

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

IRVING LAUTMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Philip G. Solomon
Date: October 11, 1994

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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IL - Irving Lautman [interviewee]
PS - Philip G. Solomon [interviewer]
Date: October 11, 1994

Tape one, side one:

PS: Phil Solomon of the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College, interviewing Mr. Irving Lautman. The date is October 11th, 1994. Mr. Lautman, can you tell us where in Europe, and in what unit you were serving in the American army prior to your capture?

IL: Well I was serving with the 3rd Armored Division. I was with the 36th Armored Infantry. I was a Private First Class at that particular time. And we served from the hedgerows in Normandy through France, through Belgium, Liege, Charleroi, and in, I was finally captured near Aachen, in Germany.

PS: Aachen is the western, to the western...

IL: It's on the western edge.

PS: The west [unclear].

IL: It's right at the...

PS: Yeah.

IL: At the...

PS: You entered the army...

IL: The Siegfried Line.¹

PS: Yeah.

IL: Right there.

PS: So before you got very far and into Germany, that was the end of combat, hmm?

IL: Well, we actually were moving very quickly, but the division ran out of gas right at the Siegfried Line. And we sat around for days or went out on patrols. And by that time it gave the Germans a chance to regroup and come back and, in fact, reinforce the line. We could have gone right through if there was enough fuel.

PS: You had entered the U.S. Army at what, roughly what date?

IL: September of '43.

PS: And you were trained in the infantry?

IL: I was trained in Georgia.

PS: Yeah.

IL: Macon, Georgia.

PS: Infantry training, was that?

IL: Infantry, right.

¹ Siegfried Line - system of pillboxes and strongpoints built along the German western frontier in the 1930s and greatly expanded in 1944. [*Encyclopedia Britannica*.]

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PS: Then, when you were sent to Europe you went first to England?

IL: We went to England first, and had additional training there. And when the invasion occurred we were sent to the southern part of the country. And, in fact, we were loaded on ships, but at that particular time there was a large, a big storm in the Channel, and nothing could cross. So we waited. We waited there for at least a week or eight days before we went across.

PS: So you actually landed on a Channel coast? Or you say southern, southern France?

IL: You mean did I land in France?

PS: In France.

IL: Yeah, at the regular beach. It was at the Omaha Beach area.

PS: Oh, yeah. Then you proceeded through, slowly through...

IL: Yeah, I was a replacement at that time and we replaced some wounded or, in the 3rd Armored Division, in the infantry, the 36th Armored Infantry.

PS: At that time, as you and your unit advanced through France, did you see at that time any evidence of Nazi atrocities against civilians and/or military personnel?

IL: At that particular time, when I first landed, we were fighting in the hedgerows and I saw very little there.

PS: Yeah.

IL: And once we got out of the hedgerows we were moving so quickly that...

PS: So there's nothing...

IL: We went through towns before they were even--as fast as the tank or the half-tracks could go.

PS: So you had very little contact with French civilians.

IL: No.

PS: Did you, were you and your outfit involved in liberation of any prisoner of war camps or...

IL: No, I never got into...

PS: Any...

IL: Well the prisoner of war camps were mostly in Germany. We didn't...

PS: Yeah. No labor camps?

IL: No.

PS: Well actually you were of course, saw very little to the west of Germany, that is...

IL: Very little west.

PS: Yeah.

IL: We traveled mostly on the roads. The only time we really came in contact with any civilians was, I guess, in Belgium, in the area around Charleroi. That was in Liege. That we slowed up a little bit, but basically we didn't see many civilians. We saw them as we went by. That's it.

PS: Were you aware, you saw no evidence, but were you at that time aware of the existence of the concentration camps, gas chambers, crematorium? Were you aware of the mass execution of Jews and other...

IL: No.

PS: ...enemies of the Third *Reich*?

IL: No. We didn't know anything about that. We were no different than anybody else.

PS: Irv, I believe you did mention, identify the unit you were with?

IL: Yes, it was the 3rd Armored Division. It was commanded by Brigadier General Maurice Rose, the only Jewish commander of any note during the war.

