HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

FRANK DOUGLAS KEERAN, JR.

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Gloria Schwartz
Date: August 30, 1999

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FK - Frank Douglas Keeran, Jr. [interviewee]
GS - Gloria Schwartz [interviewer]
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Tape one, side one:

GS: This is Gloria Schwartz from the Gratz College Oral History Archive, interviewing Frank Douglas Keeran, Jr. on August 30, 1999. Frank, thank you for doing this interview for us. Please tell me where in Europe you were serving before you arrived at the site of the concentration camp.

FK: We came into France, in Le Havre. We had been in England, waiting for our guns to arrive and then we assembled them there; more or less tore down used Cosmoline [type of petroleum grease] to clean them. And then we left from Weymouth, I believe, on a--I was on an LCI landing craft. And our guns were on a landing craft tank [unclear]. Anyway, landing craft tank. And we--which I think it was twenty range staging area, and then from there we went into, farther into France and we were assigned to the 8th, 98th field artillery. It's a large weapon, the one-five-five's, to give them air protection and security, also ground security, anti-tank. And we were usually on the roads and that was also ward--road guards also. And the first position I remember that we actually set up was in Alsace-Lorraine. And from there we went into, farther into France and then into the Rhine, into Germany. And we continued through Germany into Austria. And the war was over; we stayed in Austria, in Salzburg, for a short while. Then we went back into Germany, to Regensburg, and we guarded the prisoners. And they released a, I'd say a common soldier. But they retained all the men who were Nazi members. And they were interrogated. And then they were slowly released. And that was in, like, May, June, July of…

GS: Okay. Can you tell me what unit you were serving in before you arrived at the concentration camp?

FK: In the 798th automatic weapons, anti-aircraft automatic weapons, mobile. We were attached to the 989th field artillery [unclear] long times [unclear]. And as we approached Dachau, we could smell this terrible--we didn't know what it was; but we could smell this terrible smell, and I tell you. And I turned to one of our gun crewmen and I said to him, "What's that smell?" He says, "I don't know." And it was this unbelievably sickening smell. It just got into your sinus and you'd try to swallow to get it out. And we were in convoy the whole time and we stopped and, opposite this evidently, a prison camp or something. Because there was big iron gates and we were--our truck was, our guns were right in front of that gate. And there were people running around and it looked like striped pajamas. And one of them came up to this--up to our gun and tried to talk to us but we couldn't understand him. And in fact, we shooed him away. And he looked like a skeleton, a walking skeleton. Holes for his eyes, and a hole where your nose was. Everything was taut, and very weird. And we learned later on in the day that that was Dachau concentration

camp. And we couldn't, you know, stay there too long, what, now, my first sergeant went in and some of the other men, and told us what it was like in there. And it was pretty bad. And we moved on but the men that had been in there were telling us all about what was in there. But we could see it from the gate. And it was unbelievable, just, [unclear]. And my sergeant took a lot of pictures which I took copies of. And I [unclear]. I am trying to explain how that smell was. And you know, when you pass a building or a house or something that was blown up, you would get this sweet smell of death. Because sometimes they didn't get all the parts of the person out. And they were decaying. But this was much worse. It was like a sewer, the smell of a sewer. A grease trap, if you ever--which I had to do, is clean out a grease trap. Rotting flesh. It was just [unclear]. And later on when we had met these German civilians they always said, after they said, "*Ich nicht Nazi*," they would say, "We didn't know what was going on in there." And from the smell they must have known something was wrong there. And all those people they took in, and they never took any out, very few. And I have a friend that was an American soldier. He went in on D+2 during the invasion at Normandy. And a lot of people don't know what those guys went through, that they didn't have any sleep, they didn't have decent food. They were throwing up. They had diarrhea. And when they got off those landing crafts they were running on nerves because they didn't have any food or rest. And after he got past the beach, his unit held up and he fell asleep in a hole, probably in front of a German. And he woke up and somebody was poking him with a rifle. And he looked up and it was the Germans. And they captured him and I think he said about twenty of his unit. And they were taken back as prisoners. And they were, they had taken quite a few but they had made, oh, what's the word, a provision [probably means no provision], to handle so many prisoners. So they sent them back and Hitler told them to put them in the concentration camps and make them work. And if they refused to work, kill them. So he worked and he went to Belsen first, before I guess that is. And he said that if you didn't work, they killed you for labor. He worked in the mines there and also peeled potatoes by the hour. And they were only given the peels. They boiled the peelings from the potatoes and that was basically what they had to eat. And then he was transferred later into Auschwitz. And he worked in the mines there. And so, and potatoes. Potatoes. And I hadn't had a prolonged conversation with him. I was just learning this the other day. And it's pretty funny, it's strange. I hope to get together and get more exact information. But he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner and was finally released by the Russians, who liberated the camp. But that's sort of, you know, hearsay from him. A lot of it was corr-, a lot of things which are, I can't even say the word…

GS: Corroborated.

FK: That's the one.

GS: Yeah.

FK: Corroborated, by what you read and what you see. You meet fellows. And then a friend of mine, Herb Revel, he was in the 45th infantry and they went into Dachau. And he told me that they set up a machine gun and they were so incensed at what they saw

that these German guards were against the wall trying to get over, I guess, and they just mowed them down with a machine gun. They were so incensed. And two of our armed, our gun mechanics were in there, and they said that the inmates, I guess you would call them, prisoners, turned on the guards and beat them to death. Some they, they gouged them with cans and hit them, socked them, they were so incensed, and killed them. But then later on this--not too long ago I found an old copy of our, I think it was *Newsweek*, I have this. And it was all about when they went into Dachau. And it all tied together what I knew about it. Because another infantry man was my friend. And he told me about the thing with the machine gun, even now. And then in the article it said that information was given to General Patton about it. And he said, "I can't prosecute these men I don't have permission to do it." And fortunately or unfortunately, the reports were lost. And they didn't prosecute these men. I'm trying to stop [unclear].

GS: No, okay. Did you know of the existence of Dachau before you liberated it?

FK: No.

GS: Before your group arrived?

FK: No, we were all stunned, you know, what was that all about, you know?

GS: Mmm hmm.

FK: And…

GS: Had you heard anything about the mass murder of Jews in Europe before you arrived at Dachau?

FK: No. I never thought of it. No, even [unclear] and he's a Jew and he didn't know anything about it. He was just as mystified as I. And how come, and we learned, you know, after, a lot about that when some of them went in and explored, you know. And we were at the gate. And I was on the gun so I couldn't leave my, the Ziegfried. And I believe like if, I have some after action reports that I got from the archives and I believe we were on our way to set up the firearm. I can research the dates and all. But, and then this is just recently I worked with a man, at Exxon bulk plant in Philadelphia. And I knew he was a, in a tanker. And he drove a tank. And we were talking. And just recently, I said to him, "I remember seeing you guys in action." And it was quite a fire fight. And I said, "Did you pass Dachau?" And we didn't know the name of the place, but, and he said, at that time, he said, "No." And he said, "Oh, we were told not to go near it because the men internees…" Is that the word? "The inmates, were running all around and they were trying to get them back into the compound and give them shots, clean them up, give them food, clean clothes, delouse them, DDT." And they wanted them to stay away from them, because they, I don't see how anybody survived the camps because of fleas and all that. They didn't have a chance to, I don't know how they ever had a chance to wash up. But, you know, any sanitation. And so, they didn't want, you know, us to get it. Because I remember when we were sitting there, watching all this, it's like a, I don't know, like a tape running. And I'm--the fleas on our bare skin. It's like they cover your arm. So we had to delouse ourselves. We had a ration of DDT powder and when we went in some of these

other camps, lesser camps I guess they all were work camps, and I remember those fleas all over the hands. You just turned black from it.

