

Today is June 27, 1995, and my name is Ellen [PERSONAL NAME] interviewer with the Holocaust Oral History Project in San Francisco. Today, I will be interviewing Harry North, who was a young soldier in the American Army. And I'd like you to introduce yourself and tell us about that period in your life.

OK. I'm Harry North. And I was born in Chicago, Illinois, July 8, 1925. I'm almost 70 now. I'm, in fact, looking forward to my 70th birthday shortly. I grew up in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona, initially, where my father was in school at the university and later where he was employed in the Phoenix area as an irrigation engineer.

We were living in Phoenix at the start of the Second World War. And I remember my father had been given a new company car that had a radio in it, which was a novelty. And we were listening to that radio in the backyard on Sunday morning, or early afternoon, when the first word of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor came in.

And I was, at that time, halfway through high school. And there were a good many young men, boys who left school or tried to enlist at that time. I was still too young. But when I graduated in 1943, why, the war was well underway.

And we were all very much aware of all of the young-- the boys in my graduating class expected to either enlist or to be drafted. During that period, I had attempted to enlist in the Navy and then the Marines. And in those cases, they always turned me down because I couldn't see well enough without my glasses.

The Army didn't have that kind of a-- they weren't that concerned. So they drafted me in shortly after I graduated from high school in June of 1943. And I was inducted in November of '43 and entered a program called ASTP, Army Specialized Training Program. That was designed to train high school graduates in engineering, medicine, dentistry a number of specialized fields.

And after completion of our initial basic training, I did my basic at Fort Benning, Georgia. And while I was there, the ASTP program was phased out because the Normandy landings were coming up. And they thought that they were going to need infantrymen more than they were going to need engineers, which was what I was supposed to become. I finished basic, and then went to camp Livingston, Louisiana, where I trained to do advanced infantry training with the 86th Division, Black Hawk.

And there's an interesting sidelight on my eyesight. During the period between graduation from high school and being inducted, my parents thought that it would be a good idea if I acquired some skills that might be useful, since I was going to be drafted anyway. So I went to business school because they said, with eyes like yours, you're going to be a company clerk or something like that. So I studied typing and bookkeeping.

When the army got hold of me, what they did is they made a sniper out of me, which didn't seem to be consistent with poor eyesight. But that's what I was, at least in training. And I completed my advanced infantry training in August and then moved up to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and sailed in September on the Queen Elizabeth for [INAUDIBLE], Scotland. And it was an unescorted voyage.

Queen Elizabeth was fast, and the submarine threat was much reduced by that time. And I spent a few weeks in England, but the Normandy landings were long past. And the front lines had advanced out of France and the low countries and essentially were at the borders of Germany by the time I landed in France. And--

How old were you at this time?

I was 18. And at that time, I was 19. So by various trucks and by foot, why, we eventually got to a replacement camp up in Belgium. I never was sure exactly where, Belgium or Luxembourg. And then I was assigned as a replacement to the 104th Infantry Division, L Company, 414th Infantry Regiment, and joined that organization outside of Stolberg near Aachen.

Shortly before the initial attack, the division was taking over from 3rd Armored Division, which, at that time, was occupying Aachen. A few days after we started our-- or I had joined the division, why, they attacked from that position

and started the drive toward the right. Is that essentially what you want?

What I'd like to know is how you were given-- when you said you didn't know where you were going, Luxembourg or--

Oh, no.

Now, how was information disseminated from above? Were you just taken by surprise? Was it day by day, hour by hour?

Oh, there wasn't an attempt to really keep infantry replacements, or the infantry foot soldier, informed as to what was going on. The Stars and Stripes, which was the Army newspaper, would be available occasionally. If you were fortunate-- you have to be in a rear area, yeah, there were copies of Stars and Stripes.

But for the frontline soldier, which is what I was, you were fortunate that you ever saw one. And normally, you got information from your squad leader, sergeant or the platoon sergeant. They would tell you what they expected to do, whether there was going to be an advance, whether you were going to attack, or whether you were going to stay where you were.