PS: Yeah, interesting. Did you at that time give any thought to your possible harsh treatment as a prisoner, that is if you were captured, being Jewish? And having the letter "H" for "Hebrew" on your dog tag, did you give any thought, or did you have any concern at that time of possible very, very rough treatment if you were captured?

IL: Well, you've got to understand, at the time that I was captured I was only 19 years old, and pretty stupid, to put it mildly. And I really didn't even, it never even occurred to me that something like, I mean I had maybe problems while I was in the American army while training, but it never even occurred to me that something like that might occur. It never even occurred that I would be captured.

PS: Yeah, I was going to ask you your age at that time. Because we sort of lose the age perspective. And so you were at that time, your entrance into the U.S. Army, you were then what, 18?

IL: 18, yeah.

PS: And at the time that you were captured you were still a kid of 19 years old.

IL: That's true.

PS: Foolhardy and you didn't give thought to...

IL: Absolutely.

PS: You were wearing dog tags with the letter "H"?

IL: I wore the dog tags at all times, including through my, through the prison camp, and even till after I was liberated.

PS: Did your unit give you a second set of dog tags with either a "P" for Protestant or a "C" for "Catholic"?

IL: No, absolutely not.

PS: Did they at any time mention about hiding identity if you were captured? That is, hiding your Jewish identity? The risk of harsh treatment?

IL: No, not at any time.

PS: When you were, do you care to make any mention, tell us anything at all about the circumstances of your capture?

IL: Well, like I, I think I mentioned before, we had traveled through France and through Belgium at a high rate of speed, every day as fast as the tanks and half-tracks could

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move. That was as much ground as we covered. And there was no resistance at all until we got to the area around the Siegfried Line. And at that particular time we ran out of fuel and we had to wait. And all we did was just patrol. And on one of these patrols, maybe about four or five days after we were there, we ran into a German counterattack. And at that particular time we were surrounded, tanks up on the ridges on each side and infantry in the middle. And it was impossible to, we just fought until we got to a point that we were completely surrounded. People started surrendering. And I waited to see if everyone was, anyone was going to be shot. That's what bothered me. And I saw that no one was shot, so I surrendered also.

PS: Was it pretty much your entire company?

IL: The whole company.

PS: The whole company.

IL: The whole company was.

PS: Which would have been about 100...

IL: Something, 120, 130.

PS: And all surrendering, being up against a...

IL: Well either, the ones that didn't, you know, who weren't killed or wounded, had surrendered, yeah.

PS: At the time of your capture, you were then interrogated?

IL: No.

PS: No?

IL: Not in the least. We were hustled back to the rear as quickly as they could take us, because they were in the midst of a counterattack and they weren't interested in prisoners at that time. And they just put us on trucks or whatever, or had us march back to an interim prison camp, where we spent the first month or so that we were there.

PS: And during that period there was no interrogating of any of these, of any of your group?

IL: None at all.

PS: Your dog tags were examined?

IL: Never.

PS: Never?

IL: No. And I never threw them away too.

PS: They must have been pretty busy! I think I was probably, at that time, on the other side of the line. We were really close. And maybe they were being kept too busy.

IL: Well, they were...

PS: The date, I would say, was around January of 1945.

IL: When I was captured?

PS: When you were captured.

IL: No, it was about September, I believe, of '44.

PS: Oh, oh. So we have passed the...

IL: Yeah, it's about September of '44.

PS: September? Was that before the battle known as the Battle of the Bulge?

IL: Yes, it was before.

PS: Oh, oh. That would have been...

IL: It was also before, it was just about the time of the, that parachute and glider jump into Holland, into Arnhem.

PS: Yeah.

IL: And I remember when we were there, I was in the prison camp and they were bringing in truckloads of prisoners from that particular battle.

PS: Were you just, we mentioned, I mentioned the Battle of the Bulge. As a prisoner, did you know of these events such as the German attack...

IL: Yes.

PS: ...counterattack in Belgium?