GS: What other camps did you go into?

FK: I don't know the names [unclear].

GS: Do you know, I mean, were they close to Dachau? Were they in Germany?

FK: No, they, this one, I believe, was in an area that Lobberich, if I'm not mistaken. It's sort of hazy, because I remember we went in there and I, it was filthy, because naturally everything broke down. The toilets, it was just, and food was on the table there. It looked like it was exited very hurriedly. You know what I mean? They left all of this there. And they cleaned that place up. It looked like it was, the buildings were substantial. They weren't shabby. I figure it may have been like a SS barracks or something, because it was really nice. And of course it was a mess but they had the soldiers, the German soldiers, because you couldn't get out. And they'd erect barbed wire all around. And they had thousands of prisoners in there and they were, there was [unclear] 74.

GS: Okay.

FK: And they had all these prisoners that they had to interview, to correlate what they said against what something else said. And now it'd probably be easier to feed into the computer and you'd push a button and get a read out, but then it was, they had to--you know, they had to interview each one, and then they would get a piece of information, a piece of information, and then they would release the man if they figured, you know, that he wasn't involved, that he was telling what he heard or what he saw or what he knew. And they found a lot of these guys. They killed German, the American prisoners, there was an [unclear] lot of them and they were convicted and sentenced to be hung. And then there was a camp that had a lot of women. And most of them were young and very pretty. And they had been like secretaries to these high-ranking officers. They always seemed to have a nice, pretty stenographer or a secretary. And they kept them, and also released them bit by bit as they rehabilitated. And they brought them into one section [unclear] so they could put them all together. And another duty we had later on was we had three German prisoners who were sentenced to die and they were in this small, I guess like a normal jail or a small prison like. And they were waiting to, for the hangmen, which [unclear] sentenced to die. And I had to go in the cell block and I only had a, like, I told her, shallala, shallali. And when they had to go to the bathroom, I had to get them out and they would go and we'd put them back in. And we had to go look in their cells every so often to see if they would hang themselves or something else. You know, I mean, commit suicide. And it was pretty hairy to be in there just with a club, you know, [unclear]. And they said they had a lot of trouble with them, I think. I think they all were SS but I'm not sure. But this one guy was pretty obnoxious and I guess off the record, one of the red necks from the south, these were all tough guys, and he took an M-45 [unclear] .45 caliber with bullets in it and got his attention that he should shape up. Otherwise, you know they would shot them. They were still a human being. They were obnoxious. [unclear]

GS: And where, do you know where this prison was located?

FK: I think I have it in my notes but I [unclear]. I think that we spent in the [unclear] Ludwigsburg area.

GS: And when were you in the Ludwigsburg area?

FK: Cease fire was May 6, 1945. The whole German state, and officially, I think it was May 9, '45. And we were in Austria for a while, near Salzburg. And then we moved to Ludwigsburg and I guess in June, July. [pause]

GS: Do you, can you estimate how many prisoners were at Dachau when you were there?

FK: I have a, I have the information but I don't have it here.

GS: Okay.

FK: I was, they were releasing us, had made an account of how many points you had. And I was, I didn't have enough points to go with my outfit to return to the States and be discharged. So I stayed, I stayed almost, let's see, I think they shipped home in, well I lost track of dates. They came home like in maybe July or August or something of '45. I didn't come home till, ship home till, well I got out April 6th, I think it was, 1946. So I was on, I don't know, I think I [unclear]. And mainly guarding these prisoners. And we had umpteen thousand of them. And they had to interview each one before they, you know, released them. And we were on guard duty and we took over a *Stalag*. It had been a former camp. And I wish I had brought that. I should have brought my book. Like, we had prisoners there and they were slowly interrogating enemies. And we were on guard duty. And it was, well naturally in the winter it was very cold and then, you know, you're out there walking and sometimes it's so cold you can hardly stand to put your foot down. It gets so cold. So you used to shuffle. It was murder to put your foot up. So you shuffled. That's how cold. And if you had anything metal in your pocket it felt like ice cubes. And, so, and the lighting system wasn't too good. So they had trucks parked around the perimeter of the prison for a while. And sometimes the electric would go off and then you had to get in and start these trucks and put on the headlights. And that was funny. And then they had towers there but there was, they were open. And we sat up in them and we were cold. So my friend [unclear], he was working in the kitchen. They had an opening. And he said, "Why don't you apply for this?" And I said, "Well, I don't really know how to cook." And he said, "That's all right. The German prisoners, we get them." With all these prisoners you had excellent cooks, you had, excellent bakers. You had artists. You had tailors. So, when we had any washing or anything like that we'd just take it to the, they'd set up like little shops in the barracks. And you could get your film developed. And they had an artist making pictures. And, oh, we had an orchestra. I forget how many, about 20 pieces there. And the leader was a top musician in, you know, the German orchestra. He led the orchestra and we had music, dinner music. And we had a table waiter. And [unclear] and they were excellent cooks because they could make the powdered eggs, powdered potatoes, and all that stuff, you know, really tasty. It was amazing what they could do with it. Then also,

you know, and they started bartering to get real potatoes for mashed potatoes and vegetables. And it was pretty well run. And all I had to do was like supervise them, that they could understand to follow a menu. It was strange. We had one sergeant there. He looked like a top sergeant in the German Army. He had been in Sachsenburg, and that was a hard nut to crack because when the infantry went in, there was a lot of pillow cases and like pillow cases and sheets out the window that they were indicating that they were surrendering. And then when they went in, they, even the civilians were throwing grenades out the windows and everything. So they had to naturally pull back. And then they really laid it on them with the artillery and the B-47s dive bombing and releasing the bombs on them and then strafing them with the guns. And my friend who was in this group, tanker--I didn't know it; I mean later on he was my friend--he was telling me that they just fired, just round after round at anything and everything. You know, finding [unclear].

GS: Can you tell me the name of that camp again?

FK: I think it was *Stalag* XIX, I think it was.

GS: Okay.

FK: I can verify that after. I should have brought my book.

GS: And were you there when they were firing on the camp?

FK: No, we weren't firing on the camp. I kind of went off on a tangent.

GS: Okay. This, you said, was it Sachsenburg that was hard to take?

FK: Aschaffenburg.

GS: Can you spell that? Here you go.

FK: [writing]

GS: Okay. Ah, okay. So, okay. So phonetically it's A-F-T-…

FK: Aschaffenburg.

GS: S-H-…

FK: Berg.

GS: A-F-E-N-B-E-R-G. Thank you.

FK: And it was a, Hitler was telling them that people should rise up and also fight, not surrender. And [unclear] they had the German Youth, what do you call it, the Youth, Hitler Youth. They were there.

GS: At this Afstashenberg?

FK: Yeah, Aschaffenburg. Aschaffenburg.

GS: Okay. Now were you there when they were trying to take this place?

FK: Aschaffenburg?

GS: Mmm hmm.

FK: Yeah, that was the the town. We were…

GS: Is the *Stalag* near there, or are these two different places?

FK: I think it's two different places.

GS: Okay, fine, fine.

FK: But I just…

GS: No, it's important. Thank you.

FK: And then, then when we, you know, they finally did surrender, and we pulled through the town and then we stopped. And we, you know, naturally you wonder why. And the town that, the streets were so littered with all the debris--dead horses and what have you. They had to get tanks in there and bulldoze it and clear the area so you could go through. And when we stopped, a door opened on a house. [unclear] And out come all these civilians. And they come out and they're like laughing. They're crazy, like friendly. Real friendly. And they had two German, these Hitler Youth. And naturally they didn't come out with their weapons. And they start milling around us. And one man kept saying, "We have a cousin in Oho. We have a cousin in Oho." And we're like, what's Oho? You know, and finally somebody said, "Ohio?" And he said, "Oh, yeah! Yeah! Ohio!" You know, one minute they're trying to kill you and the next minute they're being real friendly like we're friends. That was strange. Strange people. [unclear] You know what I mean? So that was, I, I got off on a tangent.