Life was reduced to trying to stay dry, trying to stay warm. Having grown up in desert country, and having had big feet, the army had great difficulty finding shoes that were large enough that would hold enough socks to help keep my feet warm. My feet stayed wet and cold for that whole winter.

And our war was fought from village or town to the next village or town. We didn't spend much time in foxholes. When we did, why, they were usually wet, muddy. Germany, in November, December, can be cold. And it's rainy, snowy, foggy, and wore many clothes to stay warm.

Initially, I was terrified somebody was shooting at me. A lot of people were shooting at me. That passed after a while. And my first day in combat, they handed me a package, like this, wrapped in gunny sack material and tied together with cord.

And they handed me a handful of midnighters. I didn't know what they were. And I said, that's a satchel charge. I said, what's a satchel charge? They said, that's 25 pounds of TNT. And there are caps, and there's a fuse. You stick one of these igniters on it, and pull it like that, and then run.

And well, we advanced to get close to the pillbox. You take that, run up to the pillbox, stick it in the opening in the pillbox, and pull the igniter, and then run.

What's the pillbox?

Well, this was a German emplacement, concrete emplacement, where they had machine guns. It didn't matter, because we never got that far. We were pinned down in an open meadowland area on top of a hill, with a hedge running through it. And I spent the afternoon with my satchel charge next to a dead cow, trying to dig a hole in rock while the area was raked with machine gun fire. And there was a continuing mortar barrage.

During that day, the two men that I had met, but I have no idea who they were now, who were the first scouts for the squad, disappeared. What happened to them, I never did hear. But they weren't there at the end of the day.

With dusk, we evacuated that area. We had not achieved our objective. In fact, that particular hill was noted in our division history as being one of the major objectives. It was taken the next day, but not the first day.

But we evacuated from that area to a nearby town. And they told me that I was the first scout the next day. And all I knew about the scout was you seek out the enemy, and you do that by getting out in front and letting people shoot at you because that's the only way that you're going to find them usually.

And from then on, it was fairly obvious that the longer you stayed there with the unit, sooner or later, the other side's going to win. They're going to get you. The odds are that you won't survive, or you will be injured.

And I was fortunate. I went before Thanksgiving of 19-- let's see. When was that? Will it be '44 until the 1st of April of '45, when I was wounded. And that whole period, why, the unit was occasionally bypassed. And we had a brief rest.

But most of the time, we were essentially frontline troops. We may not have been attacking on a daily basis, but we were occupying space on the frontlines. And we're subject to constant harassing machine gunfire, mortar fire, or direct fire, 88s. Excuse me. Go ahead.

But you had said-- initially, I thought you had said that you were actually following another troop.

No.

So you actually were the frontline.

We were the frontline.

And a couple of questions-- I'll ask you one at a time. Did you feel that your training bore any resemblance to the reality?

Oh, yes-- as much as it could. They taught you how to use weapons. And the infiltration courses, crawling around in the dark under barbed wire and having machine guns fired over your head while large explosions were-- not really large-- but explosions went off nearby was good training.

But in all of the time that I was in Europe in combat, I never saw any barbed wire. The only time that I can recall actually lying on the ground under machine gunfire was the first day. The rest of the time, it was walking along a road until somebody shot at you, and then diving for a ditch, being aware of possible enemy aircraft.

Although, the only German aircraft I recall seeing was a town called Welchwieler when of the first German jet aircraft was observed. Thing we feared most was high-velocity anti-air artillery.

The German 88 was a dangerous weapon. And it was something that infantrymen hated because it was direct fire, and there was no defense against it, as far as we were concerned. In fact, our armor had no defense against it either. It could knock out a tank with one round.

But we advanced from Aachen through Eschweiler. And in Eschweiler, something that I discussed with you, one of the places that we entered was a factory building. And as a part of that, in a part of that factory, there appeared to be a very rudimentary dormitory area. It was just about as crude as you could possibly conceive, rough wood benches, essentially.