IL: I'd heard about it. There was radios or, well you heard from the guards when they were bragging how well the army was doing. I mean, you heard. You managed to get some news.

PS: So we've passed the point where you would have been interrogated. If they were going to interrogate your group, you've passed now the point. Were you anticipating any problems being Jewish, being identified as...

IL: No. It never even occurred to me.

PS: Really?

IL: It didn't occur to me.

PS: Were there many other Jewish boys in your, alongside you fighting?

IL: Initially, in the combat company that I was in, there was no other Jews. I was about the only one there.

PS: Now you were, your entire group, which was almost your whole entire company, right, from your armored division, were then back, you were shipped back in trucks to another assembly point, and...

IL: Right, to a *Stalag*. One of the...

PS: Yes, one of the...

IL: Yeah.

PS: Was that your final...

IL: No, that wasn't the final one. We spent about a month or two there, and they had us working in the fields or picking crops or whatever was there. Sugar beets or, then eventually they sent us back to another prison camp which was the final destination.

PS: And that was?

IL: And I don't remember which one it was. There was two of them. One in Limburg and one in Brandenburg. I don't remember which was first, which was second.

PS: That, do you recall, was that in West Germany?

IL: Basically in West Germany, yes.

PS: At any point, then, at any point along the way, were you identified as Jewish, or were you at any point along the way separated from the others or with any other group that was gathered, segregated as Jews, Jewish prisoners?

IL: Not while I was there. They didn't even inquire as to whether you were Jewish or not. Like, I think I told you before, the only way that they found out, as far as I'm concerned, they found out that I was Jewish, is we were interviewed by Red Cross personnel. And they said that everything that we told them would be kept in the strictest confidence. Nobody would ever know. And also we, I told them that, they told us that they would inform our relatives that we were alive. But they were the only ones that I had mentioned to that I was a Hebrew, I was Jewish. And as far as I'm concerned, they're the only one who could have told the Germans.

PS: Did they specifically ask you your religion?

IL: Yes.

PS: They did really?

IL: Yes.

PS: And they were the only ones...

IL: Right.

PS: ...to who, and the Germans actually, your captors never actually saw your dog tags.

IL: No.

PS: Where they would have identified your name or your person as being Hebrew.

IL: True. That's true, yes.

PS: You really think possibly the Red Cross [unclear]. No, I see your...

IL: All these years I've been absolutely certain of it.

PS: On the other side of the coin, would you say that during your period of captivity, from September, 1944 until liberation in May, 1945, during that period would you say there was any point at all that the Red Cross was of any comfort, of any meaningful comfort or...

IL: Well not individually, but yes.

PS: As a...

IL: The Red Cross provided what they called Red Cross packages during the year, which during the, you're supposed to get a package per person a month. But it ended up something like less than half a package per person. And whatever they had in there, they had different type of food, cigarettes.

PS: I believe you mentioned, Irv, that the Red Cross personnel mentioned that they were going to notify your family?

IL: Yes.

PS: Did they, to your knowledge, did they notify them?

IL: Well, I know that, I had a, I sent out a letter, and I sent out a postal card, two things. And I don't know if they took care of it or if the Germans did, but we, eventually the, my parents found out.

PS: Oh. You do know that they did receive...

IL: Well, I didn't know it at the time, but they, later on I heard that they did receive it. After the war.

PS: And at no point were you aware of any Jewish prisoners being segregated or identified? And you would say there was no interest on the part of the German captors to seek the Jewish prisoners?

IL: Not at that particular time, no.

PS: Yeah. Later?

IL: I didn't...

PS: There was? Did their attitude change along the line or...

IL: Not, only when I became, when they found out I was Jewish.

PS: Oh, oh.

IL: But up until that time...

PS: Now how, how did they found out?

IL: Oh, you say...

PS: Oh, probably through the Red Cross.

IL: And at that time I was in the second prison camp. I didn't know what it was. I was, happened to be working at a cement factory at that time and they singled me out and sent me back to the *Stalag*. And I had no reason to know what, except the fact that I was a little, I wasn't exactly the finest of workers. I used to sabotage a little bit. But anyway, they sent me back and at that time I didn't know what it was. But once I was put into a room with about 20 other fellows and we started to talk, we found out we were all Jewish.