GS: No, that's important information. I'd like to go back to the *Stalag*. Is that where the orchestra played, at the *Stalag*?

FK: Yeah, I think that was XIX.

GS: Okay.

FK: Yeah, that's where they had a…

GS: And do you know about the area this is located? Was it in Germany?

FK: Oh yes, yes. It was in Germany.

GS: It's okay. I just wondered if it was…

FK: I think it's the general area. It seems that we stayed in that, I think it…

GS: Near Ludwigsburg?

FK: Yeah, that's sort of the south, would that be called Bavaria? I think it might be called Bavaria, yeah. Yeah, it wasn't too far from Austria.

GS: Yeah, okay. Now, I-

Tape one, side two:

GS: Going back to the *Stalag* XIX, with the orchestra that played. Were these officers in the army that were playing? Was that part of their job? Or how did they get instruments?

FK: You have to remember that these prisoners came from everywhere. And their civilian occupations were they were musicians. Now there probably were more orchestras there or one band there or one this there or one that there. And naturally they strung them together. And they, some of them, you know, it was just like, "Who here can play a musical instrument?" And of course they had the records, you know, like that. The Germans were very good at records, so I understand. And probably all they did was look at Schultz or whatever, and what he did and his name and all that. And that's how they did it. Even then the American Army sometimes don't work that way. You know, they'll say, "Who is this and who is that?" So anyhow, they would play and also they had the artists and mechanics and carpenters and they fixed these barracks up beautifully. And then at Christmas we had a Christmas, 1945 that would be, I believe. Yeah. And, you know, the mess hall decorated so pretty and they had pictures and we had waiters for each table. It was like family style they would call it. They would bring out the mashed potatoes and set them down, bring out the meat. You know, bring out this, that and the other. Yeah, well, if we need more meat we'd go back, you know. If we need water, if we need coffee, we need this. And this was moving, I hate to tell you. And I feel bad about it. [pause] And one of the German waiters, he was very friendly like. But he showed his arrogance. And he got mad at me. And I asked the orchestra to play a number over again. And most of the men had finished and went out. And they supplied, supplied "Jealousy," which is a beautiful flowing song, either with words or without. And the meter was like the third highest violins in that German [unclear]. So they played it [singing] "Jealousy." And it just was so beautiful. And he came up to me, this waiter, and he said, he called me Mr. Keeran. "These men have to eat." You know, like playing that one number over. And I did not take offense right away to his attitude. And then he said to me, and I don't know why he said it, but he said, "I pissed on many an American grave." And I was going to report him and then I thought, him saying that, because a lot of these men lost people. And like that redneck who almost beat that, that SS man. [unclear] And I was afraid if I, that he might kill him. And then they would be in trouble. [pause]

GS: It's okay, Frank. Just take a minute.

FK: So I never told anyone. But I think I did the right thing. [pause] So I [pause]…

GS: Why does that haunt you?

FK: [Sighs] I let this guy get away with saying that. But then again I was afraid they would kill him. And that [unclear]. So I, sometimes, [pause, sighs]. So, every once in a while that haunts me. [unclear, pause]

GS: Can we go back to Dachau for a minute?

FK: Yeah.

GS: Do you know what arrangements were made for the prisoners about feeding them, medical care? I don't know how long you stayed at Dachau.

FK: Yeah, well we were more or less just there for an hour at most, I guess. And we had to move on because as I remember correctly we were going to fire on Munich. And as I said this guy, I knew, he said they were, they wanted [unclear] and I think it was Aschaffenburg there maybe. I don't know. I'm, you know, these things are a little hard to research.

GS: Mmm hmm.

FK: And there was one good book, maybe in our library down in Warminster. And it's all about the war and it was kind of technical, you know. And I could have found a lot of this information out. And then somebody decided to clean out the library. They had too many books and it was war and so they threw it out. The book that was used was thrown out. So anyhow, I've been trying to see how these things fit in. And I have sent for After Action reports and it helps me in the Archive. [unclear] But where were we, I think I just got lost, the point. I don't know which way we were headed.

GS: You were saying that you had been there about an hour.

FK: Oh, yeah. And we were wondering why we couldn't move. And a lot of the guys went in there and then after our next position when we set up again [unclear] firing on them, the guys were talking about it, you know, what they saw when they went in there. And then as I say later on talking to this guy and more or less called [unclear] and he said [unclear] what was in this magazine I picked up. And even, you know, just recently finding out this guy was also there at Dachau. And…

GS: When your unit got to Dachau, were there other units there?

FK: Yeah, yeah. The infantry, 45th infantry [unclear] I understand. See we were, pardon the expression, a bastard outfit. And half the time we didn't even know what division we were in. You know, these divisions were very large. But wherever we were needed they would transfer us. So we [unclear] in the 3rd Division, the 42nd, the 45th, I think the 100th, the French Armored Division. You know, it was back and forth.

GS: Sure. Then was there, do you know what the particular purpose of your being there at that moment…

FK: I guess it was, I guess that was the main road through that area. And just more, I suppose for us, accidental. You know, I mean, for our unit to stop right in front of the gate. It just happened, you know?

GS: Did you go into the town of Dachau?

FK: Yeah, we were in it. But we didn't get out. Some of our units went in but there, if guys were assigned to a gun you couldn't leave the gun.

GS: Right.

FK: I was on that, the M-51 was at Dachau, 450's on a [unclear] turret and are electrically fired. You pushed one button and the 450's [unclear].

GS: And was there still firing going on at that point?

FK: I don't think so at that point. You, you'd hear, there was so much firing all the time you just, you know, you just overhear it.

GS: Well, okay, I meant right at the concentration camp.

FK: Well, oh well, yeah. But then maybe this was farther down in there, because they were trying to get over a wall and it was probably a back wall, a solid wall, while on the front they had these gates, you know. And I guess they tried to make it look presentable to the public in general, I guess, you know. And then Joe Maley said that, "Yeah, we saw those guys running around and we were told to stay away from them." And I said, "Well, I don't know." Because thinking back it was because of the, for one thing they probably were infected with everything, you know, even like dogs and animals. Fleas. You know, you could just put your hand out and [makes a sound] we had to delouse ourself. And [unclear] and that wasn't good. But we used to, I used to go like this. My whole body [unclear].

GS: Did the experience of seeing the prisoners at Dachau affect your feelings about being part of the American Army and fighting in Germany?

FK: I had that, later on I mean in writing, as part of my memoirs, that, that we didn't do enough. We should have killed more of them after we saw Dachau. And that sort of haunts you too, that it was a funny feeling when the war was over and then you just, I remember we unstacked all this unused ammunition. Understand it's kind of, we got this, we should have used it. Because they were always telling us we used too much ammo. Every time we'd request ammo they'd say, "You're using too much," which was ridiculous. You know? I said, "What are we supposed to do, throw rocks at them?" And the Lieutenant jumped on me. And Flohre, who was our gun captain, F-L-O-H-R-E, he said, he stepped in and he said, he said, "Rotsa ruck." And, you know, he just said it like he didn't understand." But they always said we used too much ammo. But when the planes are attacking, you need to fire on them as much as you can while they're there. Generally a plane was hit because of multiple, multiple guns are firing at it. You can't say, "I did it," or, "He did it." You know, basically you, everybody tries to get credit for when an airplane falls. And I was trying to get the summary of how many planes we knocked down. But I, I have to get some more records. Five I thought I had them. And they had quite a few [unclear]. And so some of the guards in the towers, they'd resist. And they were soon eliminated. Probably the guys from the 45th got them.