None of us recognized that as a possible factory that had been operated by slave labor because, by the time we got there, the factory had been shelled and bombed. And there were no people there. But it was obvious that somebody had been forced to stay in that area under conditions that would weren't acceptable for an animal. But we didn't know. We had no awareness of what might have occurred there.

Later, as we move toward the Rhine, we, on occasion, passed people who were wearing what appeared to be prison clothes. There were a couple of individuals that I specifically recall that were wearing striped-- a black and white striped jacket and trousers, who were very emaciated, who were waving at the column as it went by.

And again, as a private soldier, we didn't stop and talk to people, even if you could speak the language. And so they appeared to be prisoners, but we didn't know where they came from. They were obviously not very well-fed prisoners.

I don't know whether they were escapees from a concentration camp or from a prison of some sort. But I think that they were more likely refugees from one of the concentration camps. But--

Did it occur to you that they might have been Jewish? Or--

Didn't enter our mind. I mean, in all the time that I was in service, I don't recall any indication or any mention of prejudice within the units that I served with against any particular religious or-- there were members, of course, who were racially prejudiced. There were some who were prejudiced against Blacks or Negroes. Blacks were Negroes then, not Blacks.

But there was never, to my recollection, any prejudice within the Army or within our units against any religious organization, or group, or ethnic group. And there wasn't an awareness of the fact that there had been persecution of ethnic, religious groups in Germany.

I had had a little exposure to that as I was growing up in that my mother had belonged to one of the lecture groups that brought speakers through Phoenix. And she felt that, as part of my education, that I should go to these talks. And they were interesting.

And there was one particularly that I still recall, and I still have a book that was authored by the speaker. The name was Jan Valtin, and he was an escapee from Germany. And he was speaking of the persecution of religious and ethnic groups in Germany.

And this was long before the United States ever entered the war. I think that it was before a 1939 when the war in Europe started. And I know that I still have the book. I haven't read it recently, so I can't--

And the name of this book?

Beg your pardon?

And the name of this book?

I think it was Out of the Night, and let's say it made enough of an impression on me then that I still remember the author's name and the name of the book. And that's a good many years ago. It was a book that was in our family library, and there was an awareness on the part of my parents of the fact that there may well have been religious persecution underway in Germany.

But it was not a-- although, our family, particularly my mother, had Jewish friends and Jewish people who were active in the same organizations that she was active in. She was active in parent-teacher association. And later, she was home service secretary for the Red Cross during the war. So she was aware of these things, but it wasn't something that was actively discussed during the period that I was growing up, except for the one exposure to that lecture.

At any rate, our division advanced from Aachen toward Cologne. And the 104th division was one of the first two divisions to enter Cologne, and we were there when the Remagen bridge was captured.

And we were suddenly routed out of Cologne before we'd been there very long and taken by truck to Cologne or to Remagen and crossed that bridge and went into essentially a camp on the German side of the Rhine and remained there until the reserves built up enough to launch an attack on the Ruhr area.

And the division was combined with 3rd Armored. They created three regimental combat teams. These were a regiment of tanks or armor and trucks, enough to carry a regiment of infantry.

And there were three of these teams formed, and each one of them took a different route into Germany. And the directions were, don't stop. Stop only if you can't go ahead. Don't stop and take prisoners. Don't stop and fight with anybody who is shooting, fight back, or get into a major engagement with anybody that you're bypassing.

The idea is to get as far as you can behind enemy lines and cause as much damage as you can and then much confusion.

And that was what we were doing when I was wounded. We arrived in the small town where the first platoon of tanks, our first squad of tanks, about five tanks out of the first six, were hit with Panzer crossfire, which was a rocket patrol and a tank grenade.

And I've learned later that I believe that the town was called Werwer, W-E-R-W-E-R, near Paderborn, which was reputed to be an SS Training Center. And it happened that I was in the second squad of tanks. So we were just out of town when the first squad was stopped, and the infantry bailed off the tanks and advanced through the town.

