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NORTHERN  
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\*Indicates Holocaust survivor

November 21, 1989

TO: Coleen McGinn  
FROM: Joel Neuberg & Fred Meibergen  
RE: Change in F. Meibergen interview

About 2/3 of the way through his interview, when Mr. Meibergen is describing his activities at the very end of the war in Europe, he refers to traveling from the left bank of the Rhine to the right bank, and mentions the Pioneer Bridge at Bonn. The battle he calls the Battle of the Bulge is actually the Battle of the Ruhr (the Battle of the Bulge was the previous winter).

Please attach this note to the transcript of that tape.

Sincerely,

*Joel Neuberg Fred Meibergen*  
Joel Neuberg Fred Meibergen



**THE  
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"Having visited San Francisco's Holocaust Center of Northern California a number of times, I was each time impressed by the seriousness of your efforts and the quality of the Library and its educational ventures. I wish you every success in your very important work."

— Yehuda Bauer,  
Scholar and Writer, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

"May I express our sincere appreciation for the important work which your institution is carrying on for promoting knowledge about the Holocaust, especially among the younger generation, and for the advancement of the constructive educational values arising out of the great calamity.

Yad Vashem and I personally wish you every success in your important endeavor."

— Gideon Hausner,  
Chairman, Council of Yad Vashem, Jerusalem

"The Holocaust Center of Northern California, which I have visited, and whose holdings I have examined, promises to a major educational centre, and one which will serve the cause of education and enlightenment for many generations to come."

— Martin Gilbert,  
Historian and Writer, Oxford

"I wish enthusiastically to endorse the activities of the Holocaust Center of Northern California.

The Holocaust Center of Northern California provides a model which I trust and hope will be followed by many other communities in our country."

— Arthur J. Goldberg,  
Former Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and  
Ambassador to the United Nations



Saturday, 15th July, 1944

*It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet, I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.*

— Yours, Anne

Entry in the diary of Anne Frank 19 days before capture.

Interview with Fred Meibergen  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
Date: October 24, 1989 Place: San Francisco, California  
Interviewer: Peggy Coster  
Transcribers: Celeste Brenn and Pamela Webb

PEGGY COSTER:

Q OKAY. THIS IS OCTOBER 24, 1989. I'M PEGGY COSTER,  
AND I'M INTERVIEWING FRED MEIBERGEN.

A That's correct.

Q WHO IS A SURVIVOR OF THE HOLOCAUST. AND, SO HOW  
OLD WERE YOU--WHEN WERE YOU BORN?

A On the 1st of January, 1909.

Q AND SO YOU PRETTY MUCH LIVED THROUGH ALL OF THE  
BEGINNING?

A Oh, yes.

Q OF THE NAZIISM AND WATCHED IT GROW?

A Yes, I did. I did.

Q WHAT--CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THAT?

A Well, Naziism was nothing new in 1933, you know, it  
originated a little earlier than that. And I don't know  
where you want me to start.

Q OKAY, FIRST MEMORY OF NAZIISM.

A Oh, I just read a book, and the Jews were not  
treated so very well in Germany all together.

And so it deals with even the Seventeenth or Sixteenth  
Century, how they faired over there. They had protective

letters or certificates, some of them. They had to buy them of course. They made prices according to what they could get out of them, you know. But one poor guy had to buy it for two thalers. A thaler used to be three marks in Germany. Now I don't know if this pertains to the same time period or not. I wouldn't know. But it wasn't cheap. I mean, in those days everything was like in America too, was cheap. But they took it from them and they were not allowed to do anything except what they did and this was pandering. They, I don't think, even they allowed them that. But they did it, and they got away with it because nobody else wanted to do that. And they served a purpose.

Q THIS WAS THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY?

A Yes. And this went all the way through the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.

Q SO DO YOU REMEMBER MUCH ANTI-SEMITISM WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?

A Oh, yes, yes, yes, there was, there was. There was always anti-Semitism in Germany. It was not the kind--the same kind that came along with Hitler, you know. That was a Government originated anti-Semitism was Hitler. The other one was more or less by the people.

Q WELL, HOW WAS THE DIFFERENCE? WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER IS THE DIFFERENCE?

A Well, I'll give you an example. When I came over, I came--I left Germany at the end of 1937, and I came over on the Queen Mary. And of course I got to talk with other people at the table etc. And they say, "Why didn't you complain to the Government?" And that was a fine howdy-doo because the Government did it, you know.

Q YEAH.

A In other words, it was such a misconception that people had about the going ons there. It wasn't even funny.

Q YEAH. PROBABLY WE SHOULD FIND OUT LIKE HOW MANY SISTERS AND BROTHERS YOU HAVE?

A I have three brothers. I had. One is dead now.

Q UH-HUH. AND SO YOU JUST HAVE THREE BROTHERS. AND THEY WERE YOUNGER OR OLDER THAN YOU?

A I'm the oldest. I have one that's living in Berkley. He's ten years younger than I am. And the other one died before me although he was a year younger than I am.

Q SO YOU ALL LEFT GERMANY?

A Yes.

Q DID YOUR PARENTS LEAVE?

A Yes. And that's a story in itself, also. I don't know if you want to hear it.

Q YES, WE DO.

A You do. My medium brother worked in Germany in an

export company, and they had dealings with Japan. And the Japanese in those days were not quite as efficient as they are now. So lots of things went wrong with their business dealings there. And he talked his boss into letting him go over to Japan to straighten things out because this was already in 1936 where one could tell what was going on.

And he left in March 1936 to Japan and founded his own company there and did very well, as a matter of fact. But before he left, I told him, "If you can see your way for me to get out there and help you or something like that, please call me. I am more than willing to follow you." And he did.

And at the end of 1937 I left Germany for Japan via the United States.

Q SO YOU SPENT WORLD WAR II IN JAPAN?

A Pardon?

Q SO YOU SPENT WORLD WAR II IN JAPAN?

A I--no. I got out the middle of '41. However, my youngest brother that's living here followed us. But when he was in transit in Japan then we had to get my parents out, and this was not easy. It was not easy at my time, believe me. They made difficulties. But through connections that my brother had in the import/export business he, well let me correct this, import he didn't do, export. One of his

connections had connections to the Government, and through that we finally succeeded to get my parents out. And it was in 1939 if I remember correctly. And that was not easy.

And those folks, my brother as well as my parents stayed in Japan during the war.

Q SO ALL OF THEM WERE IN JAPAN DURING THE WAR EXCEPT YOU?

A Not the youngest brother, he left Japan before me. He was just a half a year or so in Japan at that time. He went back many times later as a civil servant, but not then.

He was not in Japan during the war. As a matter of fact, he was in the American Army and was not wounded but contracted trench foot. And they had to pull him out just when the going was good when they got to Germany.

Q OH. NOW YOU GOT OUT WHEN? IN 1941?

A Middle of '41. I forgot the exact date.

Q SO WAS IT HARD?

A It was practically the last boat.

Q HOW--LIKE WHAT--HOW DID YOU GET ON? IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD.

A No. There's a story to that too. Because when the Atlantic was closed for emigration, fleeing Jews came on transit visas via Japan to go to North America, South America, Middle America, what have you. And they were

helpless there.

They had usually arrived when their visa expired so they couldn't take the boat anymore. Either that or the boat has left before they got there. Money hasn't arrived yet. They were allowed, I believe, to transfer some money to (Habing) <sup>302</sup> and the money hasn't arrived. They of course tried to transfer it to Yokohama where we were, and it hadn't arrived yet.