PS: All Jewish. And...

IL: They were all put, they all pulled back the same way I was.

PS: Now this was another location? You were pulled out of the *Stalag*?

IL: Well this was in, yeah, well, the prisoners were forced to work. And we had to do something, especially privates like that.

PS: Yeah.

IL: Corporals, I guess, whatever it was. I don't know how high they went. But I worked in a, at that time in a, in a cement factory. Other times we worked on farms. Whatever work they needed, whatever; they had us working.

PS: Did you work...

IL: Actually it was the best part of, the best part of the, because it was a healthier life. We were outside of the prison camp and we managed to steal food there.

PS: But when you realized that the group you were with were all Jewish prisoners, were you then concerned that...

IL: Yeah. Then we started to worry what was happening. We didn't know. And we still didn't know what was happening in Europe at that time.

PS: Yah. At that time, Irv, you realized that something a little different, a little unusual, was being planned, if they took the trouble to segregate you.

IL: Well...

PS: At that time, I'd like to ask you, did you have confidence, did you have any reason to be confident that the United States would be deeply concerned about the treatment of its American Jewish soldiers who were captive?

IL: I had no, no personal knowledge of anything that was done by the United States that would alleviate what type of fate was in store for me.

PS: So you had no reason to be confident, or lack of confidence, that you had the power of the United States behind you, you know, protecting your rights under the Geneva Convention and so forth?

IL: When you're a prisoner, you don't, you have a, you feel pretty helpless. And there's very little that you feel can be done or will be done.

PS: From then on, can you maybe give us some idea of the general treatment, whether it changed to any great extent after you were identified as being Jewish?

IL: Well, after we were identified as being Jewish, in the prison camp itself, I don't think we had any generally different type of treatment than anybody else. The food was just as bad, and the lack of it was pretty prevalent. But then we were all sent out together to work at a separate type of a job. We were working, in fact we were all sent out to the forest to work as lumberjacks.

PS: But this was...

IL: And we lived in that particular area where we, we were outside of the *Stalag*. We lived in the little prison shelters outside, in the general forest area.

PS: Irv, when you say "we," you're still referring to the whole group of Jews?

IL: The whole group of Jews.

PS: The whole group. Twenty or so Jewish kids.

IL: Right. About 22.

PS: Were any singled out, I mean, who maybe became maybe, have reason, where the Germans would have reason to single out any individuals for being maybe in their opinion a bit boisterous?

IL: Well, we had, yeah, we had some that were less cooperative than others, and we had some guards that were, I would say, not in their right mind. They had come off the Russian front. They were shell-shocked and whatever. So you had to be very careful because they fired at you a couple of times, and didn't hit anybody. But you had to be careful not to cause them any problems. When they were around you were very careful.

PS: So Irv, you were in a position where of course you can bear testimony as to your own personal treatment.

IL: Right.

PS: And also, where you were in a position to observe the treatment of about 20 of your fellow Jewish prisoners.

IL: Yeah, that's correct.

PS: And were there any that simply disappeared, or would you say there...

IL: Well, you've got to understand that this particular time was in the last three months of the war. It must have taken place somewhere around February or March of '95. Uh, '45. 1945. And we, the Germans were in such a mess, Germany was in such a mess at that time that really, they weren't looking at individuals. They were just trying to get out of it, I guess, alive. That's the people we were dealing with.

PS: We've been talking about, specifically about Jewish, American Jewish prisoners. Were you in a position also to observe the treatment of the American prisoners of war, non-Jewish?

IL: Yes, they weren't treated any different than we were. We were treated the same.

PS: All right. Would you say that the Germans were adhering to some extent to the terms and conditions of the Geneva Convention?

IL: The ones I came in contact with were, they seemed to be. I mean they, as much as they could possibly do it. They were, the country was in bad shape as it was, so they didn't give you anything extra. But it didn't look like they did anything to, anything to try and make your lot any worse than your normal one. The ones they did bother were the foreign--the Polish, the Russians.