GS: This is at Dachau?

FK: At Dachau. The 45th.

GS: What about the reaction of the other men in your unit to what they saw?

FK: Well I guess we were all kind of saying what they had to say. It's hard to comprehend it, you know?

GS: Did you all talk about it afterward?

FK: Well, we were pretty much in a group. You don't socialize, or, socialize, which is maybe not the correct word, but you're mainly with this, we had a 40mm anti-aircraft cannon, actually. And I also served on that crew. I was shifted from the two crews. And that M-51 which I explained. And you pretty much stayed there, with, you know, in the army you are on duty 24 hours a day. And they don't care when you sleep or when you eat. You know, in combat it's, you've got to stay with your unit. So you're pretty much, you know, isolated to a certain extent. And then, I'm sorry to say it but I think the, as we moved around we put it out of our mind, just like when somebody got killed or shot. And then--though you couldn't dwell on it. If you do, you'd go out of your mind. They'd be shipping you back to the funny farm. You know, some guys just can't handle it and they had to take them out. [unclear]

GS: Has this had any influence on your life as you have thought back on it?

FK: Yeah, just the thought of the inhumanity of man to man, that it's, how, you can't comprehend how they could be that way. You know? It's just [pause] you know, you just go blow somebody away or beat them to death or whatever. But all that person had to do was do nothing and they could be, without even questioning [unclear] probably, [unclear].

GS: In your own mind, how do you explain the German decision that led to setting up of the concentration camps?

FK: Say that again, please?

GS: Okay, in your own mind, how do you explain the German decision to set up the concentration camps?

FK: Well, as I understand it, they wanted to cleanse their race. And the first thing that I understand they did was take all these nursing homes where people were virtually useless and eliminate them, because they felt that they were eating food and requiring services and all that. And they would eliminate them. And that would be a big savings. And they could cleanse their race by, as I understand it they would have the girls and the young soldiers come together and procreate, is that the word, to get a master race. And the SS was supposed to I guess be the, be an example or something or prime one [unclear]. And later on I understand and it's, I'm not sure how I can say it, when there were losses, had so many losses, that they would let practically anybody into these elite outfit system. And they would even take people from a certain country, you know, that normally they wouldn't, you know, I guess in the, what do you call that, the Balk-, the Baltic? And they would bring them there. [unclear] cleanse the race. And I remember when I was about, I think it was 12, 14, something like that. Every once in a while they'd come out about Germany and, you know, how everybody's working. They would show all these young

people out there, you know, the super race, digging ditches and things [unclear] you know, probably public works, I guess. And actually it was probably making fortifications. Because they had fortifications that didn't even look like fortifications. They were green. I think this was right outside of Munich, that they had these, it looked like a park, with, what do you call them things? They stand along and then they're like a multi-section. And, we just saw one the other day. It was pretty--and then the grass is all green and everything. [unclear] It's set out from the house. What do you call that? Like a sunhouse we used to call them when I was little. I just saw one the other day and I mentioned it how pretty…

GS: Not a greenhouse?

FK: No, it's a--it's wood, you know, rough wood usually like timbers, and benches, sort of like a…

GS: Gazebo?

FK: Yeah, that's what it was.

GS: Gazebo.

FK: Gazebo, yeah. And these gazebos were linked to other parts of the park. To you it looks like a park. But it was fortifications. And they built them years ago so naturally the ground, you know, there's no fresh dirt. Like, you know, it's this, and then this friend of mine, he overcame that first obstacle. And then they took the Hitler Youth and they just put shallow fresh works I call them. If you're laying there just more or less up to your breast. It's just a shallow, you could scrape it out like down to the shore you could just scrape it out and you're somewhat protected but there's really not that much protection. It's just the fact that you were [unclear] down a little bit below the surface. And I was just talking to Joe Mallory about that and I said, quite innocently. We never talked this much at work about it. And I worked with him. And at times he was my boss. I said, "I saw you. You were in the 645th Active Force. I saw you running up and down there." And he said, "Well, I was a driver. I didn't kill anyone." [unclear] They didn't have that much protection so they would just run up it. And inspecting and the, there, there's always debris. Nice work that I used to do. And any action or anywhere an army goes by this stuff. And these boys had brand new stuff, like you get [unclear]. If the supply sergeant [unclear] get a pair of socks [unclear] a handkerchief and underwear. Everything was neat and their packs were like, had a new smell. You know, new equipment. Not worn like our stuff. And they had pamphlets and books. You know, like copied [unclear] you know, and they were brand new booklets like you, they were there. And they threw them in there. And I said to Joe, you know, and they, it started late in the afternoon, this action. And it continued on after dark. I don't know how long. And it was, and you could see the tracers naturally, more so than you would in daylight. And they had their headlights on. And they were really concentrating on getting these people. And they were running up and down, machine gunning I don't know. And Joey got off the top of the mound and he said, "I didn't shoot anybody." He was just running [unclear]. And he said, "I'd see, I could see them jumping out, you know." [unclear] So anyway. Some guys just [unclear]. For a long while I never

thought too much about it but I wondered to myself why. Why is this all [unclear] something like. I can't seem to get enough information and get it down. And I guess when they celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Normandy invasion I was thinking and talking. And it was the guys that were talking more about it and trying to understand it, I guess. It's like sort of running around in your head. I know, and in 1976 [unclear] so one day I was separated from my family and I [pause] I was sitting there in my apartment [unclear] together [unclear]. And suddenly I remembered, out of the blue. [sighs] One of the fire fighters blew up and I got these records and I can't find anything in there about it. And they said guns blew up but they didn't mention how many were killed or wounded. And that all blew up, that whole. And I [unclear]. And then I started making notes about the things I thought about, in the service that happened. There's one thing [unclear] training and all, being inducted and all. I [unclear] and I had a lot of notes but I never sat down and kind of put them together. Anyhow, in fact I think all those notes were thrown out, unfortunately. My sister was a cleaner, a clean up people. I would scratch it on anything that would endure. And I think she may have thrown it out. I don't know. So, I don't know as a fact maybe she did. But [unclear] they were having a writer's class up here at Indian Valley Library. And my wife's daughter is an editor in Summerton, Pennsylvania and she sent me a notice that, you know, this group was forming. Well it happened to be on a Thursday and I [unclear] on Thursday. Then they came out and then they changed the date, the day. The day. And I [unclear]. I never sat down and wrote anything except what I scribbled. It was pretty good on, I thought, compositions. My English wasn't that great but I [unclear] thoughts and could write it down. And so I have an ongoing [unclear]. We were talking about genealogy and I couldn't seem to get started on genealogy. There's my older sister. She couldn't remember this that and the other thing. [unclear]. So I kind of got stuck. I couldn't seem to get past that, even [unclear]. I couldn't get past that. Then I decided to myself, get past it. And so [unclear] what happened. So I, then I started writing and, and, and so it was, they were only supposed to stay together about ten weeks or something and everybody's, you know, wanting to go on. And now I guess it was about thirty and writing any current things, or something that happened way, you know, you got memories. People say, "How can you write about what happened?" You turn around or something. And sometimes I think I'm writing too much. I don't know. But that got me started. And then, well, as I say, when you--the gun blew up it, I was telling Marilyn I guess [unclear] that I, it's like it kind of runs through my mind like a tape. And then if something was bothering me, like, and I didn't realize it till I saw, oh, that movie, the, *Searching for Private*…

GS: *Saving Private Ryan.*

FK: *Saving*, right, yes. And in there there's one section in there in the video that the noise is tremendous. And then suddenly there was no noise. Everything was almost like in pantomime, this terrific battle. And at the time when I was remembering this, I couldn't remember any sound. And it was, I said, it seemed like it was in slow motion like the, about all the guns just sort of went down. And then the shells around me started going off what

were nearby. And then there was a big puff of smoke, the explosion of the, the gunpowder, actually [unclear] which helps them to fire farther [unclear]. These are long shots, which means they fire a long distance. I think they're, umpteen miles they can fire. Sometimes they put double charges of powder in it and that means that's a long one. And, which, naturally that went off. And the shells were popping. And I'm, I'm mesmerized. I can't move. I just sat there on the edge of my fox hole and I can see the guys-

Tape two, side one:

FK: Do me a favor so I don't forget my wife's comment, wife's comment. That's…

GS: Okay.

