em, with the state of their digestive apparatus, it was almost as bad for them as not giving them anything. I don't know how they went about saving the people. I read in your brochure there the letter about several people here that were former inmates that made it. I would be very interested in reading in your book how they came out afterwards, how did they progress from this horrible state of almost foodless captivity to eating some decent food and starting the bodily functions going again and all, because I'm sure a lot of those people didn't. I remember some of those people were so starved, I remember they broke into Dillon, the first aid man, they broke into his knapsack and ate DDT. And I said, "Oh my God, Dillon, look at that guy over there, he's eating your DDT." And he ran over there and took it away from him. Well, the poor guy, he was just shocked. He thought it was flour. He thought it was white flour. A little can of white flour, and he's dipping this into his mouth. And Dillon is shaking his head, trying to signal, "no, no, no," not good or something, and all he thought was, "Oh, my Lord, here's another cruel soldier."

Q: Was there anybody with your outfit who could speak German? You said you can speak a little bit of it.

A: There was people, as I told my wife, there was German people, but most of these people, you see, were Poles, Russians, French, well, I don't know what all.

Q: Were they wearing these striped uniforms that we see in the pictures?

A: No, they were just wearing sort of drab rags. They weren't wearing that you see so many times in the pictures. As I remember they were wearing kind of drab, gray, black, raggedy cloak things that hung on them, and they didn't have any

undershirts or anything like that, and they were kind of closed here. It was cold, it was cold in Germany in April there.

Q: Yeah, the climate's similar to ours. And they didn't have any marks, numbers, anything like that on their clothes to identify them?

A: No, they didn't have anything like that. I felt terrible about it when the tanks had to go up and shut the gates. As more and more of them finally gathered enough strength in this big compound - it must have been real big, see, I could only see part of it, but it must have gone on for quite a ways, for 23,000, and you need quite a bit of space for that many people - and as more and more of them heard that the gate was open, they were staggering out. Gee, it was pretty bad. You'd've thought that the people in the town would have given them all kinds of food and everything to eat.

Q: This wasn't a work camp. They weren't doing anything.

A: No, this was an extermination camp. This was a quiet extermination camp without any crematoriums, without any smokestacks, without any gas chambers, or anything. Just nice, quite starvation. After all, when they get just so far gone, they're not going to cause us any trouble, they're just going to topple over, and we'll be able to move 'em out over into the valley tomorrow morning. It was, wholly, as they say, the deplorable conditions that existed, which brought harshly to the mind the brutality of the enemy. They really looked at these people, as well, they weren't even looking at them as people. They were just nonentities and we've got to get rid of 'em. We'll just starve them to death, and that way we won't have to spend any bullets or anything, including the Americans. I mean Americans that were there, they hadn't had anything to eat for a week. When you don't have anything to eat, and hardly anything to drink, for a week, that's pretty bad. I went for one time in the army for three days without anything to eat, and at that time, you get to feeling really bad. And that's only three days. You can imagine these other prisoners that had been there for long periods of time and they had existed on practically nothing. The physical condition of those people that were slaughtering those rabbits and drinking the blood and eating that raw rabbit meat out in the back yard there of this rich German's house - they were probably so weak that their body immediately rejected all this, regardless of how - shall we say, good? I hesitate to say good - maybe to someone that's starving, anything tastes good, like that poor devil that was eating the DDT, thinking it was flour. He would have devoured the whole can if Dillon hadn't run over there and stopped him.

But then we went on ahead and the entire thing collapsed, and I've never, ever seen that many people before in my life. One night, all of a sudden, the whole thing, the bubble just burst and we had our tanks and half-tracks and everything surrounding these literally tens of thousands and thousands of people, dirty, unkempt German soldiers who had besieged, literally besieged, the world for