So there were only a handful of German Jews that could help these guys, and the Meibergens were two of them. Incidentally, we have here in this library, here in the Holocaust Center, a little article, a little booklet that deals with this. It is written by a Japanese that was--who was working for the N.Y.K., which was the main shipping company in Japan, and he tells a little bit about the Meibergens, etc., etc., among other things.

So we founded the Jewish Committee in Yokohama. There was another one in Kobe bigger even than ours because there were more Jews, no German Jews but Jews period. German Jews were there too, yes, but more others. And we dealt with this interaction, you know, Kobe/Yokohama. And this was going on for a little while there until it finally stopped.

Now there were so many Jews coming through Japan that--and their visas expired. And we had to do with the American



Consulate, and that's where I came in. I was the liaison man to the American Consulate, and that gave me an "in" to come to the United States because I was known there. I think this was leading to this.

Q YEAH. OKAY, GOING BACK TO GERMANY WHERE WERE YOU BORN IN GERMANY?

A I was born in a city that was called at that time (Geistamunda). It was a Prussian city that is in opposition to Bremerhaven what it is called now. In those days Bremerhaven was the center of this, you might say, one city, (Geistamunda) in the south and Leer in the north. It was built together molded in the sense to enrich the district I must say.

But since Bremerhaven was blemished the Hungarish thought they couldn't get together. So they combined the cities in back of it, the Prussian cities of Leer and (Geistamunda), and made it (Veisamunda). Now it's called old Bremerhaven. So have your pick. Even (Geistamunda) was called before that (Geisendorf). So you have four choices. No, (Geisendorf) is out because I was not, maybe was not even born when it was called (Geisendorf).

Q SO IT WAS A PRETTY BIG PLACE THEN?

A Right now it has about hundred and fifty thousand population.

Q WAS IT PRETTY BIG THEN, TOO?

A I would say in the three cities about a hundred thousand.

Q AND WHAT DID YOUR FATHER DO THERE?

A He was a dealer in leather and so was I. I learned the business, not in his company but out of town.

Q HOW DID--HOW DID YOU FIRST EXPERIENCE ANTI-SEMITISM?

A Well you might say it starts in school. You know, it was not--see this was not government originated. So it is individual. We always had what we called the good old anti-Semitism in Germany. And that existed, as I said, even in the centuries before even more so.

It became much better, I think, you might say, in 1850 if I remember the date given in this book correctly, then it got better.

THE CAMERA MAN: I HAVE TO STOP THIS. (MEANING THE CAMERA).

PEGGY COSTER:

Q OKAY. GO AHEAD AND TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT.

A Well what was it now? We were forming a committee in Japan to help those so-called transit Jews, and they got stuck there because, as I said, their visas expired. The

money wasn't there and the ship had left. This was the rule. There were exceptions but darn few.

Q UH-HUH.

A And you want me to go into detail there a little bit?

Q YEAH.

A It so happened that my brother, as I told, you was in the export business there, and I worked for him. And he had a small office actually only because he was what he called himself was a agent's representative. Now we didn't have a warehouse or anything like that, but we dealt with the exporters.

We made a middleman, let's put it that way, between the exporters and the companies abroad that bought from these exporters. And my brother saw to it that things were done right because in those days, as I said, they had a different standard and quality.

And one day a Jewish fellow, a very nice guy by the name of Steinberg, who lived in Tokyo, which is only about thirty minutes, let's say, from Yokohama by train. Ivan says, "Meibergen, I hope you don't mind; I cabled your name to Berlin that you would be able to help guys that come through here and so on if they are lost. And all you got to do is you go on the telephone and call me up and I will be down

here in the next hour." Well, we didn't object, my brother and I.

So in a short while later my brother happened to be on a little trip to Osaka, which is about like Los Angeles from San Francisco. And the guide on the phone was a guy from the N.Y.K., the assistant shipping company that did most of the passenger shipping. And he says, "Meibergen, I don't know what to do here. I'm lost. I have a house full of Germans here. They don't speak a word of Japanese. No English. I don't know what to do with them. They are running around like ants here. You better come down." All right. So I locked the joint and went to the N.Y.K. and tried to do what I could. And that was the beginning of our relief help over there. And it never stopped until I left. And it went on there after, also because I left in the middle of '41 and the war here started in '41, end of '41, December of '41.

So according to this book that I mentioned before there must have been forty-five thousand transit passengers that we had to take care of.

Q DID MID--WHAT DID YOU DO FOR MONEY?

A We had another gentleman, a Tokyo gentleman by the name of (Bearward), very nice guy, too. And it so happened that this Mr.(Bearward) had a brother who was the head man of the Joint Distribution Committee in New York. So we had a

good connection in that respect. And I think (Mr. Bearward) advanced money and got reimbursed later by his brother's outfit, the Joint Distribution Committee.

Q OKAY. YOU KNOW JUST WHEN THE TAPE WAS OFF, WE WERE TALKING ABOUT HOW HARD IT WAS, I MEAN, EVEN JEWISH PEOPLE WHO KNEW THEY HAD TO LEAVE GERMANY, THEY FOUND IT DIFFICULT BECAUSE THERE WAS NO COUNTRIES THAT WOULD TAKE THEM IN. AND HOW DID THAT MAKE YOU FEEL? I MEAN, HOW DID YOU--

A Well you knew you had to go. How would it make you feel if you know you have to go or else, and nobody lets you? Now in the beginning I would say the Nazis sort of pushed them out, you know. But this all changed later on.

I give you a little example myself, and this was in 1937. I started a little earlier than the date that I really exited there. My brother asked for me so I went to the (Kunotline). "Sell me a ticket to Japan." And they say, "Yes, we will do that if you can prove that you can land in Japan. Go to the Japanese Consulate and get something in writing. A Visa or what you have that you can land in Japan." So you go to the Japanese Consulate and they say, "Oh, no, for Japan to establish entry in Japan all you need is a valid German passport," which I had at that time.

So with that advice you go back to the (Kunotline) and they'll say well they advised me that all is necessary is to

have a valid German Visa and they said, "No, no, no. You can't do. You have to bring this in writing."

So, I thought I was smart, and I wrote to the Japanese Consulate what was cooking, and I expected an answer in writing, you know, but they didn't fall for that. And so I was stuck right then and there.

It so happened; however, that a friend of mine had somebody at the (Kunotline) office and through him I got the ticket because I had a little "in" there, yeah. And so I took off on the Queen Mary. I went to New York. I went cross-country to Seattle and left for Japan. I spent about a week or so here in the States. I was interested. I was very interested to see the country. Coming from the Coast, Bremerhaven, which is a port.

And we had any number of Americans landing there or even stewards or something, worked on German boats, you know, went back and forth. And I heard enough about America. But I had never seen it. So I went that route. I had a friend who had a friend, his girlfriend at the time, went at the same time. We knew of each other, but she went via Suez and that was the alternate route. And then the surest route would have been via Siberia, but I was interested in America.

Q WERE YOU MARRIED AT THE TIME?

A Nope.

Q SO IT WAS EASIER TO LEAVE THEN?

A Yes, probably so. I didn't know what I was going into, you know. I mean, Japan was in those days pretty far out of the map, and of course I didn't speak Japanese. And I didn't know what was going to happen. Otherwise, who knows, I might have been married in Germany before I left but I didn't.

Q OKAY. LET'S GO ON BACK TO THE BEGINNING AGAIN. CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHEN YOU FIRST EXPERIENCED ANTI-SEMITISM?

A Well in school of course. There were fights, and you were always a "dirty Jew" or something like that.