And the following day, I was leading my squad down the road when I was right in front of the farmhouse when a tank pulled out on the other side of the street. And there wasn't any place else to go but inside the farmhouse. Unfortunately, that was the wrong place. It was full of Germans, and they shot me when I went in and shot me several more times while I was in there.

And then they left. And I got up, went out the door that I had originally come in.

Did they think you were dead?

Well, they thought I was dead or dying. And I had observed where they went, and I went back out the front door. And my squad almost shot me as I came out because they didn't expect to see me come out of there. The tank was gone, and I didn't know where it had gone. So I walked down the road to--

Where could they have gone? You ran into the farmhouse. Where did your squad go?

Well, there was an embankment that they could take cover behind a hundred yards down the road. And that's where they were. They had sent for a bazooka so that they would have something with which to fight the tank. And as I stepped out, they almost shot at me with a bazooka. But they didn't.

The Germans had all gone out the back of the farmhouse, where they wouldn't have been observed by my squad. And I got there and reported to my squad leader, Sergeant Bennett, that I didn't know where they'd gone, but they'd gone out the back. And I didn't know where the tank was or where was the aid station.

And at that time, I reached out and found that I had a broken leg. And I'd been shot both hands. And so they said it was down the hill, pointed out the farmhouse. So I started walking. About that time, mortar fire or artillery started coming in. And I tried to run, and I found that I didn't run very well. So I ended up walking.

And at this point, I didn't have either a helmet or a rifle-- I couldn't have done anything with a rifle anyway-- and got to the farmhouse where they-- message center, where they called for a corpsman. And from then on, I was evacuated by armored half-track ambulance and spent a little over the next year, a little more than a year in hospital.

Interestingly enough, I was in San Francisco when the-- I was in Paris when the European war ended. I was in San Francisco when the Japanese War ended, and I missed both celebrations. And I was also in San Francisco when the United Nations charter was signed, which they're celebrating now, the 50th anniversary. And I was in the Dibble General Hospital in Palo Alto.

And that's essentially my war career. My division was one of the divisions that liberated-- or was the division that liberated Nordhausen, the concentration camp. Let's see. Where is that close to? Can't remember the name of the community that it's near. It was camp Dora. It was a very unusual facility. It's actually been documented in a number of books.

The early US rocket program acquired the V-2 rockets that were later used in testing at White Sands at that location. The prisoners there were forced to expand the tunnel system that was in place, and it was an underground factory for V-1 and V-2. It was terror weapons.

And when the Americans occupied that camp, they found stocks of completed and partially completed weapons. And

they knew that this was going to be part of the Russian assault. And already, there was an awareness of the fact that, hey, things aren't necessarily going to be all comfortable with the Russians, so let's get it while the getting's good.

And so they sneaked most of the weapons out of that area and shipped them back to the United States. And this was contrary to the pre-existing agreement with the Russians, as I understand it. So at any rate, it gave us our initial start in the space program.

But the first time that I actually got to Nordhausen was last October when my wife and I went on a battlefield tour, and that was one of the high points of the tour. And we toured that area. One of the interesting things was that the camp is essentially a museum now. It was well-maintained. They didn't appear to be suppressing the knowledge of what had occurred there.

And it was obviously directed at the German population, possibly young people. But it was not set up for English-speaking visitors. The legends on pictures were not English. The people who were knowledgeable were not skilled in English. They had some rudimentary English.

It was obviously set up to present to the Germans that came there, what had happened during the Hitler regime. And they had graphic photographs of what the camp had been like and told one plate what the Nazis have done.

Now, had your fellow squad members gone on to liberate Nordhausen?

Yeah.

And were you able to share, or were they able to share with you ever? Did you ever have communication with any of them after the war?

I lost touch completely with everyone. And until about three years ago, I finally found out that there was a divisional organization and became a member of that organization. And I attended the reunion and so on.