almost six years. It didn't seem possible, it seemed very, very unreal, very unreal that they'd been able to do that. I remember we liberated a Mercedes Benz from one general. He was planning to get away, him and his girlfriend were trying to get away, and we put him in the bunch, along with the girlfriend. And liberated the Mercedes; it was a four-door convertible touring car. I often wonder what that would be worth today. We drove it until it was out of gas, and then we usher it into the ditch. (Laugh) But that's another story. My goodness, I'll never forget it. After we did that we headed north when we found we weren't going into Berlin. And the Russians, of course, reduced Berlin in a matter of days. We headed north to the Baltic and stopped at a big airport up there where again Hitler's denial of reality showed through in really dramatic light. In one of the revetments in the airport, which incidentally hadn't been bombed, hadn't been touched - why, I don't know - Tanhowitz Luftwaffe Base right out of Rostock - there was a Jet fighter, and we looked at it, and we said, "Look at that fighter there. No propeller!" And we looked in that gaping hole there and we could see turbine blades and everything, and we thought, "Holy mackerel, that's that new kind of airplane." I remember in its belly it had an 88-mm cannon, and it was all radar controlled. It was painted black. I'll never forget it, and it was sitting there, in the revetment, untouched, unscarred, and it could have shot down any plane in the air at that time. Air crews, American and British air crews were literally scared to death, because every once in a while they'd find enough kerosene - they used basically high-test kerosene, you know - and all of a sudden (makes whooshing noise) this plane would go by and they didn't even have time to shoot or anything. Luckily, they hadn't given these people any priority, and so there the plane sat, and there was no use of it.

And then, of course, after the war was finally over, I celebrated. I remember I found a whole bunch of flares, parachute flares, and I went down by the Baltic there, right around the 8th of May, and I found a flare pistol, and I sat there and I was shooting all the flares over towards Sweden. I have relatives in Sweden so I sat there and shot parachute flares out into the Baltic and I had a great time and it was really nice; there was no more shooting, and I had made it, I had figured out that this was it. Then of course we came up against the Russians. Here was another enemy, but we didn't know it. And the fellows were taken in by some of the Russians who'd come across the Elbe there and they would tell the Americans, "Oh look, we have plenty of vodka." Some of 'em could speak pretty good English. And of course vodka comes through pretty good in almost any language. So they'd go across the river and end up beaten up and they tried to torture them into making all kinds of foolish statements about the United States, and things like that. And then our MP's would have to go across the river there and try to rescue them, and got to be pretty bad. The bridge there had been bombed out - in the middle were pontoons, and then here was the old bridge coming this way and coming that way - and you could see the Russian sentry over there, goose-stepping about. I was down in headquarters one day, company headquarters, and the Charge of Quarters, the CQ said to me, "Nost, we've gotta have a guard up on that bridge."

Q: And this was after the war?

A: This was after the war. And this road, the bridge came across the Elbe there and went straight down into Halle, which is quite a large city - we came through there - and it had been bombed quite a bit, but it wasn't too bad. He said, "We've gotta be up there and we've gotta have a man up on the bridge to stop a car of Russian generals that are coming across the bridge. Your only orders are to stop that car, he says, and you can't miss 'em, they'll have ribbons all over their chests and stars and stuff all over their shoulders. You can't miss 'em, but be sure to stop 'em."

So they tossed me an M-1 rifle and a bandolier of ammunition and I'm back in the war! But I didn't know it. So I go up on the bridge and there's nobody on our side at all. On the other side, way over there - the Elbe there is sort of a flat, slow-moving river, sort of like our Missouri, sort of shallow and slow moving. On the other side the Russian sentry is goose stepping back and forth. So I just stand over on our side watching 'im. When I left they says, "Oh, don't worry, we'll have an interpreter up there, Nost. We'll have an interpreter up there real soon and that'll help you." Well, of course, no interpreter showed up. And all of a sudden this Mercedes, this captured German Mercedes, starts roaring across that bridge, and he hits the pontoons and he's doing pretty good. So I stand out in the middle of the road, all alone, with kind of a high port with my rifle, as a sentry should at a time like that. In other words, I'm challenging them to stop. I'm right in the middle of the road. They don't stop. They keep on coming. And coming. And coming. And right away I start getting plans. I thought, "Well, I'll dump the whole clip into the windshield, drop the rifle and jump in the river." We had finally gotten so we actively hated the Russians. The guys were just up to here with all these beatings and all this kind of junk that they'd been doing. So finally, they got closer and closer, and I came out of hand salute, put the rifle right in the middle of the windshield, pressed the safety off, and they stopped, about from here over to that air conditioner (gesture toward window), with a screeching halt and a cloud of dust. I smartly went over there and gave these Russians generals the rifle salute. They were drunk. And they showed me a bunch of papers. I looked at 'em and kept nodding and flagged them through and off they roared down to Halle to have supper with Eisenhower. Eisenhower never realized - and who was that other fellow, Bradley - and Patton was the only one that knew 'em for what they were. Eisenhower and Bradley were too much political persons to look at 'em as enemies but Patton hated 'em just like I'd hated 'em on that bridge, and I often wondered what would have happened if I'd've emptied that clip into the windshield. I don't know if I would have made it in the river, although I think it was shallow. Or maybe the car would have got me, maybe the car would've come right after me into the river. But I often think about that. And every time I see a Mercedes now with the triangle and the round circle I can see that coming right at me. It was a big old touring car, a four-door limousine; I always remember that. So that was about it. After that we