And I remember I was fifteen when I left town. And I became an apprentice in Gottingen. Gottingen, you would pronounce it here most likely. This is a university town about the caliber of Berkley here. And I remember distinctly that there was an increase in anti-Semitism.

So we Jews bunched together a little bit, and we learned boxing in which I was never any good. And we carried canes in case we were attacked or something like that. And this whole thing I mean it was going on, but anti-Semitism was there all along.

Q SO THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN ABOUT 1924 THEN?

A I have something I can--yeah, it was 1924. You're

right, absolutely right. Yes, you're absolutely right.

Q AND THAT WAS WHEN THE NAZIS WERE KIND OF REALLY BEGINNING TO FOMENT?

A Well Hitler was around already in those days. I don't know how active he was. I came to Gottingen in May 1924 and I left in 1927, September, '27. So in those days we already tried self-defense, you know. That I remember.

Q WERE YOU EVER ATTACKED?

A No, no.

Q HOW DID YOU NOTICE THE GROWTH OF NAZIISM BEGIN?

A Yes, it became a little bit more acute when I lived in Berlin. There were always fights between the Nazis and the Communists.

Q OKAY. WHEN WAS THIS?

A I moved to Berlin in January, 1931, and also left in 1937. But there were always fights. I see it in front of my eyes now. You know, that the Communists had a--well I won't say headquarters, where more or less they hung out, you know. And it spilled over into our street where the police were attacking them as--with a detached bayonet, you know, and with rifles and so on. There were shootings in Berlin. Alexander Platts and I did take part in it, but running away from.

And I remember in another part of there, there was even



more shooting going on. Where it happened to be was more or less the--it's not the center--southeast of Berlin. And these things, I mean, there were frictions before. Of course the Communists were the exact opposite of the Nazis. And of course those two didn't get along. And there were demonstrations just like there are in this day and age and usually ended up in shootings. And that was the time when the Nazis grew stronger and stronger. And by 1933 Hitler came into power.

Q YEAH. DO YOU REMEMBER MUCH ABOUT THAT? LIKE, WHERE WERE YOU WHEN YOU HEARD THAT THE NAZIS, YOU KNOW, HITLER, HAD BECOME CHANCELLOR--BEEN MADE CHANCELLOR?

A Well that I don't know anymore, but I was in Berlin for sure.

Q DO YOU SEE THAT AS OMINOUS THOUGH?

A Oh, yes. Yes, I mean, anybody with a sound mind could see what was going on. After all Hitler wrote Mein Kampf way ahead of 1933. And although I never read it in full length, I have that book at home, too. I kept it while as a soldier over there. But, a lot of this was clear. He made good on his book I would say, unfortunately.

Q YEAH. WHERE WERE YOU BETWEEN 1927 AND 1931?

A Between 1927--1927 I was in Regensburg. Ever heard of that? It is in the south of Germany on the Danube River.

I was a year and a half there, until March, '29.

Q AND DID YOU EXPERIENCE MUCH NAZIISM? DID YOU SEE MUCH GROWTH THERE?

A I was and I'm still pretty much keeping to myself. I'm not a "party man," "club man," or something like that. So I didn't belong to a club in Regensburg. And I worked for a Jewish company. So, no, I would say I wasn't too much touched by the anti-Semitism, which no doubt existed in that part of the country, too. Bavaria, that's where Hitler started you know, with the Reichswehr.

Q YEAH. OKAY. AND THEN YOU WENT FROM THERE--YOU DIDN'T GO STRAIGHT TO BERLIN DID YOU?

A No. I spent part in Hamburg, then it was back in my home town again in my father's business. And so--but in 1931 I--January 31, first of January, '31, I think. I started in Berlin.

Q DID YOU HEAR MUCH ABOUT, LIKE, RIGHT AFTER HITLER MADE CHANCELLOR THEY STARTED ESTABLISHING THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS? DID YOU HEAR MUCH ABOUT THAT?

A Oh, yes, yes. We knew even though the Germans claimed they didn't know that there was a Buchenwald or a concentration camp and so on. And we also knew that things were not the best there.

I, for instance, I had an uncle who was arrested and

went to Buchenwald if I'm not mistaken or Dachau. I think it was Dachau. And the people in general and he in particular when they came back, when they could prove that they could emigrate, some of them were let go. And he was one of them. He went to England. But to his last day he wouldn't want to talk about what happened there. They made him so scared threatening him, you know.

Q YOU MEAN IF HE TOLD?

A I have a cousin here. He was in Theresienstadt. Well this is a story by itself. He will not touch the subject. He goes up in the air. You must not even mention it. That's the way they scared the heck--the living daylight out of them, you know.

Q DID YOU--DID MOST OF YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY GET OUT OF GERMANY, TOO, OR DID YOU LOSE A LOT DURING THE WAR?

A Well my immediate family, as I said, my two brothers and my parents, we were able to get out. And we two brothers who went to Japan first of course got out. But there were a lot of others, my wife's mother, for instance, who left was deported and of course no more seen thereafter.

And relatives, we had relatives that fled to Holland--no maybe to Italy first and maybe thought probably since the access was formed and so on they weren't safe there and went to Holland.

And my uncle as well as my aunt didn't survive it. Their son did survive it. He was underground, and he was hidden by somebody and is now a professor here in Portland, Oregon. But these things, I mean, lots of others that maybe not immediate relatives but people that we knew well, they landed in Auschwitz or someplace, you know.

Q WHEN THEY HAD THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES, DO YOU REMEMBER THAT?

A The Nazis had a beautiful song they called it  
- 2 -  
(Venutinloot from mesinswitch dangeets lamo zgoot).

Translated: If Jewish blood bounces off or pearls off the knives then everything is twice as good. This was going on practically since 1933 when Hitler came to power, you know. The Night of the Long Knives, I don't know if it ever took place. It took place throughout.

The Jews were persecuted and killed and murdered and whatnot, throughout. But this is more saying, I would say, The Night of the Long Knives, you know. But it was going on all the time not only with knives, with clubs or fists or what have you.

Q THEY STARTED DOING ANTI-JEWISH LEGISLATION RIGHT AWAY, DIDN'T THEY?

A Oh, yes, yes. It increased every time they tightened the screw a little more. And for instance, well

they, I think, first they started out with government workers couldn't work for the government anymore. Jewish government workers that is. Lawyers couldn't work anymore or could only work defending maybe Jews or something like that. And doctors, Jewish doctors, maybe were not allowed to treat gentiles or something like that. Although I don't know when that happened. But in this order, you know, and this was tightened all the time.

And the park benches had inscriptions on it "Not for Jews" or "Jews not allowed" or not desired or this kind of stuff. In the end and I didn't live long enough in Germany to witness that. They didn't let them ride the streetcar or something like that. They took away cars or at least the licenses. They couldn't drive cars. Although not in my time.

Q DID YOU DEVELOP A KIND OF A SIXTH SENSE FOR DANGER?

A Oh, you knew you were in danger. Although not that I want to brag, but I was also a dealer in leather, as I said before, like my father. And I had to do with shoemakers and--but I can't--I would say for myself I was almost well-liked, you know, I don't like to brag. And I "loosed a lip" there sometimes. And it could have backfired very easily.