FK: And I'm sitting there and the guns, the shells, you know, they have them divided. Things started going off, and the powder, you know. And I just sat there and watched it. It seemed like for several minutes or more. And then, but it wasn't that long really. And I saw a guy run out of the inferno and a man about, you know, 25, 25 yards, something like that, and then he dropped. And I ran over to him. And I looked down, and he had no head. [weeping] And then naturally the medics take him, brought him out, and they started to yell for a mattress covers. We used mattress covers for the dead. And we started stuffing him in this mattress cover and he started coming apart. And the mattress cover was turning red. [weeping] And there was one of the guys that was friendly to us and rarely came over to talk to us and but you know, like from our section [unclear]. And he had this bandana he always wore around his neck. And [unclear] this bandana. You know, like inside his collar and sort of like--and it was still in place. And there was no head. [unclear] And the Lieutenant came over and he just, before, he was like [unclear] and he reached down and he picked up an arm. He brought it over to stuff it in and just, and I was like in shock. I can't hardly remember what happened after that. But I remember he yelled, "Everybody back to your guns." Because you can't stop the other [unclear] and we had to be at our gun all the time because you never know when a plane's gonna dive in. [unclear] fire [unclear] turret, so you have to have two men up there on the gun because guns jam and they fire so fast and we have to eject the shells and you have to reload. So you need three men there. Right away they have that. And then you have to have the other three men bringing the ammo up. And so you have to be there. And [unclear] because we weren't supposed to fire at night unless we had [unclear]. And you can't see the planes at night. Then you had these planes that attacked at night. And they called them bedcheck Charlie. And that's, maybe harassing him, I don't know. If you make a light, one of our outfits made a, must have made a light and they attacked them. [unclear] So I remember, I guess later on that day, I don't know, that some of the artillery guys were together. They didn't have a [unclear]. They had [unclear] like an old ammunition [unclear] he used to put his writing material and candy bars, cigarettes, extra cigarettes, things like that in it. And they were passing the stuff out. "I'll take the candy bar. I'll take the cigarettes." [unclear] And it was sort of mayhem then, you know, and sort of just [unclear] and I was kind of a little bit shocked how casually they were saying this. And I thought, well, he's dead [unclear]. So they might have used it yet, you know? And his problems were over. He was gone. He was out of it. No more fear. No more cold. [unclear] You know, he's out of all of that. So, yeah, don't feel sorry for him. Feel sorry for his wife and family, parents and so forth. He's out of it. No more worries. [unclear] had a tough I think it was in April, tough in April--and

[pause] I did hear somebody say that they had taken two of the guns away and gave them new barrels and I'm sure they were, you know, one with, one, and then they'd bring back the other. So they always had these two guns there. And they took them back to the ordinance. They probably set up nearby and they keep a record how many rounds go. And they put new barrels on the first two. And different things you had to do. But this third gun they said, "Oh, fire another thousand rounds." [unclear] It was penny wise and pound foolish. We lost I don't know how many men. I still am not for sure. I know one. And all, if you want to be monetary--the gun, the whole gun went on a man. I don't think that we used a barrel. And in fact it should have been changed later. And the men, the ammunition that went off, you know? That was a mistake. It was true [unclear]. But I remember when he, the guy said, you know, it was, automatically [unclear] we had to load and step back and then it was, [unclear] the guns [unclear] and say, "Fire." [unclear] we said, "Fire." And they'd pull a landing. And he said, "FIRE!" Like, you know, with steel in his voice. He says, and the guy pulls the second time. And I thought may be they report that second time. [unclear] A lot of those people were killed in accidents and malfunctions, and friendly fire. I just fired out so much I think [unclear]. Fired at by friendly fires. And guys mistakenly were firing at their own people, you know. We were set up one night and [unclear] and we were on the ends for [unclear] had dropped down. I guess it was some woods down there. And it was peaceful. Nothing happened. And I went to sleep. Usually, if you, there were conditions where you didn't know how just to do something. Do I sleep in the hole tonight or do I sleep with it right next to me? So I put my bedroll next to me. And I woke up and it must have been, really, what's the darkest look like, three, four in the morning? And a machine gun was firing at us. And the trench just looked like oranges, the size of an orange. And I rolled over into my fox hole. Actually slipped. And it was just large enough to accommodate me [unclear]. Usually three or four people. And I peeked out. And then again it stopped. So I went back to sleep, the next morning, the American outfit had pulled in during the night and set up. And then they saw our people at the kitchen decided to have a hot breakfast. And we didn't get, make hot meals there, so it was a treat. Plus you needed C-rations and K-rations and [unclear] rations just however we cut it. To be alive and, that's enough. So they decided that. So, and they were trying to light these gas stoves. And they were tricky to light. And they must have saw that light and they thought that we were Germans. And the guy on the machine gun over there opened up on us over here. And the only thing, I got hit. Plus, when we were hit there was no casualties as far as I know. That the mother earth because they, it was like the roads here and then it dropped off. And then we were protected. And I don't really remember now if we had a hot breakfast that next day. I don't know. It could be, you know. I don't know. Communication is not a, back then wasn't as great as now. You know, you have these radios and you can contact somebody in a play up there, and a guy over here and headquarters there. There, you had to pretty much have wires strung. And the radios we did have were very erratic. I, we, I don't know, we had them, but I don't even remember ever even using them, you know. The things that

were [unclear] trained and all. You know, I mean we use to have these problems they called them, which are like [unclear]. And they might work there but when you get into real combat things don't work and you just have to drop it. And we got there what they called directors. See we were, CAC was Coast Artillery. Coast Artillery. CAC. Coast Artillery Corps. CAC. And that meant a great deal in my army life, which I just discovered on this writing and research and--we started training in March, '43. And we [unclear] most people, that boot camp which is conducted and they beat you down like you're nothing and then they build you up. That's their theory. And that was in Camp Kallin, California, near San Diego. And then we moved up to Camp Haane, H-A-A-N-E. And that was near San Bernardino and Victorville and I don't know. They, then we started more advanced training. And we got these directors, fire directors. They did good for, if you are in a fixed position. And in combat you're moving and you, by the time you set up and do all the things you had to do to lock in to these directors on the plane, the plane's gone. But Coast Artillery, you probably would get more warning, and you could hook up. You know, get the two guns in sync with the 40mm if they can. The first thing we did was dump them. They were heavy and yet we practiced out on that desert hours after hours on end, firing at a toad's sleeves. Well, you knew where it was coming from so you would lock in. Well in combat you don't know where the target is whether that way or this way or that way. And you had to swing everything and get it lined up, the director and the gun and then snap it in. By that time the planes are hittin' you and they're gone. So, you know, [unclear]. But CAC, you were in fixed position. You were set up ahead of time. And in the training, we were all on the coast. Now, to my knowledge--and I've thought about this--did we have live ammunition first? I think we did. Because around the desert and in training we had live ammunition. So anyway, they, that's one reason I think we didn't go overseas sooner. Because we were, see, they were afraid the Japs were going to come in on the coast. And we would go to different airfields, training airfields along the coasts. And again that coast was, I got pneumonia and almost died of it. You'd get fleas, the mosquitoes over there--the mosquitoes, I could put my hand out. They fed us at midnight cold coffee and bologna sandwiches I think. And I put my hand out, it turned black with mosquitoes. You had to keep your sleeve down. In fact I pulled my sleeves up over my wrists. And they would fly into your eyes. You had to put your collars up. [unclear] And they had sand fleas. They were, the sand fleas, they bit my legs up, and the mosquitoes. And it was wet. We were out there, this particular time, three days in a row. It was supposed to be like a training mission. And it rained like a son of a gun. We were constantly wet. I ended up in the hospital with pneumonia and some infection I guess from the flea bites and the mosquito bites. But there we'd also get set up that day [unclear]. In fact we could fire on the move once I was being in convoy and which we did several times. They attacked us. They totally would stop. We didn't have time enough to drop the 40 and put it in fixed positions. So we just fired it while it's up on its wheel. And then the M-51, 51 caliber, 50 caliber machine guns, it was up in the bed of a topless truck. You know what I mean? It didn't have a roof and you