PS: Yeah.

IL: Those type, I saw that they made--their lot was much worse than ours. But the Americans...

PS: Were they in the same prison camp?

IL: Actually yes, in the same prison camp but...

PS: Yeah.

IL: In a different area.

PS: Now these were all other nationalities who were captured, say those, the Poles were not Poles who were Polish Americans.

IL: No, no. These were Poles.

PS: Oh, these were Poles who were captured as part of the Polish army.

IL: There were Poles and Russians and whatever else they had.

PS: Now the *Stalag* that were you in, can you identify it by name and general location?

IL: Well, there was two of them, one 12A, and one was 2A. And I don't remember which was Neuburg, eh, Neubrandenburg, and one was Limburg. I think the Neubrandenburg one was probably the first one. That was closest to about, though actually the west part of Germany. And Limburg was probably further in. I don't know exactly where that was.

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PS: So this was, say, toward the northwest?

IL: The northwest portion of Germany, yeah.

PS: Northwest. Were you able to judge from the frequency of air attacks, were there any air attacks in your immediate area, that is American or British, air attacks on Germany?

IL: Not that I seen. I saw airplanes go over, but...

PS: Yeah.

IL: We never saw any, there was never any air attacks in the general area. Because I saw we didn't have anything of military value there.

PS: Were you, did you have any idea that the war was drawing to a close? The...

IL: We were, yes. After we knew from radios, you can get from the, the guards. We were finding out little things that they would tell you, because initially when things were going well for the Germans, you would find out. And as the things started to go bad, they became more morose and they were just trying to protect themselves. That in effect was probably why they didn't bother us too much, even though they knew we were Jews. They probably felt that if the war would end and they were to lose, they would probably have problems.

PS: So you were aware that the day was coming, within a matter of short months, of liberation, of victory.

IL: Oh yes, we knew. In fact, we had sewn up a--I'm sorry we don't have it--but we had sewn up an American flag out of different strips of garbage that we had laying around, so in case anything, we'd have it available in case anything should happen.

PS: Now during that period you were pretty much aware of the progress of the war. During that period, were you getting any information at all about the uncovering of the horrors, the atrocities, the gas chambers, the crematoria, the concentration camps? Were you aware at all of what was happening?

IL: We never heard anything about it. I mean, not a thing. In fact the first time I became aware of it is probably when I came back to the United States after the war was over.

PS: Yeah.

IL: But I never, we never knew a thing about that.

PS: Were there new prisoners coming in at that time? That is, the flow of newly-captured American or British?

IL: There were, but we didn't see them. Because for the last few months we were out in this separate area just working in a forest. And we weren't in contact with the prison camp at all.

PS: Your group of 20 or so, were you in contact at all with the non-Jewish groups of prisoners, either official...

IL: No, at that particular time, no. We were isolated.

PS: You were totally isolated.

IL: We were in the middle of a forest.
PS: Oh.
IL: And there was nothing around us but trees, that's all.
PS: That was for both labor and for billeting and food and, you didn't go back to a central camp or barracks or...
IL: No, no. We stayed there. They found it was too difficult to try to take you back and forth.
PS: Were there reasonably comfortable accommodations? I said that with the knowledge of, you know, who had reasonably comfortable accomm-...
IL: It was, it wasn't bad. It wasn't terrible. Let's put it that way. It wasn't something I would go out of my way to try and find nowadays.
PS: Now you were there starting really during the cold months...
IL: Yes.
PS: ... of January, February, which were pretty cold then.
IL: Right.
PS: Were you protected against the cold?
IL: In the building itself that we were, it seems that. Because I don't remember being that much cold, that cold. Maybe out in the open, we may have been. But when we were in the buildings in the evening, I don't remember that. So there must have been something. Not a hell of a lot, but there must have been, because we were cutting wood that they were using for fire, and everything at that time.
PS: Irv, while a prisoner, were you granted the privilege of receiving mail, packages from home?
IL: I don't think we ever received a package from home.
PS: A few little ones from the Red Cross?
IL: From the Red Cross, yes. The Red Cross...
PS: Any mail at all from home, letters?
IL: No.
PS: Nothing whatso-, you did not really have reason to believe that your family even knew that you were alive.
IL: Well I didn't know that they knew, yes.
PS: Yeah. You weren't aware of that?
IL: I only found that out after...
PS: After, yeah.
IL: After I got back.
PS: They were, they had been advised that you were a prisoner.
IL: Alive and a prisoner.
PS: I wonder if you know, have any idea how long a period they experienced between, you were initially reported as missing in action.
IL: At least three months.