I once was in a--visiting a shoemaker and this was just the time when a German battleship bombarded a Spanish--this

was during the Spanish Civil War--a Spanish city, I don't know which one it was anymore, but it was a big to do. And, as I say, I was in the--I was visiting a shoemaker and in comes his son and he reports about that. "And the Jews did this not the Germans. The Jews caused this." Yeah. And the father shoemaker asks him, "Do you know any Jews? Do you know what they look like?" "Oh, yes," he says. "They're black haired, curly hair, black curly hair and a nose like this." Almost like mine. Which wasn't so sad a shape in those early days it got that way a little later. And, oh, the father says, "You're sure?" "Yes." "You know that for sure?" He was not anti-Jewish and then the father says, "Now you see Mr. Meibergen here, he's Jewish." "No he's not. Jewish. He has no black curly hair, and he has no hook nose." Something like that.

So you see, they made them out to be like in the characters, you know, like Moses. So he didn't believe that Meibergen was a Jew. That's the way it was.

Q DID YOU HAVE ANY CUSTOMERS STOP DEALING WITH YOU BECAUSE AS THE POLITICAL CLIMATE GOT HOTTER?

A No. No, I didn't.

Q DID YOU HAVE VERY MANY PEOPLE SHOW YOU THAT--THAT, YOU KNOW, FRIENDSHIP?

A You might say that sometimes. I was told by more

than one, "Why do you leave? They don't do anything to you. They will not do anything to you. Why do you leave?"

Q WERE THESE GERMANS OR JEWISH?

A Gentile shoemakers. Uh-huh.

Q AND THEY THOUGHT THEY WOULD NEVER--

A They thought it wouldn't happen. Nobody did believe. I mean, it was the--it was also the opinion of the German Jews that by the time Hitler came into power, that it was a gimmick for him to get into power. And from then on out it would decrease and maybe, okay, he might not--may not trouble with the young kids anymore, but he would let the old ones die out or something like that. That is all, you know, but it turned out entirely different. He meant what he said.

Q DID VERY MANY OF YOUR JEWISH ACQUAINTANCES AND FRIENDS THINK THAT THERE WAS NO DANGER, ALSO?

A No. No. This was obvious. You couldn't miss it. You couldn't miss it. You knew you were in danger. Maybe we Jews knew even better than the other that some of us disappeared and were never seen again. But you don't even have to be Jewish, I mean, suppose you were Communist, you were gay, or a Gypsy, or something like that, you went to the concentration camps, also.

If you were a Communist, the thing is this, if you're a Communist you can change your party affiliation. You can

become a Neo-Nazi, but you cannot become a Gentile when you're Jewish.

And in Germany books are kept, and they knew exactly who was and who wasn't. It's not like here where you can disappear. In Germany before you move from one place to the other, from this house to the next one you have to go to the police. You have to announce in writing that you moved to that place.

At that place the landlord has to sign that you arrived here and that has to be registered again with the police. And so you cannot duck there, you know. It's not like here wherever, where eventually they get them, and they have a car accident or something. But that's about the only way, you know. And they knew who was Jewish.

Q WHEN YOU LEFT, YOU SAID IT WAS MORE DIFFICULT TO GET YOU PARENTS OUT BECAUSE THEY STAYED LONGER. WAS THAT BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T--YOU LEFT BECAUSE YOU COULD GET OUT, BECAUSE OF BUSINESS, RIGHT?

A On account of my brother's business, you know. Because he--my brother was establishing just then. He went March, '36 and I left in the end of '37. So he was quite new in his business, too.

But he saw the need for one thing and all right, I could help him. He could have gotten along without me also, I'm



pretty sure. But since it amounted to saving a life he did it and I'm very grateful for that.

Q HOW DID YOU FINALLY GET YOUR PARENTS OUT?

A As I said before, they tried of course everything and didn't succeed. And we tried from the other end and didn't succeed. Through a business connection of my brother's, who had connections through the Japanese Government, who sent a cable to Germany, they were finally given the ticket for the boat, and they left. But this took an act of Congress or two, believe me.

Q SO WHEN YOU LEFT JAPAN AND YOU CAME TO THE UNITED STATES--TALK A LITTLE ABOUT THAT.

A As I said, I left practically the last boat. And the reason I could leave Japan at all at least I was tipped off there fast enough.

Being the middleman or liaison man between the committee, the Jewish Committee, and the American Consulate. I asked the Consulate one time how long would it take if I apply for a visa. The quotas were in use in those days. They're still in use I understand. And he says, "Well under the present conditions, maybe twenty, twenty-two years, something like that."

And as the business went on there with the Consulate shortly thereafter a similar affect in retrospect it lasted

maybe a year or so. The Atlantic was closed that's why the immigrants went via Siberia, Japan and to places like North, South and Middle America and so on.

When Russia was attacked by Germany, that escape route was closed, too. And so the American Consul said, "Now we've got quotas. You can go now if you want to." I said, "Yes, by all means." And that was the middle of '41.

Q SO WHEN WERE YOU DRAFTED--WHERE DID YOU LAND?

A San Francisco. Yes I think. You got me now. I left via Seattle. I think I landed in San Francisco.

Q AND WHAT DID YOU DO ONCE YOU GOT HERE?

A I--my brother here, the younger brother, was here already, and I took over his apartment room and went immediately to a Jewish-relief organization here, asking them if they know where I can get a job. And three days later I had a job in San Francisco. That's what I did.

Q AND THEN YOU WERE DRAFTED?

A Okay. Let's go on from the job business. I was, in those days, I was cutting leather coats. I was familiar with leather and although I didn't learn this particular business I could handle it very well. And again I must brag, I handled it very well. That was better than the natives, and I always tried to save leather, which the others didn't. They were only out for speed. It was piece work.

And I got a special union permit to work. And that ended when the business got a little more slack and I was fired. I was let go. And I told them, "Well if it starts going again, I'm ready and willing to come back."

But in the mean time I ran into somebody else, who was a non-union shop and he hired me, too. And I was--he paid less of course, since he was non-union. And again I saved him money because I utilized the leather better, you know. And leather is not like cloth where it's universally clean and even and without blemishes. Leather has a cut here and a blemish there so you have to navigate around it. And the way you do it can save a lot of leather. So I saved him leather. And I told him that and I asked him for a little better price because the conditions were worse than the union conditions. His patterns were not as good and so on. And he couldn't see it.

Then all of a sudden my old company wanted me back and I said to him, "Good-bye." And then he didn't want to let me go because he realized I saved him money, you know. But I went anyway.

And it was only a couple of weeks or maybe not even that much or was it a month, I don't know. But it was the maximum, I think. I got invitations by our Government, greetings, salutations: " You have been nominated to be a

General in the American Army."

Q RIGHT.

A And that was in March, 1942.

Q SO WHERE DID YOU GO FROM THERE TO BOOT CAMP?

A Then I spent most the time here in the San Joaquin Valley, Lemoore, California. It was a brand new field at the time we got there. It's now our biggest Naval air base.

And what I didn't know is that they had me packed to the post. I was not at the general disposition like soldiers shipped out here or there and so on. But I was shipped out anyway later on and went to Pecos, Texas at another air base and different training flying schools.

Q HOW COME THEY HAD YOU--

A I'm coming to this now. I got an invitation to the headquarters, and they wanted to test my German language ability. Now I was tested then by Americans that learned it in high school and so on. I could have, of course, made circles around them, you know. They found that out pretty soon.

But there I found out that I was packed to this post for future employment in certain branches of the Government. I mean, for a position where you needed language.

Q SO WAS THAT GOOD?

A It turned out to be very good, yeah. I can't kick.

From Pecos, Texas I was shipped to Greensboro, North Carolina. There they discovered all of a sudden that I had furlough coming. So they shipped me back to Pecos where I had my wife already established, you know. Those three days on the road with one handkerchief and a bad cold.