didn't even have a cab. The cabs were open. And there was nothing to restrict your fire. And they would fire on them, you know, return fire to fight them off. And we were, we didn't have to bring a plane down to be, what you'd call successful. Or, just to drive them off. Protect them from shooting up the, the artillery pieces. And then all that. We were well-trained by the time we did get sent over. But that, plus you always wonder why didn't they send us over? Well we were CAC. There was an outfit, some 98th FA [Field Artillery]. When I first sent for information about my outfit, I said, well, I thought in my mind, I forgot CAC. And I thought, well, we were with the artillery. I thought field artillery. And they sent me a report back, one page. And the summary was no actions, no campaigns, no wounds, no this, no that. Now wait a minute! Something's wrong here! And I wrote back and I, CAC, Coast Artillery Corps. And then I put those letters on it, it was totally different. I got oodles and oodles of reports.

GS: To whom did you write?

FK: I have here, I wish I'd have brought my stuff. I thought it was too much to bring, but [looking around] be there, be there, be there.

GS: Is it a military archive?

FK: Yeah, yes. It's a, it's a, I'm not [unclear]. My fingers don't work. I know that.

GS: Okay. You can get me that information later.

FK: Yeah, I can get you that. I thought I had it in here, but every time I said, "Well, I'd better not take too much."

GS: It's just for the record.

FK: Yeah.

GS: To find out more detailed information about your unit.

FK: Da da! [found it]

GS: Okay, read it to me, please.

FK: If I can. This is the, I only need the glasses to see. National Archives at College Park, 8601 Adelphi, A-D-E-L-P-H-I, Road. Adelphi Road, College Park, Maryland. Zip 20740-6001. National Archives at College Park.

GS: Thank you. During your service, was there any time that the army provided a time for you to sit with your group and talk about the experiences that you had gone through?

FK: One young lieutenant, and I'm glad I remembered or wrote it down or something. I did write something in 1945, in August of 1945 I wrote this to a girlfriend. She was just a friend. And things I remembered off the top of my head. And I did write a young lieutenant. I said perceptive, I don't know. He told us to, "You will forget the bad times and you will remember the good times." And not to sweat it. And not to worry about. "And when you get to about forty, different things that you went through and you start to think about, your hell, but forget about it. Enjoy your life. It's later than you think." In other words, you know, enjoy yourself, go on with your life, and [unclear] if you don't like

[unclear] I don't know, enjoy the bread of life, or try the bread of life. And [sighs]. I think he meant [upset] I think he meant to, I don't know exactly. [pause] I guess I think he meant [pause] I think he meant [can't talk] well, in a [unclear] in a religious way and I can't quite get it. [weeping] Believing in G-d and--every time I, I wrote it down. It's in my book. Every time I read it, it seems so true. You know what I mean?

GS: Mmm hmm.

FK: We had one guy, he was an excellent soldier. And he was a dark soldier, what we called him. He was never engaged, which means he didn't get the merits or anything on active duty. He knew the manuals back and forth. He knew how to tear down guns and put them back. He had so much information that when this one clown, a lieutenant, a 90-day wonder, would give a class, he would give the information from this guy and he'd stand out and give it out like it was his own. I was embarrassed for him, that the guy was that transparent. Instead of saying Private Bug Eyes (I called him Bug Eyes), you know, give the information and then just pass it on. Or, let him talk. But he put it out like he [unclear]. We were looking at each other like, I was embarrassed for this idiot. He was always, he was a salesman and he had that, you know. So, we were in, he was on the 40mm. His name [unclear] the horizontal. [unclear] the azimuth and the horizontal. Wait a minute, which is horizontal? This is horizontal. And the azimuth [angle to measure position], this way. And he was a, I think he was on the horizontal, which takes two men to aim the 40. And they've got to be in sync. And that's why you practice, practice, practice. And this guy, he always went around uptight and tense. I never, you know, his shoulders were hunched and his eyes always looked, you know, and he was, he'd been in the service like, I think he had already three years when he joined us. And [unclear]. I get emotional. He never was even, you know, raised a voice to anybody. And most everybody sort of skirted him. It was so funny. It's a wonder they didn't pick on him. Sometimes they'd pick on the nice, quiet person, you know. But they seemed to leave him alone. And he never was buddies with anybody. He went on pass or furlough and he, he was a nice guy but, he knew all the rules and regulations, everything. But the first combat we had, he froze when we got there. He absolutely, all that training, right out the window. So they had to knock him off, to get him off. Because you've got to get, you know, the plane's coming and you gotta get the guy on there. And they didn't know what to do with him so they made him a guard around the CP, the Command Post, especially at night. And it was extremely cold. We had some extremely cold winters in Europe. And it was an extremely cold night and they said, "He's out there." And you put on as much clothing as you could, and still you're cold. And he's got his rifle on his shoulder, and he's walking around, and he's stomping three times to keep him from getting too cold. [unclear] And he's standing there and, "Jesus Christ, it's cold! Jesus Christ, it's cold!" And he's slapping himself. And that was the end of him. They had to get him out of there, make a bonfire. Like, the infantry is maybe a mile in front of you, a half a mile in front of you, a couple miles in front of you. And you're basically at the front. And he said, "It's cold!" So, it's funny, all the training, there's some

people that train and train and train and they're attacked and they don't even fire the rifle. They don't even fire the rifle and they get killed. Fire. It's fully loaded, out of range, fired. So it's very strange. So you make it as, all these training things you go through, as realistic as you can. But it comes down to like in football, if you train, train, train, and you get in there, the whistle blows and then you've got to do it. And he just couldn't do it. And some kinds of football players are like that. They look good. Or any sport, like, you know, you get out there and don't work. I'm lost now. Where are we?

GS: Well, I would like to ask you if there's anything else that you would like to add to the interview.

FK: Unfortunately, you're together 24 hours a day, and every guy is different. And most of the guys just want to get along. Understand? I don't want to, your space means a lot to you. I mean, you go and, say we came into this room and there's ten of us. And you get a little corner and that's your space. And if somebody walks over you, you're offended. But you try not to, just as down at the shore when you're ever sitting around and you stake out where your area is, and you don't like people to walk through there. And they can walk around you because you have this area staked out. And your blanket's down and if somebody walks over and walks right on your blanket, it gets you angry. So anyway, tensions at times do flare. But then, sometimes you have these guys that are, are miserable. And this guy Kossel, and he was miserable. And he was always complaining that dirty deal he got in the army. "I was here and I really had it made and they took me and na na na and blah blah blah." He was always complaining. And he was miserable. So-

Tape two, side two:

FK: It might be Kessel. Now this guy, you know, if you ask for forgiveness--and this is [unclear] of your sins, you've got to forgive people. And I've never quite forgiven this person. And I think, I don't want to go to hell because of that guy. You know what I mean? It's tough.