went into a kind of quiet seclusion in the small German farming towns. These are little settlements where the German farmers walk out to their fields every morning. That way they don't waste any good land on houses. They've got their houses in a little valley which is not arable land, and the house we lived in had a sign over the lintel there, 1521, I believe. It was adobe, probably about that thick.

Q: About a foot and a half thick.

A: You could look in there and see the little sticks and stuff; just like the Mexican adobe, the same thing. The only thing that kind of livened up the summer was all the round-ups we'd have. We'd go out and we'd surround an area and then come in looking for SS. They were all branded with their SS number just like they branded the prisoners at Auschwitz. The same way, they had the SS number. I'm not sure where it was but it was on their arm somewhere. I'll never forget, they covered this one guy and he looked like a pretty desperate character. This army colonel is standing there and he had a .45 in his hand; I'm covering the guy with my carbine, with the safety off and everything; I was ready to cut him down if he made a silly move. All of a sudden the colonel checked him on the arm somewhere and he saw this blue SS, and he takes his .45, and he wipes this guy across the side of the head, right down the cheek with the .45, and he wasn't a small man. And you know, that SS so-and-so just stood there and took that just like it had been like a baby attempt. If somebody had done that to me my knees would have buckled, and I would've been on the ground. Instead of that, this guy's standing right there, and the blood's just gushing down the side of his face.

I have a memory of the SS. Every once in a while you hear about them still having meetings and reunions in Germany and I can't believe it, you know. I just can't believe it. Somebody told me one time, he says, "You know, you've really got to sharpen up, Nost. You've got to sharpen up your bayonet tactics and all that," he said, "there may be some SS coming." And I said, "Are you crazy: Do you think I would ever engage in any kind of hand-to-hand fighting or bayonet work with those people: I've got my trusty carbine right here and I'm gonna cut 'em down long before they get within bayonet range."

Q: You don't think they've changed?

A: No. No, I don't think they've changed. I really don't. I'm sorry to say that. After the war we joined in with the SS, I'm ashamed to say, because we became so terrified of the Russians. And SS was quick to note this sudden switch, they was quick to note that, and they said, "We know all about the Communists and Russians and so forth, and we can help you." All of a sudden, a lot of those people, who should have been shot, were given jobs by the military, going through dossiers and going through records and interpreting and so forth.

Q: (Wife of Interviewee) Who made that mistake?

A: The intelligence, the army intelligence.

Q: (Wife of interviewee) They must have been awfully intelligent.