And so back to North Carolina. And from there to Camp Kilmore in New York or New Jersey rather to be shipped overseas.

And it was just at the time when the Battle of the Bulge started. And they didn't have room on the boats for more or less nonessential guys like me. So we stayed around there a little while. And then the time came and we left. We went over to Europe. Where I came from.

Q WERE YOU IN GERMANY THEN? DID YOU LAND IN-- WHERE DID YOU LAND?

A I was stationed--I landed in--near Glasgow--a place, Greenock or somewhere. I forget the name. It's near Glasgow anyway. It's on the west side of England, northwest side of England.

And we were transported to London and headquartered at Sheffield because it's the European headquarters of Eisenhower. This was all camouflaged and some--and we worked from there out of there and prepared ourselves, so to speak, to be shipped over to Germany.

Now our outfit, the U.S.S.B.S., United States Strategic Bombing Survey was supposed to establish to find out what could have been done to shorten the war. And in England, in London we were distributed to certain sub-outfits of the U.S.S.B.S. And I was detoured to the Submarine Department.

And the head of our outfit said well he needs one man and what about it if you need--Meibergen speaks German well enough. So Meibergen was appointed. Maybe I'll tell you the rest of the story, which is--I was just going too far ahead. I better not do. So let's leave it at that. Anyway we went to uh--

Q ARE YOU GOING TO TELL THE STORY LATER?

A If you want to hear it. We went from there to Brussels where we stayed a few days. And then went to Germany by jeep by Aachen, which was a city on the French border. It was of course knocked out as anything. There was big fighting going on there. And from there to Essen, a big industrial city where Coup, the main ammunition factories are located and from there we went to Cologne, from Cologne to Hamburg, from Hamburg to Bremen.

And there it so happens that while I was stationed in Bremen, armistice was breaking out. And I went the next day to the town mayor, which is the chief of the American army for that city, and told him I'm coming from 55 kilometers,

maybe what is it, 35, 40 miles north of here. I would like to go there. And either he or he made me acquainted with an officer or captain, I think it was a major, I don't know. He says, "Let's go tomorrow morning." And so to speak, the next morning I was up in my home town.

And I was supposed to drive the jeep. An officer was not supposed to drive. My driving experience consisted of maybe three or four half hours of driving in Berlin before I left and then no more. So you can see how good it is. I had to make an army license on a jeep straight away. I could do this fine, but I was lousy. So a little bit out of Bremen, I came too close to a wagon with bushes on top. And he says, "Okay, I'll take over." So we went up to Bremerhaven.

Incidentally we went through a little town on the way from Bremen to Bremerhaven which is called Uetersen. My grandparents came from there, my father of course too. My grandparents lived there and a few uncles too. And on the way there was Jewish cemetery. I asked him to stop by there and he did. And what do you know? There was not one stone standing, one tomb stone, except four or five of my family. The only ones just by coincidence. If the Nazis destroyed it, I don't know. Close by was a shipyard and it most likely got bombed and might have hit them too. But only the stones of my family were left. I have pictures of that. I can

prove it.

So we went--we went on to Bremerhaven and there I had an aunt living, who was Aryan originally, married a Jewish fellow, my uncle, became Jewish. And had a heck of a time under the Nazis too, which is a different chapter. But anyway I rang the bell and out she came, looked at me, looked again. And I didn't say anything and nothing happened. Of course I was in uniform, steel hammered, goes up to here. And then after a while I said, "Don't you know me anymore?" in German of course. And then she recognized me. And you should have seen that face and this get together at that time. She didn't expect me to show up as an American soldier that went to Japan first and comes back there. She was in tears and she could never forget that. I prepared myself with a few cans and so on and donated them to her. And I went back a second time.

Q WAS YOUR UNCLE STILL ALIVE?

A No, my uncle conveniently died before the war. But his son was around, he's here. And that is the son, the guy that I mentioned you must not mention concentration camps or anything about the Nazis. He just can't tolerate it because he was in the Konzen. Konzen is German for concentration camp. Anyway it was a coincidence, was a funny coincidence, that I was just in the right spot.



Q WHEN YOU FIRST WENT OVER TO GERMANY, WHAT DID YOU SEE?

A What did you see?

Q YOU WERE LIKE IN THE FRONT LINES OF--OR WERE YOU FOLLOWING?

A You probably didn't see the marina right now. It was a little worse than that. All the cities that I went to and I guarantee that the others were not fearing any better, like Aachen, Cologne, Essen, Hamburg, Bremen, Bremenhaven, nothing but the rubble. I mean the outlying districts were preserved. Hamburg, for instance, part of it was comparatively preserved. But others, I drove in a jeep for miles this a way and that a way, square miles. And there was not one stone that you could use. Not to speak of a room or something.

Q DID YOU LIBERATE ANY CONCENTRATION CAMPS?

A No, but one thing I would like to say. Being in this outfit I was in, we were directly under the War Department and we were, call it the rights to have extra secret files or what have you. And I don't know where it happened. I was stationed in Hamburg at the time and I looked through books there. And I can't recall anymore where it was. And there I found this cousin of mine listed as being in Theresienstadt and could we report this to his

mother who didn't know where he was. That's shortly after the war. I mean this is a coincidence.

Q YEAH. DID YOU GO SEE ANY OF THE CAMPS? HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE CAMPS?

A What camp?

Q WELL WHEN YOU'RE IN THE ARMY WHEN THEY STARTED DISCOVERING THE CAMPS?

A Well we knew it all along as a matter of fact. We saw films of it, camps that were liberated. See the Germans fought in the army, the allied armies, all the way back. As a matter of fact by the time I came to Bremen, there was still fighting going on the outskirts of Bremen. But my outfit was not a combat outfit, we were investigating outfit. But the fighting was going on just the same. When I was in Cologne, Cologne is usually referred to as left of the line or right of the line and we were on the one side that was taken. The other side was not taken yet. Oh there I have a story to tell if you want to hear it.

Q YEAH, I DO.

A Being an investigating outfit, we had to stay in Cologne for quite awhile until the other side of the line was taken. And one day it was taken. But the Germans had a nasty habit if the bridge wasn't bombed out by allied forces, the Germans blew them up. And there is a very important

bridge in Cologne that leads from one side of the line to the other side of the line where (Ker Doits) it's called is situated and the bridge hang in the water and so for us to go to the other side, we had to crawl half in the water and then over this bridge to get to the other side because the bridge was hanging in the water. And there we discovered some books that were of interest to this outfit.

And since you cannot drive a bus, the bus, a jeep let's say or truck, over the bridge that is half submerged, we had to go to Bonn, the present capital of Germany, where they had the pioneer bridge built to get to the other side. So we went along the line. I don't even know if it's north or south, now until we came to this bridge went over there. That is the first lieutenant, I think he was, and myself by jeep to pick up the books on the other side of the line.

And we came to the other side. And we saw lots of columns of refugees. And then we went on the other side of the line, up again to because we had to go to the spot where the line of the bridge. And we drove and where we drove and we didn't get anywheres and all over the white flags were out. But it seems the guy, the first lieutenant, did not speak German, but I did. So I told him many times let me ask where we are. We didn't know because there was still some fighting going on. And the rules wouldn't have done much

good in a full-fledged war. So after a long time I finally convinced him. And I asked and he didn't like what he heard. So we cocked our guns and backtailed.

Q YOU'RE BEHIND THE LINES?

A That was the Battle of the Bulge going on at that time. So we didn't want exactly to go into that so we went back.

Q SO DID YOU EVER GET YOUR BOOKS?