I found members of the same company that I belonged to. But as a replacement, I had not initially trained with these men. And the names that I recalled from that period, I have been unable to identify any individual that I knew then.

We have common memories of some locations and so on. However, even during the tour, the people who were there were not-- they didn't speak about their experiences there. I think that there were still the-- let's say that that tour was an extremely emotional experience for most of those people, for all of us.

And although I have not had personal experiences there, I know that there were men who had. But they were not things that they spoke openly about. They tended to protect those. I guess it's part of the masculine image that most of us try to preserve, that you don't expose your emotions that much. And anyway, they didn't.

When I hear you talk about your experiences, I think of a person who is incredibly courageous. And perhaps it's because you are not talking about the fear. And I'd like to know what was in your mind? It seems that you were operating day-by-day orders from above.

Why did you feel you were there? Did you want to be there? Were you patriotic? Did you sense patriotism from other people? What was your day-to-day emotionality as a soldier, as a 19-year-old boy?

When I started out, very emotional, yeah, patriotic. That was before I got there. And while I was in training, I wanted to be a good soldier. There was apprehension about, was I going to be a good soldier? Was I going to be able to do what was expected of me?

The apprehension grew the closer it got, and it was sheer terror after we actually got into combat, initially. And then it was resignation. And then you became aware that, if I don't get out of this pretty soon, I'm either going to be dead or seriously injured. And the only way to get out of this is to win and make the best use of cover and concealment, and

keep them from shooting me, and shoot them if you have the chance.

Interestingly enough, there isn't that much opportunity, wasn't that much opportunity in my war to shoot at individuals. We were in buildings most of the time. And the Germans will retreat from one town or one farmhouse to another. We would advance from one town or farmhouse to another.

And in most cases, they'd shoot at us from a town until we got close enough from the artillery fire from our side, got heavy enough that they would evacuate it. We'd occupy it. Then they'd shoot at those same buildings that we'd just been shooting at, and we'd shoot from them. And it went on like that from day to day.

And concerns became rather fundamental. Food, cigarettes, a place to get warm, a place to stay dry or reasonably dry, a blanket to roll up in, and a place to sleep. It seems that you were always tired, always cold.

I must say that I was not hungry. Sometimes, I didn't have exactly the rations that I would have liked. But usually I was not dissatisfied with American Army rations. There was a resignation and a realization that the only way that any of us were going to get out of it was to win. The other way out was the proverbial billion-dollar wound, the one that's going to send you home that's not really going to do any significant damage.

Did you have any ideological understanding of Hitler and what he represented?

Oh, yes. There was a significant program during basic on knowing your enemy. And this film program concentrated on the Japanese empire and the German empire and the Italians and the origins of the war. And my recollection is that they were well done.

Was I really knowledgeable? No. Since the war, I have read history dealing with the German, the rise of Hitler and Nazism. I read Mein Kampf. And I read Eisenhower's recollections of the war and a number of different books dealing with that period. And also, I've read some in connection with the Japanese War and the Japanese empire.

But since I was never there, I have always been more interested in the European war. But my father's parents came from England, and they lived with us during the Depression in Phoenix. And they had relatives living in and close to London, in Coventry.

And so all during the early phases, of the war during the Battle of Britain, we regularly received mail from my grandfather's cousin, Nan. And she told us what they were experiencing, the rationing, the sending the children to the country, the bombing raids. And she wrote fascinating letters, some of which I still have.

And the family always was putting together a bundle for Britain of one kind or another, food, or clothing, or that type of thing, to help make it a little easier for them to get through that particular period. So we were aware, I was aware of some of the things that Hitler had done, that the Nazis had done, but not really, until well after the war, any of the persecution of the religious and ethnic minorities.

And I don't recall from that Know Your Enemy series in the Army whether there was much emphasis on concentration. I don't know whether there was even much knowledge of it. I think that, probably within government, the intelligence community knew that that was going on. But it wasn't, I don't believe, common knowledge.