GS: Mmm hmm.

FK: And I'm working at that. And I can actually say I forgive him. You know, I've worked at that. I've done that with other people. But, and right now I don't know of anybody that I despise. I've had some problems, not necessarily my fault or their fault, I don't know. But I'm able to say, you know, in myself I forgive them. But this guy was something else. But we sometimes put up the tent. There's things that, like, you can't explain. Sometimes we put it up; sometimes we didn't. Sometimes we were moving so fast, we couldn't, we didn't take the time to put it up, because we'd be moving out. And weeks move in and we dig these trenches, well first we dig the gun. We got to try to get it into the, as low as we can, so they don't stick up, you know? And for some, well, I guess maybe in our mind it was some protection to us, when actually I'm up, most of the time I was up [chuckles]. But anyway, so I guess maybe that's a, Florey, he was our, I'll call him Gun Captain. But he was a neat guy. And he more or less determined, or asked, "Shall we put the tent up?" Well, sometimes we did. And this one particular time I just, I think, and as I think back why it was so quiet on our front where we were, figuratively speaking, and then I, because we, and we were low on ammunition, especially the five highest. Well it must have been the aftermath of the Bulge. And it's still sending, trying to straighten that Bulge out. That's the only thing I can rationalize. Because it was, in March there it was not much action. But when this happened I'm not exactly sure but it's important. And as I said, we always had to stay on the gun. Three guys had to be right there and the other three nearby. And so we were in the tent, the three of us. I think it was Florey, me, and probably Tammel. And we were, you sit around and you talk and a lot of times you sort of just take your wallet out and you start looking at your pictures and you show them to the other guys and you talk about them. And [sighs] I had a picture. I got my wallet. And it was of my family, taken in, back in 1944 when I was home on furlough. It was my two sisters, their two kids (one each), and my Mom and Pop. It was just a snapshot and it turned out beautifully. You know what I mean? It just happened to do that. And my sisters were pretty. One was dark, dark hair. And my other sister was a blonde, a natural blonde. And we were on the porch like. I don't know who took their picture. Possibly my brother-in-law. We were home at the same time, just by accident. Or maybe no, maybe before he went in, come to think of it. [unclear] But anyway, we were showing the pictures around. And we just, you know, look at them and feel very emotional, you know, and sort of print that on your mind just like you don't even have to look at the picture. I can see it now. I don't even have to have a picture to see it. And this SOB, who always caused problems--that's one of the

reasons I was like on the 40, I think, as I remember, an RL Mackel Vehicle, on the 50--he couldn't get along over here, so they put him over there. And he didn't get along over there, they put him over here. So they're trading me back and forth. So anyway, he walks in and I'm just sitting there and all of a sudden he snatches my wallet which is, that is bad enough, right? He's don't, he's not content with that and he picks up the picture and he looks at it and he says, "I'd like to fuck her." [sighs] I was so astonished. I momentarily was like, I didn't hear that. He didn't say that. And then he threw my wallet at me I believe. And I can see how somebody could kill somebody that fast. Because I went blank. I saw red. I saw complete convulsion. I don't even, you know, people say I saw red. Well I think I saw yellow. I think I saw the complete convulsion. And I went for his throat. And this guy was I would say six foot, 180 pounds. I was five foot six, 130 pounds. But I was always good at boxing and football, you know. And I went for his throat. I knocked him down. I had him down. And I had my arm straight--not bent--straight. And you have a lot of strength that way. And then you put your whole shoulders and back into it. And I'm choking with all my might. He's trying to pull my arms apart, which is not the way to break a hold. To break the hold you put your hands up this way. But he's trying to pull them apart. And I got myself like iron bars on his throat and I'm choking him. And I would have killed him. Florey, if I remember correctly, he just knocked me off and told me, "Cut it out." And a few choice words. And that guy never talked to me, unless it was necessary. He never was fresh or whatever with me. And that, unfortunate things like that happened. You know, you go through, and you can have one malcontent that can poison a whole part. I think if I'm correct, there were 16 in our crew. And I don't, nobody was like him. You know? And he was dangerous. At night he would shoot at a bush. If you had to go to the bathroom, you didn't get out of your foxhole. You did it in the foxhole. I don't care what it was. It was gross at times, but he was shooting at bushes and everything that was his imagination. And to show you what kind of guy he was, we were in England and waiting for our guns. So they gave us passes to go to London, you know, around or nearby. And he went up to London. And I think we got two days to go there, maybe three. And he came back. Picture this. We even, we've never been in combat. Never were there. But ready. He comes back here with decorations already. Can you believe that? I mean, and I said to him, "Where'd you get that?" And he said, "I bought them from London." How did you have the nerve to do something like that? You know, I mean, the mentality, to pretend you're in combat. But that's the kind of person that, you know, I, and I said [unclear]. But maybe at that particular time I just sort of like, "Suppose somebody went up and told your wife you did that?" He said, "She wouldn't believe it." Can you picture this person that has this mentality! And later on, you know, he was in our gun troop. Sometimes he's over there and sometimes he's back. Mainly when I say [unclear] I see that they have the M-50. That was my favorite. I said to him, "How could you do that? You've never even been in combat man. How could you do that?" And it didn't seem to phase him. I don't know. It's like maybe a guy who's

a garbage fellow and he says, "I'm a sanitation engineer." You know what I mean? I don't understand a person like him.

GS: Okay, I wanted to ask you…

FK: Yeah.

GS: You asked me to remind you what your, your wife, about your wife's comment.

FK: Well, I've been writing and she, when I first started I had all these notes [unclear] and I thought [unclear] started working on it. See what happens. It couldn't hurt. So, and after I started working with Marilyn and she helped me a lot that's true. And she really encouraged me to write, so did [unclear]. He had been a, in the Marines. And he was a leader. He moved, and [unclear] when he died of cancer she [unclear] which was wonderful. And she's very gentle and she encourage me like this. Several times I felt like giving up disgusted. But my wife, at first when I told her I was going to do this, I said, "And you can type it." Because she worked in an office. She was a secretary, or assistant secretary, or secretary of the association of an independent bank, the Huntingdon Valley Federal Savings and Loan. She was there 24 years. And before that she worked at another bank for a while. And she types and she's very good at everything like that, especially. But she, some people are good at banks and they're all right where they work and not too good at home. Well she's excellent at home and there. So, I said, "Would you type it for me?" And she said, "Yes, but I don't have a typewriter." She said, "Yes, but I don't have a typewriter." She was used to a typewriter. Now, I told them, when I would study humor, you know--I'm getting ahead of myself--I started going around and trying to find where I can buy a good, used electric typewriter. And I figured I'd call places and, you know, I'd did a lot of researching and I said, "I'm going to buy an electric typewriter." She says, "Why?" "So you can type my notes." "I'm not gonna type your notes." Isn't that a good start? I'm like, and she said, you know, to get her a typewriter. And she didn't think I would do it. So she was adamant. She was not going to do it. In a way I'm glad she didn't, because she would want to change everything. You know what I mean? "No, you can't say that." When I was writing a letter or something like that I'd say, "Does this sound all right?" "No, you can't say this, etc." Then she would be changing it, which I guess is, thankfully [unclear]. And it worked out. So I told her I was going to be interviewed by the Holocaust [Archive]. She says, "Why? You weren't there." I said, "Pardon me?" or whatever. See, she never reads my notes, my, or the book. I left the book around and I thought she would. I said, "Did you read that?" "No." I don't understand. I'm not a woman. Do you understand? I don't know. So anyway, she just said she wasn't going to do it so I'm getting, trying to get different people to do it for me. And one grand-, I have one granddaughter did a couple notes for me. And then I would leave them with her, and weeks later they're still laying there! So I thought, and I was going to pay her! I did pay her. And she, they said she wanted to make some money. She's still in high school and towards her graduation and all that. But she wouldn't do it. So, different people, some people volunteered and did some