A Yes, later on we got some books there, I think. No, no, I think I saw the books. No, I only saw the books when we crawled over the bridge there. No, I don't think we ever got the books.

Q WHAT WAS YOUR AUNT'S STORY? YOU SAID THAT WAS A SEPARATE STORY.

A My aunt being originally born Christian, having become a Jewish lady, was having a very tough time with the Nazis. Now she had a business, but she wasn't allowed in her business. But she was detailed, to my hometown has a very big fishing port. As a matter of fact the biggest or second biggest in the world, not like Fisherman's Wharf. And she was detailed to work at the fish port cutting off fish heads and so on. And so this got lousy cold in Germany, some parts particularly. It was not easy work. She was not accustomed to this and that's what they made her do.

And the interesting story is, to me at least, I was working for the holocaust center, maybe the second time, or maybe the first time and somebody threw a file on the table. And I saw it was my hometown and I opened it. And what do you know? Two-third of this file deals my aunt, the trouble she had over there. They wanted to what they called Aryanize, that is Gentilimize, Christianize or whatever you want to call it Aryanize. They considered the Hitler's were Aryans, wanted to convert the company to an Aryan company and she was a very clever lady, my aunt, and she fought it tooth and nails. And it went up to every step of the way until it finally ended up with the top-notch man in Germany in this department. And I think she was able to drag it out until finally the end of the war came. She had to change the name of the company to her brother, who was of course still Aryan. And she wasn't there actually. But she had to turn home at night and from the fish port and could direct her brother maybe doing this and that. And so that is the story about my aunt.

Q DID YOU LOOK UP ANYBODY ELSE THAT YOU USED TO KNOW WHEN YOU GOT HOME?

A There was no anybody else. They completely, I mean who couldn't go, couldn't immigrate, was just killed was deported and killed.

As a matter of fact I think it is written in this file that I told you about when the Jews in Bremerhaven got notice at ten o'clock tomorrow morning you assemble at the station, you take your suitcase or handbag or what have you and toothbrush, et cetera. She wanted to help them and was there with some workers of her company to help to cart their stuff to the station and to help them. And the Nazis wouldn't allow it and of course they were never seen again, good friends of ours. So what else can I tell you?

Q WHEN YOU WERE IN AMERICA, DID PEOPLE BELIEVE YOU, THE STORIES YOU WERE TELLING THEM ABOUT WHAT GERMANY WAS LIKE?

A Oh, I think by then it was very known as a matter of fact I might throw this in. Me being born in Germany, coming from Japan, I was twice as suspicious and but being Jewish I think they put two and two together. And I figured it was my war even more so than anybody else's. Because I knew what was going on there and people here knew too, a lot of people did. Maybe not the full extent of it. It's too grotesque, too enormous, to know the details, let's say. But that the Jews were persecuted there I think this must have been very known here.

Q HOW DID PEOPLE REACT WHEN THE SUBJECT WOULD COME UP?

A Well again, like the example I gave you before. People did not know what--how the thing worked, you know how methodically the Germans worked. Like the statement on the Queen Mary where some of the guys there, why don't you go to the Government and complain about it? Well that's fine. Howdy doody I said. It won't work. You go to concentration camp or extermination camps. It's just a little faster.

But you can read stories. I mean there were--we saw films where people, let's say Polish ambassador or something like that, who was probably fleeing to England and being in the Government in exile or something like that, who pleaded with Roosevelt to bomb Auschwitz or something like that and make it impossible or at least harder for the Germans to exterminate there. Well he said, Roosevelt there with his cigarette holder and so on. Well the ambassador or whatever he was I don't know he was asking what am I telling my people over there. Roosevelt said, let me imitate him, "You tell your people we will win the war." In other words we will win it, and then they will get the bad end of it. We will punish them. But that didn't scare the Germans too much.

Q NO.

A As a matter of fact nothing scared them, even in the beginning. When the Germans started out, they had--the Germans were forbidden to have a regular army after the First

World War. And then finally Hitler built it up and he had maybe a couple of divisions or I don't know how many he had. And then he blocked his way through there. He marched through the Rhineland, which he was not permitted to do. It was occupied. So the guy had guts, grant him that. And when he went into Czechoslovakia, there was still time. No, but Germany thought he got peace in our time. He got a piece of our time all right, but no peace. It was still time then. Nobody was armed. You know how poorly armed America was. We trained with broom sticks, saw things, pictures of that. But then again the combined allied forces, they could have put a stop to this if they wanted to.

It's the same now. If you have country that disbehaves and there are two sides to it. I always say for one government to go ahead and let's say assassinate Hitler, that doesn't sit too well with our morals. But what could have spared what kind of grief and could have spared the world? Fifty million people died, that's a lot of people. And this just because this one idiot, I might say or fanatic, wanted to rule the world. So the question is: Is it better to kill one man and save fifty million or not? I don't know the answer. I can't kill anyone. But it might have done fine, who knows? They tried it over there. They tried to kill Hitler. I saw him driving by in Berlin, him and a few other



of the big wigs. This wasn't easy to kill him. They drive like a house on fire. And the assessed troops were lining the streets when they came by. So it was not that easy. Otherwise I'm sure there would have been a few people who wished to finish him.

Q DID YOU EVER THINK OF GETTING INVOLVED IN A POLITICAL GROUP TO FIGHT IT?

A Over there?

Q YEAH.

A No. I was--I was never political minded or pronounced one party affiliated or something like that. But it was even impossible. I mean as long as we could vote. I'll let you in on a little secret I voted social democratic. No, I didn't even I voted democratic, which was about center or a little bit left of center you might say. But that's as far as it goes. You were not allowed.

You could not talk to your next neighbor in Germany, even in my times and say what you wanted to say. And I told you I took liberties when I talked to my customers and so on. And one word by them would have been the end of me. So I took chances I would say. But you telling one bad word about the party or something like that and you would end up in a concentration camp. That was for sure.

Q YOU KNOW PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE LESSONS OF THE

HOLOCAUST. WHAT ARE SOME OF THOSE LESSONS THAT YOU THINK ARE?

A How were the lessons were learned, you can see this very well. There are people in this day and age they just don't believe it. And since it is so grotesque and so unbelievable that people can do that, some get away with it. And we have skin heads and Ku Klux Klan, et cetera, et cetera. And you can't convince them. You can't convert them. They know it all. It didn't even happen.

So what are you going to do? We try through documentation here like you do and the library here and to establish for all times what actually happened. Now I just recently had I think my brother brought this over from Germany, he gave to me to read and I read it. And these are eyewitness reports, not by Jews or something like that, by participating Nazis. Now this book in my opinion is worse a thousand times than what I say because these are the ones who perpetrated it. And they admit it now. And we all have the book on my instigation here and we have it here.

Q WHAT'S THE BOOK CALLED?

A It's called something Frohe Zeiten, I think ironically it meant nice times. I think that's what it was called. I forget in the meantime I'm too old.

MR. CAMERA MAN: 59?

A Huh?

MR. CAMERA MAN: 59?

BY PEGGY COSTER:

Q Not very old.

A Thank you very much.

Q WELL IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU DIDN'T ENCOUNTER MUCH  
DISBELIEF WHEN YOU CAME OVER HERE?

A I encountered disbelief. Well there was the majority of the people, they could not fathom what was going on, they couldn't. There's the examples I gave you. And they knew most likely that there was something going on over there, but not the extent of it. And when you talk to Germans now, I mean even those that you might almost say you can trust because they're friendly to you and so on and so on. They always maintain they didn't know that it was that bad. They knew, they must have known because in my times people disappeared, Jews disappeared, Communists disappeared and so on. They must have known, but the extent of it maybe not.