PS: Three months.

IL: Three-and-a-half months maybe.

PS: That's between the time you were reported as missing in action and the time that they received word that you were alive and a prisoner, about three months.

IL: About right, about three-and-a-half months.

PS: Were you married at that time?

IL: No. No, but...

PS: Were you...

IL: But she waited for me until I got off the boat, and then...

PS: You were...

IL: We got married then.

PS: Yeah. You were acquainted...

IL: Yes, yeah.

PS: And, prior to your entering the service. Was the, oh, I think I asked you before if the Red Cross, the American Red Cross, then, you believe, were responsible for a few packages that you received. Were...

IL: Oh, that I know they, they did.

PS: Yeah.

IL: Because that was part of the, we knew about that. I mean they even, but in some way or another, either the Germans took some or whatever, but eventually we didn't get what we were supposed to get. But whatever we did get was, it was very helpful.

PS: Good.

IL: I used to trade smokes for...

PS: Oh, you were in good shape then.

IL: Smokes for food.

PS: Can you imagine to some that smoking was more important than the food.

IL: Absolutely. We had, I told you I worked in the fields there. We pulled up beets, sugar beets, from the ground.

PS: Oh yeah.

IL: And they used to save the leaves, dry 'em and smoke those!

PS: Was your physical condition painful? Were you suffering through malnutrition, do you believe? Overwork? Underfed to any great degree?

IL: I know I lost a lot of weight while I was there. I didn't see any pictures of myself, or I didn't see a mirror, but I know that we had lost quite a bit of weight and when I was in the, when we finally were rescued by an armored column that came through the area, we were sent to the, we were flown immediately to Nancy in France, and they allowed us to go into the mess hall whenever we wanted, eat as much ice cream and as much egg nog and as much steak as you wanted.

PS: You sure did deserve it. You were-

Tape one, side two:

PS: This is Phil Solomon interviewing Mr. Irving Lautman, tape one, side two. Irv, we were just speaking of, we've reached just about the period of getting close to, or actually upon the date of your liberation. You knew that the date was coming within a very, very short time of liberation. Did you notice toward that period much of a change in the attitude and treatment of the German guards?

IL: Well, they left us alone more, and actually when the time came, we woke up one morning and they had disappeared. And we were all alone, so we knew that it was fairly close, liberation, so we got out and put on whatever coats or whatever we had warm and started walking west, carrying our American flag. We were on the road at the time and a British mosquito bomber came over, and we waved the flag and the plane waggled his wings, to let us know that he'd seen, and he just kept going on. So we knew that they knew we were there. How long it would take before we were met, we had no idea.

PS: The actual, the end of the war, V-E Day, Victory in Europe, I think was May the 8th, 1945. Do you recall what date this was when your guards left and you were free to...

IL: This was about the beginning of May, May 1st or 2nd.

PS: Yeah. It was maybe a week or ten days...

IL: A week or so before the end, yeah.

PS: Before the, yeah. Did you continue walking to the west?

IL: We continued walking, yes. And actually as it turned out, another five or six hours later we met an American tank column.

PS: Oh.

IL: And from that point on they put us on trucks, hustled us back to the rear, right to an airport, put us on a plane, flew us into Nancy, and we spent two weeks there recuperating.

PS: During that period you were privileged to possibly to call, speak to your family?

IL: No.

PS: Any telephone? No telephone facilities offered?