typing [unclear]. And I have a girl that's doing it, but she's, I think she's trying to be a teenager again. She wants to go dancing all the time. Not with me! I'm not gonna. But she, "I went to this dance, I went to this dance, I went the other night, I went, and we went sailing…" And she has a, her boyfriend has a, a long time boyfriend. He has a combination sailboat and motor. He has a motor in it. And she's almost broke up with him because he was getting too serious and then she's talking about this guy and that guy and she's kind of reliving her teenager, teenage. Well she was in England during the war and her house, she was bombed out and her school was bombed out. And I guess she sort of missed that, to a degree. But anyway, she gets hot and then she does a lot of typing for me and then she lets it pile up. And so I can't ever seem to get even. You know what I mean? But anyway, I can't really complain because she's heading towards it. But then she, you know, when she has her problems, when she was sick in the hospital or this or that, and then I was sick too. But anyway, my wife saying that to me was like getting hit in the face with a wet mop--a dirty, wet mop. "What do you know? You weren't there!" And how many guys in the service, in the millions and millions of guys, how many guys were ever at a concentration camp that, that was it, the moment that was history, it was [unclear]. The inmates, they--is that a nice word or what should you call them? I don't like that. Internees?

GS: I don't know. I don't think there is a good word.

FK: I mean they weren't prisoners. They weren't inmates. They were, it's, your word. Inhabitants? I don't know. But they were so happy, and they were running up to all the GI's, you know, and in and out. Well mainly out and then they were all running around. Well, they wanted to get them in and give them shots and you know, clean them up and feed them. The point was, though, that you had to be careful how they eat because they hadn't had food. And some guys gave them this and that now, then they died. Their stomachs just couldn't handle it. So they wanted, we had the medics, they had the medics come right in and start services, all the things that they needed. And I can still see them on the, in the snow, on the ground. I smelled some very bad smells with that. And, and we didn't know what it was. We're looking around and we're thinking, well maybe they fertilized the fields. And where we were there was no fields! We were in like a town, you know what I mean? Now, after the war we guarded a lot of prisoners. And I don't know who they were. They, like a, they were coming with what they called honeydew wagons. You know what they are? You don't know that? Let me see if I can explain it. They were mostly horse and wagons, and they had like a barrel-shaped eye in the wheels, like a wagon with a barrel shape. And they would go in and pump out the outhouses, the raw sewage, at these camps. And they had thousands, thousands there. So they would bring you at the front gate and you had to open and close that gate. And it was brutal, because if they dripped, they smelled! Well after you were there a little while, you kind of get used to that. There was, but that was just human waste. It was not mixed with dead, decaying flesh and the, smoke or what do you call, ash. So that didn't, you, this, after you were there a while, you know, after about an hour, you didn't even smell it. But this, this goes right up into

your, into your sinuses and it was like, there was nothing you could do to clear it. So when the people in that area said they didn't know anything was going on, when you smell smells like that, and smoke was there. I mean that's an out and out lie. We had a German girl come through on a writing class. She only came once or twice, I think. She married, I guess, an American GI and she was over here. And she was telling, some of the girls were taking with her, "We didn't know anything about this." Maybe [unclear]. One time we had a, I think [unclear] a French girl who was a teenager in France and how she reacted to Hitler, all, you know, her remembrances that she [unclear]. And then we had another English girl who was in England. But she was more or less in the area that was kind of safe out in the country. And an English bomber--I don't know why she was there, because there was nothing there, really. You know, like a farm. It was just farms, little villages. They dropped a bomb and killed [unclear] you know that's one of those things that happened. Just out of the blue those things come down. It was [unclear]. It was in there, even if they were coming back from a raid and it was still in there and they didn't even know it. It just fortunately, in a way, unfortunately in a way, came out. Because they, if they would land with that in there, [unclear]. They make a whole trip and then they land and there were bombs stuck in there and they didn't know it and then they'd explode. See, the Air Force now is, we always, what's the word, we always put down in a way the Air Force, like they have it so easy and they have it great. Well I read one guy's story. And every time they went on a raid they'd lose three of them. And they had mechanical things go wrong. Sometimes they've gotta, just get off the field and it'd blow up or whatever. They had those really [unclear].

GS: Frank, I wanted to thank you so very, very much for this interview. And I want to leave this offer with you, that if any of your memoirs of your stories that you would like to share with us, we will attach them to your interview and keep them at the Archive.

FK: I'll be in touch.

GS: Okay.

FK: And you be in touch.

GS: We definitely will be in touch. And…

FK: There's two people I want, I'm gonna pass on that they would talk to you.

GS: Wonderful.

FK: One guy was, lived in, survived I guess over in Belgium and in Brussels. And the other fellow was 24th Division [unclear]. And whether he'll do it or not I, he has a lot of pictures.

GS: Okay. We would be very interested in interviewing him.

FK: But I don't know [unclear] if he would do it.

GS: Okay. Thank you.

FK: You're welcome very much.

[Supplemental note from Mr. Keeran, August 30, 1999]

Unit 798 AAA Automatic Weapons Mobile Battalion.

Our unit was a bastard outfit. We were moved about where we were needed. The whole unit or just a gun section we could fire on the move or mostly from a static position. We were in the 7th Army in the E.T.O. [European Theater of Operations] most of the time, in the 3rd Army sometimes, in many divisions.

[Essay written by Mr. Keeran describing his immediate reaction to witnessing Dachau.]

DACHAU April 24, 1945

I put a hand out--it turned black in a split second, covered with fleas. I was afraid to go into Dachau. It was not like facing enemy fire and returning same. It was surreal, eerie, not of this world. These were walking zombies. I didn't think or comprehend that these were human beings. I surmise that's how the guards and enforcers thought of them. Can you grasp what I am saying?? I'm saying that they had been relegated to things, lower than human life, animals? Fed slop, made to endure the bitter cold without adequate clothing or shoes. Made to stand long hours in ranks. At a guard's whim they were shot or beaten to death.

My friend, a G.I. buddy from the 45th division, a combat infantryman, said they set up a 30 caliber machine gun and mowed down the SS guards who were trying to escape over a wall. Some of the guards were beaten to death by the freed inmates. Some were gouged to death with sharp cans and stomped. [T/S Melnic & Sgt. Vanyo from CHI, our Polish gun mechanics, told me.]

I got as close as the front gate. Their eyes were huge, sunken into nearly fleshless skulls. One was talking to me. I couldn't understand him and I shooed him away. "He came out of there. What was that?" I asked Cohn. We could see many of these guys running all around, and being herded back into the camp to be processed, given shots, cleaned up, deloused with DDT powder, showered, attention given to wounds, etc., given food, water and clean clothes, etc. When he came up to the side of our truck and I saw all these guys running around in their striped pajamas, I couldn't comprehend what was going on.

We were in convoy and had to move on to set up to fire on Munich. Out 1st Sgt. took the pictures enclosed. For many years I kept them in an envelope hidden in a drawer. What's that smell? The smell, odor, that permeated the entire area is something I will never forget as long as I live!