But then again when you, as I did I was in 1945, end of war and we were quartered in Bremen in some guy's house there. And he maintained, no, he was never a Nazi, never. Those people over there, yes. This was always the other people over there. But then again since we were quartered in

his house, he found his membership card in the S.S. and you can trust them that much. So he didn't do anything. And the S.S., as you may know the black shirts, they were the elite over there.

Q WHEN DID YOU COME BACK AFTER THE WAR?

A When did I come back from the war?

Q YEAH.

A End of '45, I think I have it in booklet here if you want to know. But it was the end of '45.

But I want to tell you something else. I was stationed in Bremen, this was before I was stationed with the S.S. man. This was an S.D. headquarters. S.D. means (Szethzen) security service. They were on top of the S.S., in other words worse than the S.S.

And when we got there, we were--there was still the food on the table and so on. This was--they just left. And we got there, of course I was very very much afraid that they boobytrapped the joint and we looked around. And we went to the cellar. There a heap of stuff that they swiped from people, antiques or stuff like that. And in the corner there was standing an oven. And in Germany the rooms were usually heated by oven and not by stove. And I heard some ticking there, tick, tick, tick.

And I mobilized the whole gang and thought ah ha if we

couldn't find where it came from. And I advised my, there what is it, my commanding captain or whatever we had there, let's get out of here. He couldn't see it. So we stayed there and nothing happened or I wouldn't be here otherwise. But it was the rule rather than the exception that they boobytrapped these outfits and then that was it.

But anyway these guys just left everything was still standing like they were still there. Oh this is I why I said this. So I snooped on further. And they had a bookshelf there and I got one book, this dealt with the Jews in Vienna. The book was under the issue by the Nazis or some such thing and they made comparisons between the yeah, well Nazis and the Jews. Well by Nazis I mean the whole general, the population you might say, not just Nazis, the general population and the Jews. How do you know? They characterized it by murders, theft, burglaries and et cetera, et cetera. The Jews faired about ten times better than the general population in most any category. So the Jews were the bad guys and they were the good guys. The Jews were ten times more law abiding than the general population. But, no, they were the bad boys. They had to be killed. I just had a word and I forgot--the reasoning behind their anti-Semitism.

Q WHAT OTHER THINGS, WHAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND ON YOUR RETURN TO GERMANY?

A There are a lot of Jews that wouldn't go to Germany no matter what. Of course when the army tells you to go there, you go. I didn't have these scruples. I don't know. For one thing, maybe I faired too well. I didn't go to a concentration camp. I mean they hindered my business of course and if I would have stayed a week longer, I wouldn't have had a business anymore, it just so happened. But with relatives being killed off left and right and how they were killed, this torturing business and starving them to death you know the concentration camp pictures It's really understandable. I understand also guys, like my cousin for instance, he just can't stomach that stuff. Every time they are reminded they relive it and it was just too much, too gruesome. So of course things happened there.

I went back. There was a little place in between close to the city of Bremen and they had a submarine base there. And although I didn't see, they had these shelters there. They drove them into shelters that they had prepared. I mean big roofs, heavy roofs, over the top and so on. And there was a guy. He said, "How come you speak German so well?" I told him I learned it in school which wasn't a lie. But I don't think he quite believed it. I think turning aside he said he must have been Jewish or something like that. And these situations happen on all occasions too.

Incidentally since I had access to these secret material, we were given some--the admiralty in England turned them out, these submarine pens as they were called. They had in France to they made them bigger and bigger. They had enormous reinforcement on top of them. And of course with every weapon you invent, the other guy invents a counter weapon and tries to hit you back. So we invented some. There were not block busters, but they may have been bigger than block busters and concrete penetrating bombs and so on. And we almost got through it and we looked like in a earthquake a little bit off the ceiling and these French and this particular French submarine pen, but that's as far as it got. We still couldn't reach them.

Q THESE WERE AIR RAID SHELTERS?

A Not air raid shelters. The submarines drove into this pen and let's say it's built into a rock or something like that. And in this case, probably in most cases they had enormously thick ceilings, reinforced, steel reinforced concrete ceilings and the concrete had to be a special hardened kind. And yet we almost got there, knocked off a little bit of the cement ceiling.

Q OKAY. WHEN DID YOU GET MARRIED?

A During the army. During my army days, 1943.

Q AND WHAT'S HAPPENED SINCE THE WAR?

A The war went on and on. But of course we won because I was in the army. But the war was going on. And my wife followed me to Pecos, Texas, as we were stationed there. As I said they sent me out to Greensboro, North Carolina, which was a staging area. That is covered there that I had a furlough coming. So I had to go all the way back to see my wife in Pecos, Texas because she was working there in the engineering office or something like that. I forget what office it was. No, I worked in the engineering office, but she worked for some officers club or something like that and they just built army housing there on this field. And no sooner that we moved into that I was shipped out as it always is. And then in Greensboro, North Carolina, the staging area. That sounds almost like an earthquake, doesn't it?

Q EVERYTHING DOES HERE NOW.

A We had there they collected all these guys that spoke more or less German. And this was very interesting we marched along the streets called cadence and so on and Achtung and so on. That was a joke, but the whole thing was no joke. But I came out all right. So I can't kid.

Q LET ME JUST CHECK MY QUESTIONS HERE.

A Uh-huh.

Q HOW COME YOU CHANGED YOUR NAME FROM SIGFREY  
TO FRED?



A     Sigfrey is a specifically a specific German name. And I didn't want to bother my army, my fellow soldiers with that name and the last syllable is similar to Fred, Sigfrey to Fred. So in the army it was already Fred. But I was a year in the army when I was able to make citizen because I was a member of the armed forces. And I was asked, do you want to change your name on the citizenship papers? And I said--he says you can decide when you come to the judge when it comes to the swearing in. So when it came to the swearing in, I said yes, I would like to change my name. I would like to make it Fred. And he says forget it. This would stick with you anyway. So I'm still legally Sigfrey.

Q     WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO MOVIES ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

A     Well, I have no opinion about that. It's very good. I mean the way they do it. It should bring it to the people. However, and that is the however, you open the television, nine out of ten, there is shooting going on. There is murdering going on. There is mayhem and there is everything. So we are so traumatized to this kind of violence. That this is just another violence to them, to a lot of people. And that it takes so much away from it. They just treat it as another movie I feel. But no film, no movie, no book can really tell the story.

I mean if you are yourself in there, how would you feel if they make roll call and let you fall out naked, ice and snow around you? That's not enough. They pour cold water on you and let it freeze on you. And then drag it out for hours, all these things that they did. That's just one thing coming to mind. I mean these are sadistic treatments that they got. How can you picture this in the film or can you report it so that it becomes real? It cannot be done.

Q YEAH. WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU WHEN PEOPLE TELL YOU TO FORGET THE PAST?

A Forget, you can't. I mean what happened, I mean even with my old age, forgetfulness, you don't forget these things. As a matter of fact old people usually remember what happened in those days. My memory was never too good, but yet what I told you I can back up, I can back it. This is not thin air that I reported here but--

Q WHAT DO YOU TELL PEOPLE WHEN THEY ASK YOU WHY NOT FORGET THE PAST? WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER?