A: Well, for instance, when we were advancing we always destroyed guns. In other words, you don't leave an operative gun behind you, that somebody can slip out, some guerilla - we always head about the werewolves and all that - so we'd take thermite grenades and pull the pin and you've got a thermite fire going in a flash and you put that into the breech and no longer is it operative. You can't get a shell in there to use it. All of a sudden Churchill put down a memorandum that the ordnance company shall get going and get out there and follow the front line troops and rescue all these guns. And I've seen gun parks, square blocks of solid German artillery; ack-ack-anti-aircraft, heavy guns, 88s, self-propelled guns, everything you can think of. Churchill, you see, decided that as soon as the war was over, that the Russians would hit us, and take over all of Europe, and drive us into the channel, and if he was lucky, he'd save England again, but I don't think he was even sure about that, because at that time England was in pretty bad shape. These V-2's had done much more damage to the morale. They licked the V-1's, they shot the V-1's down, or they could see 'em, they'd stop, and oh, it's gonna drop over there and we're over here, and isn't that fine? Well, this other baby with this high trajectory, that was invisible. Next thing you know, all of a sudden, a great big building disappeared, or a whole bunch of people disappeared. And it was terrible. So Churchill stopped this destruction of the guns because he was sure that the Russians were going to hit us and them. As it turned out they were smarter than that, but the result has been largely the same, almost.

Q: I didn't know that. Now, is there anything in your notes there that I interrupted you on, that you didn't get to read?

A: Let's see. No, that's pretty much it. This is Hemer. Kay and I looked on a map today and we couldn't find it. Of course, we were looking at an old map that we had out at the Bureau of Mines. But I assure you, it was extant.

Q: I have several atlases and I'm sure it will be there somewhere. Is there anything I forgot to ask you that you wanted to talk about?

A: I don't know. I'm sure I've talked with other people that were at the worst camps. As a matter of fact, May Beth's husband, that was the photographer that took all those pictures at one of those big camps, Buchenwald or Auschwitz, one of the two - his name was Hope - he felt the same way. It was unreal, it was really unreal, what was going on there, and what was also very unreal to him, was that other people in that area professed not to know anything about it. As a matter of fact, in all the time I was in Germany, I only met three Nazis. All the rest of them

were "not Nazis," and they would look you straight in the face and tell you that. However, Mr. Dorner, and his wife, and his Aryan blonde daughter, were Nazis. He come right out. He was an engineer, and he was busily engaged in burying fuel - when the bombers came over, they were using a lot of artificial fuel, they weren't just depending on full test - but we hit that too, because Hitler didn't authorize him enough manpower and slaves to dig this stuff in so that the Allied bombers couldn't destroy it. But as he said, rather proudly, he said, "You know, Nost" - he could speak perfect English, a little sharp accent - "if I had been given the supplies and the men that I needed to put that fuel underground, it might be a little big different now. I might be talking to you from your side of the table, instead of over here." See, we had taken over his house and we had given him, rather foolishly, kitchen privileges, allowing them to come in once or twice a day and use the kitchen to prepare food.

Q: Was this the man with the mahogany table?

A: No, this is in Switzingen, down in the Palatinate, near Mannheim and Heidelberg. Heidelberg was the college town; it wasn't bombed, it was beautiful. I went up there and saw it. Mannheim was leveled, and Switzingen was partly leveled but not so much because that's where the workers lived. And apparently army intelligence knew that, so they said concentrate on Mannheim because that's where the factories area And leave the hill alone; that's where Heidelberg is, that's an open city. And it should have been. It was beautiful. And this area in between these three towns is the Rhine Palatinate. And we were billeted there in Switzingen at that time. That was in the late summer of 1945, when we were down there.

Q: Do you think it changed your life any, that you came back a different kind of person?

A: Oh, yeah. I went into the army, I was shy, introvert. As a high school student I'd had terminal acne, not just a little, terminal! As a matter of fact, my high school picture - I've got a white face, because they brushed out all the problems. And that even made it worse. I didn't date, I didn't go to dances, I was quite a woods person, I guess. I've always been quite a hunter. Getting into the army I got into the main stream of things, and I found that I could teach people. I was amazed at that. I could run these people into the gas chambers and have them put on their masks and escape from being (laughs). We had two gas chambers; we had tear gas on one side and chlorine on the other. And there was enough chlorine on this side so the air was kind of tinged with green, so you'd know that it was pretty deadly. I'm surprised that we didn't lose some of those recruits, but we didn't, we never lost a one. We trained 'em. I helped. And we gave 'em lectures. We gave the officers lectures. We tried to teach people about booby traps and how ingenious the Germans were. I remember one time I was teaching an officers' class that was out on bivouac near the airfield there and I went over to this one very nice captain and I said, "Sir, I'll be giving a class here