At least at this time, I don't recall that I was ever told that there were concentration camps for Jews, or extermination camps, or for gypsies, or for anybody else. But that came out later.

When did you first learn about it?

Well, of course, by the time that it happened, I was wounded on the 1st of April, the 1st of April, 1945. Nordhausen was liberated on the 11th. By that time, I was in a hospital in France.

And Stars and Stripes carried pictures and stories related to the liberation of the various camps by the Allied armies, and

that was the first that-- I mean, Eisenhower's tour of some of the death camps and the photographs that went along with them. And I don't recall that there was any discussion of it, that it was not perceived as being out of character for the enemy.

I was not, I believe, surprised that they had done this. We didn't we didn't expect much from them. I will say one thing. I found that, of the various European-- I saw just a little bit of England, a little bit of France and Belgium and Luxembourg.

I felt more comfortable in Germany. I mean, the highways were better. The communities, although they were ravaged by war, were obviously more like what I equated with home than England, and France, and Belgium. They were more foreign. Germany was more like home.

And I was also impressed by the beauty of the country, particularly in springtime, as we approached the Rhine. My recollection of that trip riding on a tank was that it was beautiful country. I always wanted to go back there and see it because it had been beautiful.

But I had almost no contact with Germans and some very few prisoners, and didn't have any personal contact with civilian populace. They all evacuated and were gone or were-- as soon as we overran civilians, why, they were directed to the rear.

So I didn't have an opportunity to get to know any civilians or military people on the other side. And yet, when the news came out about the camps, I wasn't surprised. I didn't find it to be out of character with what I expected.

While you were fighting, do you recall ever an incident of actually looking into the eyes of a young German soldier? Or when you were injured, for instance, and you saw them sleep, did you ever take any of the detail in, faces, just-- was that everything--

Things happened fast.

--so quickly?

Like, when I was wounded, I had just-- look, earlier that day, we had been down this country road. And there were two farmhouses, several farmhouses on one side of the road. The last one was intact. The other two had been shelled and were on fire. They'd fallen into a cellar or into the cellars.

There was a railroad cut right next to the one that was still standing. And I always thought of it as a Schloss or castle. The other side of the embankment, there was a large gatehouse and then a large multistory building beyond that.

But I got right in front of the farmhouse. And it was one of these, where you have living quarters on one side, stable on the other side, and a kind of a centered garage, a two-car garage in the middle for the farm wagons and so on. And I had gotten right in front of this building.

And a Mark III tank pulled out from behind the building, and there wasn't any place to go but inside. So I went through the door, and I didn't open the door. I went through it. There was an individual, a personnel-sized door rather than the wagon door. And I don't know whether I broke the latch or what, but I put my rifle in high port, like this, and just went through it.

As I went through it, something hit me in the leg. And my feet went out from under me. And my rifle went one way, and my helmet went another. And I ended up on my face on the floor, and with my hands like this. And I was on a cobblestone floor.

And I got a glimpse of maybe 10 German soldiers on this side of the room. I was on this side on the floor. They were shooting at me. I just lay there, like this.



And I remember seeing ricochets sparking on the cobblestones under my face. Of the six bullets that hit me, three of them were in my hands, and one on the chest, two in the right leg. One of them that went in the right leg was the one that had broken my leg, that knocked my feet out from under me. And I just lay there on the floor until I left, and they were obviously preparing to leave at the time that I ran in.

Did you hear them talking?

I wasn't aware of it. The noise of gunfire in a relatively small room tends to be deafening, and I wasn't aware of any discussion or any conversation.

Did you think you were going to die?

Well, I thought that I was going to die for a long, long time. And that was not much different. This is it. And when they left and I found that I could get up and walk, why, I figured, well, maybe not today.

I didn't know how long it was going to take before I ended up back on the line, because the usual routine was, if you weren't seriously wounded while you went to the hospital, they fixed you up. And you came back to the unit. And that was not what you really wanted. You wanted to get out of there.

