

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Boas, Roger

Date of interview: 10/23/1990

Summary: John Roger Boas was born on August 21, 1921 in San Francisco. Some of his family members were non-observant Jews while others were Christians. John became aware of the Jewish situation in Europe in 1935 during a "grand tour" of the continent with his mother and grandmother. Their tour included the Soviet Union and Poland, where they caught a glimpse of the growing prewar tensions as well as a proto-Nazi group. His mother had strong feelings about the happenings in Europe.

He knew that the Germans were persecuting the Jews and believed that Germany would come after the U.S. if Britain fell. He had relatives in Europe, some of whom escaped the oncoming carnage.

He attended Galileo High School. At 16 John enrolled in Stanford University, where he studied political science and actively debated global politics. When he graduated four years later from the business school, he was drafted into the artillery training school. He felt obliged to fight because he felt that he was protecting his family by doing so and was resentful of his Jewish friends who chose noncombatant roles. He was then assigned to a heavily Jewish division from New York. This was the fourth armored division in which he served during his entire army career, and it was the spearhead of General Patton's 3rd Army.

He arrived in England and trained in the Salisbury plain. He landed in Normandy soon after D-Day in a landing ship tank. At the time he was a battalion adjutant and not a field observer. He had several dealings with Patton including when they were moving through a bombed out town and he stood there saluting the troops. Another instance in which he met Patton was when he was wounded with shrapnel and also had bronchitis. Patton visited the hospital and told Boas to get some rest. Boas later earned his nickname "I Don't Know Boy" after he couldn't tell Patton where the headquarters was located.

In Lorraine, France his army was ordered to take the port, which housed U-boats. Roger was now an artillery observer. He took up a position in a steeple from which he could direct fire and narrowly escaped after it was hit by fire.

Boas had his first glimpse of the Ohrdruf concentration camp in Germany from the window of a castle across the street and was horrified when he saw the results up close. It was a camp of men with bodies piled in the courtyard as well as in the barracks. Those in the courtyard appeared to have been shot by the fleeing guards and some of those inside the barracks were hung by hooks. He remembers the stench that permeated the air as well as their emaciated bodies and pinstripe uniforms. There were no survivors that he knew of at that camp. Later the leading townspeople were ordered to tour the camp and the mayor of the town shot himself soon afterwards.

To the east of Ohrdruf Boas came into contact with Polish slaves at Wagner's (possibly the composer's) house as well as a large group of Jewish slaves later

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

on. All were female and poorly nourished.

During the war Boas received a Silver Star as well as a Bronze star and was in five combats.

After the war was over he returned to San Francisco but wished he had stayed to study in Europe. He avoided those who had not participated in the war and felt an affinity towards those who shared combat experience. He remained anti-German for 20 years after the war, until he was invited to make an official visit to Germany in 1966 or 1967. From then on he changed his opinion of Germany, although he is wary of its reemergence.

After the war Boas went into the automobile business. He still owns a dealership. He also has been elected State Chairman of the Democratic Party and was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. He has also been the City Chief Administrator.

Boas joined a Jewish temple and he and his wife have 3 sons and a daughter. Boas is thankful that the Holocaust Center is preserving the memory of the Holocaust for future generations as well as for those who still doubt that such a thing actually happened.