A If you do that then what we do here is meaningless. I know people don't want to be reminded of these bad things. And for sure the Germans don't appreciate this is always have against them. And maybe in a way I would even say one should put a bottom line there and say let's forget it or something like that. Because the present generation, as a

rule, has nothing to do with it. And they don't want to be blamed for the behaviors of their predecessors there. But yet you can't forget it. You must remember this so it won't happen again. History usually repeats itself. Maybe we can stop it in a mild way at least or prolong it or what have you. But it should definitely not be forgotten. We can forgive them. The ones that did it you can't even forgive.

But I will say this as maybe as surprising coming from me. It was so in Germany. You did not have your own free will to do what you deal with. You were ordered and in Germany was most everything by orders. And when you're ordered, a soldier is ordered to shoot a bunch of Jews or what have you. Either the soldier shoots them or he gets shot. I had read also stories in one book, I forget which one it was that they were a little lenient in that respect. But that is the basic understanding. You either did as you were told or else. And your life is usually closer to you than somebody else's. That explains a lot of things. You could not use your own judgement.

Once Hitler had the power, there was not getting away from it. It went actually I mean stories like this circulate and they are no doubt true. If not this particular story but stories on this aura. Let's say little Joe went to school on the second of May and there was a May demonstration the day

before. And the teacher would ask him, ask the class well how it was going yesterday? Everybody enjoyed himself or something like that and you marched and little Joe when his turn came to be asked says, "Oh, my father said I don't like all that stuff. The heck with it." And so on and the next morning papa goes to police headquarters and from there to concentration camp maybe.

So you could not talk even in your family, maybe not. Suppose a husband and wife is very friendly today. Tomorrow they get a divorce and then there is friction. And the wife tells about the husband, what he once said. You know this was all right when they were together, when they were married. The next day concentration camp on that aura. There were no two people that could communicate it openly and truly. That is the trick that they used. If there were otherwise, well there could be more position. And often the Jews are blamed and people wonder why didn't the Jews put up more resistance? Well, the Jews came under this category too. Among themselves maybe they could talk, but they could not form an organization that could put up resistance besides it takes arms or anything. And where would they get them? Individuals put up resistance naturally, but no concerted effort could have been made.

Q     YEAH. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN PEOPLE TALK ABOUT

FORGIVENESS NOW? YOU KNOW LIKE THAT GUY THAT THEY WANTED TO LET OUT. I DON'T KNOW WHO HE WAS. THIS BUT HE WAS A TOP GUY AND HE WAS IN JAIL IF HE HADN'T DIED YET.

A (Rudolf Hess) maybe?

Q PROBABLY.

A Well he died in the meantime. Well the crimes committed by these guys, these Nazis, they are so horrendous. You go to jail here for life if you kill somebody maybe under extenuating circumstance or something like that. You go to jail. But these guys they have millions and millions and millions on their conscious.

Q UH-HUH.

A They shouldn't get away with it. You can't forgive them. I mean say there are lots of individuals that just followed orders and that's usually their excuse. But if somebody tells me I should shoot an innocent person, I can't do that. I can't do that. I came to Germany with a gun in my hand or at least at my side. I can go around and shoot just indiscriminately if I'm attacked it's another story. A soldier meets enemy soldier, it's either him or the other guy. So that's the way it works, but innocent people and unarmed people and so on that never done wrong. Before I immigrated I had to prove I had to go to the police and bring that certificate that I have never been punished for any

crime whatsoever. Otherwise, I wouldn't have even gotten out. So me, the Jew, who would have been killed for nothing, has never done anything, has never committed a crime even proved by the stamp of the Nazi's authority. Yes, what do you make of this?

Q THAT'S ALL THAT I CAN THINK OF. THANK YOU A LOT FOR--

A You're quite welcome. I hope I did what you wanted to do. But as I say, I was very lucky having escaped the concentration camp. A few more months or so would have been a different story. And I thank you for the interview and the camera operator.

Q HOW'S IT GONE SINCE THE WAR?

A Pardon?

Q HOW'S YOUR LIFE GONE SINCE THE WAR?

A Since the war?

Q YEAH.

A Well, I became a Leverworth's repairman here being having to do something with leather which means not just leather but it was anything made of plastic wood, what have you, and I did fine. I have no complaints.

Q DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE HOLOCAUST CENTER WHEN IT WAS BEGINNING?

A Yes. And strange that you asked. One of our

bosses here Lonnie Dobin, why she was one of the founders and principles, president was a customer of mine. And she recruited me. So I'm in here already for ten years or so.

Q HOW HAS THIS EXPERIENCE CHANGED YOUR LIFE?

A The holocaust?

Q THE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE HOLOCAUST CENTER?

A Well, I mean all of this holocaust stuff is not new to me. I have read it before I came to the holocaust center and when you're here you have more and more of it. Every book you touch here is holocaust. And if you wouldn't have strong nerves or something like this, you wouldn't be here I guess. When you see those pictures and read those stories, you have to have a strong stomach. And as I said I was recruited by Mrs. Dobin, one of the first members and presidents of the Holocaust Center.

Q WERE YOU AWARE OF THAT BUSINESS OUT AT THAT SYNAGOGUE WHERE THE ANTI-SEMITITIC LITERATURE OPENED UP A CRUX IN THAT SYNAGOGUE?

A I live close by. You mean on Tarver.

Q PROBABLY.

A The (Rudolf Hess) Bookstore or something like that it was called, I think.

Q YOU'RE KIDDING.

A That's just opposite the synagogue.

Q RIGHT .

A It is.

Q WERE THERE A LOT OF SURVIVORS?

A I live three blocks away. I was aware of it, yes.

Q TELL ME ABOUT THAT?

A I can't tell you anything. I wasn't involved, but there were I believe some demonstrations in front of their door and naturally that close to synagogue I was just kitty corner there of the (Le Emena) synagogue. This is, well I don't know. It didn't do any good. And furthermore, to me and anyway it's a disgrace that we have those people and skin heads and Ku Klux Klan and et cetera. If they haven't learned now and look at these guys. What are they, the skin heads? What are they when they catch them? They're murderers, bank robbers. Usually it's the exception that confirms the rule. There it's the other way around. They are not the exception. They are the criminals and the exception is that there is not a decent guy among them. If there is I don't know. But every time I open the newspaper and they caught one of those guys or something like that, they're criminals throughout. I mean with I don't know of an exception.

So, again like in Vienna the Jews. These are the good guys, the skin heads and the Nazis. The Jews are the bad



people. In Germany before the war we lived about five hundred thousand Jews, that means less than one percent of the population. Now can you imagine that hundred people cannot stand up to one hundred good Aryans, to one bad Jew if you want it that way? Oh it's so silly, so silly.

I see it too. Look at the Jews in Israel. How many are they? How many Arabs are there? No, they need this little piece of land. They need it. Do I want to go back to Germany? No. The Palestines want to go back there. I can understand that mind you. I can't understand it. They want to go back to their place but it was a piece of desert when they had it. Now that it is good, sure they want to go back. How much more country is there for the Arabs? God knows maybe two hundred times as much as the size of Israel maybe even more than that, the size of Israel. They can't spare this little piece of land. The other Arabs won't let the Palestenians go into their countries either. The Egyptians don't want them and I don't think the others want them. So but the Jews got invited to come to Israel. They absorbed them. And they built it up. And now that it's built up they must have it back and the land was after all, the way I understand the Jews bought land and they were glad to get the other stuff for the piece of centers they had there.

Q UH-HUH.

A But now that they can grow tomatos on there they have to have it back.

Q WELL I CAN'T THINK OF ANY MORE QUESTIONS.

A I thank you very much.

Q WELL THANK YOU.

A And let's hope it does some good.

Q IT WILL I'M SURE OF IT. I'M SURE IT HAS.