So it was kind of what you expected or what I expected to happen. It wasn't something that I was looking forward to, but it's like death and taxes. They're inevitable things, things that are going to happen.

And in this case, there wasn't any way to get them to avoid it. You did what had to be done. And that was pretty much the feeling with everybody. You did what had to be done. Anything else?

In the days, in the weeks, the months, or the years that followed the war, did the impact of what the war meant to so many people ever hit you? Did--

Well, let's say, I thought about it a lot. And I have never been reticent to talk about it because I felt that-- I don't know who it was, and I don't remember exactly what the quote was. But my recollection is that someone said that those who are ignorant of their history are doomed to repeat it and that war is certainly not something that you wish to repeat.

My sons are familiar with what happened to me. I would say I have one son, who was in service during Vietnam. He didn't have to go to Vietnam. Thank goodness. I have one son who is presently in the Air Force, and it's courier Air Force.

But I haven't made a secret of it. I have read and been interested in war as a human failing or activity. My wife feels that I perhaps dwell on it more than I should.

But mankind has expended an enormous amount of treasure and life in that particular pastime. And it seems to be-- it is irrational. But I've thought about it a good deal. And I think I lost track of your question.

I was asking you about the impact of the war, the meaning of it, and actually--

Oh, yes. I didn't really have a feeling for what it might mean to others. I had a pretty good feeling of what it meant to me. Since I discovered that there was a division or organization, I have found that a good many members of that organization have similar feelings. They have strong emotional feelings in connection with their period of service with the war.

And I mentioned that my wife and I have gone on a battlefield tour last October. And during that, tour, we visited some villages, four villages in the Netherlands, Holland. And the 104th Division was the division that had liberated those villages.

I mentioned it before. I joined the division outside of Aachen and Stolberg. The division had been in combat with the

Canadians in the low countries, and that was their first combat, as the first one on the line in Holland.

And during this battlefield tour, there were four busloads of veterans from the 104th who visited these villages essentially on the 50th anniversary of the time when the division liberated those villages. And those villages put on a celebration, with parades.

And I find it difficult to talk about it, but it was obvious. The gratitude of the survivors, though, they-- the villages were devastated by the attack, and there were a good many lives lost. Still, they have named streets for the division commander, Terry Allen. The division was the Timberwolf Division, 104th Division.

And they had Timberwolf Street. They had museums. It was an extremely emotional experience. As it turned out, the veterans in division marched, or walked, in a part of the parade.

And that was the first time that I'd ever marched with members of my division because I'd gone in as a replacement, and I left as a casualty. And so that was the first time. But then I got a feeling of what it was like to be on the other side.

Can you recall a period of time when you read about 6 million Jews being killed and your reaction to that?

Well, as I said, it was horrifying. I was horrified by it. But then I didn't find that to be out of character with what I expected. The Nazis were-- it was an evil empire.

And what it did convince me of is that human beings are capable of unbelievable brutality and cruelty, not just Germans or Japanese. We're the product of our environment. We can be led down the garden path by a demigod.

And there are brutes and people capable of horrible cruelty and in humanity, in society. Society hasn't learned the way to correct that yet. But it exists, and that increased awareness of what has happened in the past hopefully will help us prevent it from happening in the future.

The thing I find almost impossible to believe is that there are people who say it didn't happen. That is, to me, the hard thing to believe. I find that it's a fact. It happened And that someone could come along and say it didn't happen is like saying the sun doesn't shine. It's just irrational and inconceivable.

Do you think that's a question of denial, or a question of antisemitism?

I think it's more a question of antisemitism than it is of denial. I don't think a rational individual can deny that it happened. I think that a vicious antisemite could easily say that because they would like to see it happen again. And they are aware that there are many people who do not want-- that most people would not want something like that to ever recur.

But if the majority of the populace is opposed to that action, if he can convince them that it didn't happen, then maybe you can set the stage for a recurrence. It's the only thing that I can think of that would explain in any way what has happened. Unfortunately, that attitude, that belief appears to be restricted to a lunatic fringe.