pretty soon. I wonder if I could borrow your helmet?" "Oh, yes, sure." I said, "You'll get it back," and so while they weren't paying any attention I wired up his helmet. There was just a little cut back there and over the edge I hung half a stick of dynamite and I put a trip underneath the helmet. And then I went on to describe booby traps, how the Germans had booby trapped the fruit trees in Normandy, so that when the GIs would reach up to get one of those apples or whatever it was, the whole tree would go, and kill them. They'd been told by their spies that we souvenir hunters. I was not, but most of the guys were, and they'd booby trap ceremonial daggers and thing like that, when you lifted them up. So I told them - and this class it was all officers - I described these booby traps, I gave them a complete chemical warfare history, what was done and how deadly it was, and how it could happen any time because after all, we're dealing with madmen, so it could happen anytime. And I said, "Captain, would you mind coming and retrieving your helmet?" It was toward the end - I kind of made a break in it - and he says, "Oh, yeah. Okay, okay, corporal." He comes over and picks up his helmet and "Whammo," half a stick of dynamite goes, and I got everyone's attention right away.

Q: (Wife of interviewee) It wasn't right under his helmet?

A: No, it was a little ways away.

Q: Just to scare him, not to hurt him.

A: And I had this wired, but I was standing here, see, so nobody could go over there, and if they had gone over there, I'd have said, "Don't go over there, please." And the helmet was over here, see. And afterwards, you know, people came down to Lt. Moore and told him about this. And he finally came over to me and he said, "What did you do, Nost? What did you do there when had all the officers out there? Somebody said you scared some of those people half to death." (Laughs) "Well," I says, "I did my best to put the points across." I found this out, and I also gained confidence in myself because when I finally decided that I wasn't going to stay in the garrison life anymore, that I was really gonna go and put my life on the line, too, it was really just a casual thing. I just thought, "Well, this is what I wanna do." And I just went and did it. All I had to do was to tell these inspector general people that I'm really surplus here, I'd like to be transferred out, I'd like to go overseas. And by golly, I was overseas, very shortly.

Q: Are those your medals over there?

A: Yes. This is one of my proudest possessions, my combat infantry badge. I'd been awarded the Purple Heart, of course.

Q: For being wounded.

- A: However, the first one broke. And so I wrote to the people and told them that my lapel pin that's for civilians was broken and I had destroyed it. Would they please replace it? So they wrote back and said, "We have no record of you. We have no record of you being in the army. All your records were burned" - Back in '61 or '62, or something like that, the Viet Nam protest down in St. Louis, they burned a big section of storage, and my records went. So they said, "We'd like to rebuild your records. Do you have your discharge, do you have your air corps reserve, do you have your purple heart thing?" So I sent it all to 'em and lo and behold, as a result, I got this beautiful, engraved Purple Heart with my name on the back of it. And a few days after this had landed, I received this. US Reserve Personnel Center. And that was this certificate, as soon as I can find it. Here it is. United States of America. I was given the bronze star, because in 1962 President Kennedy had signed an executive order that awarded the bronze star medal to holders of the combat infantry badge.
- Q: So there it is. That's engraved, too.
- A: Yep. And that on the back is for heroic and meritorious service. And of course in my case it was meritorious service, because although I did my job as a soldier, I'm not heroic, I know that, but it's meritorious. Just think, I've had that ever since '62. I'd been entitled to that. If my mom could have known about it, and I hope she does now, my brother, and my sister, and my dad. My dad was gone then. And the same with Betty's family.
- A: (Wife of interviewee) If only my father could have known my husband. He never did. He always wished he'd had a son. Three girls, you know.
- Q: It says, "For meritorious achievement in ground combat against the armed enemy during World War II in the European, African, Middle Eastern theatre of operations."
- A: And this is inscribed, too. And now I have a kind of a sad duty. I have to write to these people and say that I still have my Purple Heart that I received in Germany, and I'm not entitled to two of them, and what do I do now? Will they take care of it for me?
- A: They'll probably feel that you earned it, and that if you've got an extra one, that's okay, too.