IL: Not a, nothing. I didn't even think of it. No, you're right.

PS: Were there mail, was there mail waiting for you there or...

IL: No mail was.

PS: Did you mention Irv, that you did not receive direct mail from your family?

IL: No, I didn't even, I don't know how we, how I got in touch with them to tell them I was still alive. That was odd. I really don't remember now.

PS: There was never any communication that...

IL: I may have sent a letter from, from the prison camp there, no, from the camp in...

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PS: Yeah, in Nancy.

IL: In Nancy. Because I was there for about two weeks. So they must have gotten mail.

PS: Nancy is in what part of France, what area of France?

IL: It's about the east central part.

PS: So at that point, you say you were there for about two weeks.

IL: Approximately.

PS: And during that period you were fed well.

IL: Oh yes.

PS: You could go into the mess hall whenever. Did you, at any time reconnect with your buddies from your armored division? Did you ever see...

IL: At no time, no.

PS: No time at all. Not even those who were captured along with you?

IL: No, well they were with me up until the time I was separated.

PS: Yeah, you were separated.

IL: And once I was separated [unclear].

PS: You were the only Jewish boy in your...

IL: Yes.

PS: ...the company that was surrendering?

IL: Right. Well, the only one that I know of. There may have been somebody else but I don't know.

PS: Yeah. But as far as men from your own unit, you were the only...

IL: Yes.

PS: ...the only one. And you never connected again after liberation?

IL: I never saw them. Well actually I didn't train with these people. It's a, a lot of people have connections...

PS: Oh, so you were a...

IL: Because I was just a replacement.

PS: Yeah.

IL: And a replacement is not...

PS: Yeah, no.

IL: You're not the same.

PS: Then you were in, at Nancy. Can you describe, if you care to, your general physical and mental condition, first of all during your months of captivity and up to the time of your liberation? Your general physical. You say you lost weight and...

IL: Well physically I was working at that time in the, toward the end, in the forest, which was good. I mean it kept us up physically. As far as weight-wise, I probably lost a lot of weight, but I don't, I really don't know what I weighed when I was, when I came back. But mentally I was, like I said, I probably was a stupid young kid. It didn't bother me that much.

PS: Yeah, 19 years old and...

IL: That's all. You really don't know.

PS: You had, did you have any real fears, of anything?

IL: No.

PS: Any fears of being executed?

IL: No, not at all.

PS: Any fears at all of...

IL: The only fear, I wanted to stay away from the guards. Otherwise, you know...

PS: Yeah, don't get in their way.

IL: And if you're stealing something, like sometimes we had a, we were short of food and I went around to try and steal some. You've got to be very careful you don't get caught.

PS: There was no point along the line that you felt that possibly something would happen? At one point, I think it was after the saturated bombing of Dresden that Hitler ordered the execution of all, I think all airmen who were in captive, who were all Jewish. In fact, one of the, I think the second in command of Hitler refused to carry through his order.

IL: I never heard that. But it's interesting to...

PS: Yeah, that's a...

IL: Oh I didn't know that.

PS: Oh yeah, that's a matter of history.

IL: Oh yeah?

PS: It was after the saturated bombing of Dresden. The order was never carried out, thank God. Now how long was it, you were in Nancy for a couple of weeks.

IL: Right.

PS: And then you were only in mail contact with your family, no voice...

IL: I believe that...

PS: No voice time?

IL: No, I wasn't voice, that I'm sure of. It must have been mail, yes.

PS: Now, after about two weeks in Nancy, were you then shipped back to the United States?

IL: Yes, they sent us on a, all the ones that were from the prison camp, they sent us to, I think it was Le Havre, and they put us on the slowest boat they could find, with the most food on it. Same thing again. They never stopped feeding you. And it took us about seven or eight days also to get back to New York. And at that time we went to, I think it was Camp Dix. And we only stayed there for a short period of time. And they gave us some money and they allowed us to go home.

PS: Looking back on all the experience, do you feel that there's any lasting effect on your attitude, on your mental, physical conditions, anything at all that you believe relates to those experiences?