But let's say, we've seen what lunatics can do because certainly Hitler was not what you would call a sane human being. This insanity was just not absolving of guilt in what happened. But his actions were not those of a rational human being.

Well, this discussion leads to the obvious question of, do you think it could happen again?

Sure. Not necessarily against Jews. I think that the Jewish community is alert now. They have been alerted. They have been exposed to pogroms and prosecutions for 2,000 years or more, and they survived. They survived by reason of learning how to survive in spite of what other members of society attempt to do to them.

They are more apt to be able to call attention to this kind of thing and be aware of the development of this type of thing. But the slaughter of the innocents goes on. The things that have happened in Africa recently-- oh, probably Somalia, the

religious wars, or the clan wars of Rwanda-- these things happen.

And our society, the world society is ill equipped to deal with it. It doesn't react. Occasionally, it happens like wildfire, like in Africa, not a thought-out, logical process as was used in Germany. But as long as man doesn't care about the life of-- one man doesn't care about the life and rights of another, it can happen again, any time.

And I think that the form of government that we have here and the United Nations are at least building blocks toward a society in which that couldn't happen again. I won't say that they are the only way to go, but they help.

I know my youngest son, who's in the Air Force, has been into Bosnia-Herzegovina. He was in Sarajevo, and the plane on which he's crew chief blew a tire. He was under artillery fire on the airfield changing a tire on the airplane.

[CHUCKLES]

So you know, and that's more religious war, one group against another because of our religious belief, the terrorists that continually harass Israel. The world is not killing as many as the Germans did all at once. They're still working on it. It doesn't make any difference whether they're-- well, who they are. There's always one group that doesn't like another.

Do you think this is likely to happen in Germany again?

I think it's quite unlikely. But I know that there is a-- from my visit there and the comments that were made during the celebration in the Netherlands that was repeated several times by mayors of the communities and by a rabbi that spoke, was that there is a resurgence of nationalism and, if you would, neo-Nazism in Europe.

I won't say Germany, because the skinheads-- they're elsewhere, too. They're not just in Germany. And I think it's possible. But I think probably, by and large, the Germans are presently aware of what happened there and that they are not pleased with the legacy of the Nazi, the Third Reich.

And I wouldn't see that as a place for it to begin, what I went through. I think eternal vigilance is the price of freedom, and that's freedom for everybody.

A couple of months ago, there was a celebration or a gathering of the 50th anniversary of the Shoah. And you attended.

I did.

Can you tell me the significance of that event for you?

It was-- although, as I mentioned, I didn't actually participate in the liberation of any of the camps. And as I told the organizers of that celebration when they invited me that I hadn't, they said, you come anyway. And as I told you before you-- it was very significant to me.

And as I told you before we arrived here and as we were driving in, my daughter-in-law is Jewish. And she and her daughter are recent additions to our family. And my wife and I have been kind of adopted by her family, and we have shared celebrations of the Holy days with their family and with Kathy's family.

And though I had minimal earlier contact with Judaism, I have found it a rich tradition in that the Christian church is-- the Torah and the Bible or Old Testament are essentially the same documents, as far as I understand.

And I have become much more aware of the Holocaust and the memorials associated with it because of the fact that my daughter-in-law and step-granddaughter are Jewish and have been to Israel and have visited the Memorial there.

And because of my experiences, it has become a matter of considerable pride that I was able to participate in a small way in participating in the liberation of the camps. I was just one of millions, but it was a very worthwhile activity.

Is there anything that you can think of that you'd like to share before we conclude?

Oh, I think-- [CHUCKLES] I think that I've shared just about everything there is. And I think that's it. I appreciated very much the recognition that was afforded to those who participated one way or another in the liberation of the camps. And I was happy to have had the opportunity not only participate in the liberation in a way, but also in the celebration of that liberation.

Well, we thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

Thank you.

Thank you so much.