IL: Well, I would say that, I really don't know. I know a lot of that changed me quite a bit, but to how much, I can't possibly say, because I don't remember what I was before. But I'd say it made a little bit of a pacifist out of me. I'm not, any time anyone suggests war, I'm a, I'm not for it, put it that way. I'm not always against it, but I'm not for it.

PS: My next question, which could be the last question, might seem a little odd. But Irv, after the war, a number of years later, there were a lot of TV programs, like *Hogan's Heroes*, that pictured the German guards as blubbering idiots and the American prisoners of war as having free reign and doing whatever they wanted and pulling all kinds of tricks, knowing this was far from reality. Did you have any resentment?

IL: To the programs themselves?

PS: To the programs themselves.

IL: No, I just took it for what they were. There was not, it was just entertainment. That's about all.

PS: Yeah. See, I myself, in watching those programs, even though I was not captured, I was not a prisoner of war, I did resent the fact that it made such a joke out of the general life of PWs.

IL: Well, the actual reality, when you're talking about it, the Germans were very good fighters. They had, when they had their equipment, they were far superior, the equipment was far superior than what we had. You were in a tank outfit. You'd know.

PS: Yeah, yeah.

IL: Their tanks were far superior than ours. In a battle, when one of their tanks, one of their Tiger Tanks with three of our tanks, it would destroy the three.

PS: Especially, we were equipped with light tanks. And they were like newspaper.

IL: The only difference was that we were lucky enough to be air, superior in air power.

PS: Yeah.

IL: If it wasn't for that, their equipment was far superior than what we had.

PS: Yeah, their artillery.

IL: Each and every item.

PS: Yeah, their mechanized forces.

IL: Their tanks, their...

PS: Their artillery was [unclear] and...

IL: 88 rifles, whatever they had. Everything was better.

PS: Believe it or not, our tanks were equipped with 37mm, which was like a little dart.

IL: I would, I happened to be at a particular tank battle where I was up front, and hiding in a hole or something, where tanks were shooting at each other. And our tank, even with the 75s, were bouncing off the Tiger Tank like it was nothing at all.

PS: And their 88 would just pulverize.

IL: Yeah. One shot and that was it.

PS: Yeah.

IL: I felt sorry for the tankers. They had a tough time. They were lucky they had airplanes up there.

PS: Irv, we've reached about the end of the list of questions that I had planned to ask you. Is there anything else that you would like to add to what we have discussed, the replies to the questions, anything that we didn't cover, or any conclusions, anything at all that you would like to add to the testimony?

IL: Well I had, the only thing that I can remember now that doesn't have anything even to do with the, being Jewish or not, is, you asked me about treatment to people, but I saw some treatment to Poles and Russians that were far worse than anything we ever had. I mean, I was only there for a short period of time compared to maybe some other people that were prisoners. But they, they would beat them and have them do the hardest type of work that was possible. And...

PS: Now these were Polish and Russian prisoners of war.

IL: Yeah, and then they were, they were deadly with them. I mean they were, it was, the Americans, the French and the English were treated like gold compared to what the Russians...

PS: Did you actually witness any executions?

IL: No executions, no.

PS: But very cruel.

IL: Yeah, the treatment. Their treatment was bad.

PS: Yeah.

IL: Yeah. It was tough.

PS: Irv, I think we've covered pretty well. Is there anything else, any other comments?

IL: I don't know. I can't think of any.

PS: When you finally, you...

IL: Probably I'll think of something after I leave.

PS: Yeah. You arrived back in the United States and reunited with your family and you were shortly thereafter married? Or...

IL: [Irv's wife says something, unclear] I, I didn't, they sent me out to, when I, after rest and recuperation at home, I went to, they sent me to Fort Ord in California.

PS: Oh, for redeployment?

IL: Yeah, but it ended up, the war ended.

PS: Me too.

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IL: You too?

PS: Yeah, yeah. Irv, I think we've reached the end, and on behalf of the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College I want to thank you for your very valuable testimony. And again, for Gratz College, thank you very much.

IL: You're welcome.