

Go ahead and start it off.

Today is August 22, 1995. My name is Ellen Szakal, an interviewer with the Holocaust Oral History Project in San Francisco. Today I will be interviewing Harry Weinberg, who was an army soldier during World War II. And behind the camera is Sean Simplicio.

Would you please begin by stating your name, and your date of birth, where you're from, and give us a little bit of history about your background?

I'm Harry Weinberg. I was born July 6, 1911, in San Francisco, at Mount Sinai Hospital. I had a twin sister-- still, who is still alive. My folks came here from 1895 from Russia. Their folks had come here in 1875 from Russia. And their houses are still existing.

However, my family's all left San Francisco. And I'm the only one-- nine children. Only three of us left. And I'm the only survivor in San Francisco. And thank goodness, I'm still able to manipulate and get around. And I work-- keep busy. That's it.

So today you are 84 years old.

I am 84, thank goodness. I hope to make 90. I want to be here to see my grandchildren-- great-grandchildren, I should say. I have two married grandchildren. So we'll see.

Can you tell me what you were doing when the war broke out-- 1939?

Well, I was married. I was 32 years old. I was a clerk in a retail store on Mission Street in San Francisco, between 20th and 21st. I'd been there for many years.

I did not go into war effort where I could have stayed out of the service because I had been advised that there will not be any drafting of fathers. I had a four-year-old daughter. And all the advice-- and I had seen everything in writing. I knew right up to date what the draft boards were doing.

But it was to no avail. They had-- I lived in the Richmond district. And they had run out of people to draft. So I got a letter to appear for examination. And I did.

And I had very good knowledge that they were not going to take fathers. I read the circulars all the time. And I went through the test. And there were 18 steps.

And at the 17th step, I met a very good friend of mine, born and raised with, who was a doctor. And I asked him how I look on the chart. And he says, you'll never make it. So when I talked to my boss all the time-- a very prominent businessmen in the city-- he and my manager in the store always said, don't worry. So I didn't worry.

I get the examination. I came back to the offices, and I told them what this friend of mine had said. And they said, see? Don't worry. So I didn't worry.

However, I got a letter very shortly thereafter to report for induction and to be picked up by a bus at a certain place on Memorial Day-- was it-- February 22-- be at a certain spot. I had to get a bus there.

And I took the letter back to my boss and my manager. And I showed them. And they said, see? Don't worry. Don't worry. I'm not worried. I never worried.

So then I reported. And there were three of us only in the neighborhood-- in the whole area that was eligible to be drafted. And it happened to be three men, 32 years' age, each with a four-year-old child. The wives knew each other. And we were very friendly.

So we went to Monterrey. And fortunately, I got a pass to get back to the city over the weekend. And I stopped and saw my boss, my manager in my uniform. And they said, don't worry. I'm not worried. I don't worry at all.

This is a story I have to get out. And so I finally went back to Monterey. And I ended up at Camp Roberts down past Salinas. And the other two ended up wherever. And I was inducted right into the infantry.

And I was fortunate to get pass on a weekend, come home. And of course, every weekend I came home Friday afternoon or evening. And every weekend, I made it my business to stop and see my boss and my manager, because they were paying some my salary to my wife to help her. I had a child, four years old and a home we had bought. And every time I went in-- don't worry. I don't worry. I'm not worried at all. Don't worry. OK.

So I went through the whole basic training. And I shipped overseas. And my wife-- I wrote to her quite often. She sent me letters. And she always talked to my boss and my manager. And they always said to her, don't worry, nothing.

Everything went along good. And then I ended up in-- after basic training, I ended up in England. Well, before that, I was in New Brunswick, New Jersey for a week, waiting to be shipped out. And I got a cable, or a Red Cross came to me.

My mother was in Mount Sinai Hospital with a heart condition. My dad was in Mount Sinai Hospital with a heart condition when I left. And I got a letter, message, whatever from the Red Cross-- my brother had been killed. Come home.

I can't come home. I went to Red Cross. I went to CQ. I went to every place to get a pass to come home. I couldn't. They weren't going to take me out, put somebody in my place, and maybe something happens. You know. So I was resigned. That's it.

So I went overseas. And I was in England for a week. And then we shipped over, across the channel, into France. And I was in a replacement group.

Can you tell me what the date was?

All replacements. And I was in Saint-Quentin Forest, where the First World War ornaments and caves and everything, dungeons. And everything was still there.

And it was a very rainy afternoon. This is something that struck me. I have to say it. It was a very rainy afternoon. And I got in the little pup tent. I took the little Bible they gave everybody. And I was just reading it. I don't know why. And all of a sudden, I realized, tonight is Rosh Hashanah. It just hit me.

And I'm religious, but not that religious. I know the holidays and all. I know my religion. And I said, Jesus, Rosh Hashanah.

So I put my gear on. I went over to the main quarters. And happened to be a Jewish fellow who was the desk clerk there. And I told him. He said, yes. He said, why don't you put a note on the bulletin board out there? And I did. And they were going to provide a tent for religious service that night.

And we had our dinner. And I went over to the tent. It was a big tent, like a circus tent. And there were a couple of hundred Jewish boys there. They all read the bulletin board. And so we went in. They had a pulpit and everything, but no rabbi, or no-- what do you call it? Chaplain. But there was a priest there.

So they asked, who can run and conduct a service? And the boys from New York and Chicago, they were real good. And they all conducted. So two of the fellows took over. And we had to have a rabbi. So the priest says, I'm not a rabbi, but I'm a priest. But I know your religion thoroughly. So we had a complete service. It was absolutely amazing.

And they came up with some wine and some cookies or something after. Of course, we went back to our pup tents. And next day, we were called up. The trucks took us up to action. That night, before we went into action, I wrote my wife a letter. Told her what to do in case I'm killed. And I told her, please be sure and talk to Jack, my manager and my boss, and tell them I'm going into action, but I am not worried.

[LAUGHTER]

So anytime anybody said anything to me about not worry now, I start worrying. However, of course, from there you've got the details on that tape. If you want to read it off, you can do it. I'll relate-- you know what I-- the letter I gave you.

Would you mind telling it? Would you mind telling it?

Well, the best I can follow-- went into action. And the first night, our action was an Aix-la-Chapelle, which is a-- what's the name? Aachen. Went into action. We chased the Germans. And we got them out of Aachen. We occupied it in the middle of the night.

Finally settled down after action. Work hard. I mean, it was very hard with a full pack. And I had a mortar. And I was a little guy. And I still went ahead to full duty.

You just get to the point where you're so exhausted, you can't move. And come hell or high water, you're going to lay there. And they could kill you. If you can't move, you can't move. So it's surprising, after you relax about a minute or two, how you rejuvenate yourself. And you're able to proceed.

So then we got-- chased the Germans out of Aachen. And we followed them all the way through. And this had come after the liberation of Paris. My outfit-- I was in the 28th Division-- the 28th Infantry of the-- no, 28th Battalion of the 110th Division-- infantry from Philadelphia-- Pennsylvania. And went through that whole action.

And then we got transported at night. We went up towards the front-- the Siegfried Lines. And the next day, we were put in formation. We went up to the Siegfried Lines. And we chased the Germans out of there.

And we had to get-- we couldn't get through-- the trucks couldn't get through the dragon teeth, the tanks and whatnot. So they had to take three tanks to pull down one dragon tooth. They went way down in the ground. And they were 27 inches wide. And they had big, big points that went up about eight, 10 feet. And there was no way you could maneuver. So they had to have one-- three tanks to pull one of those teeth down so they could maneuver and get through them.

Meantime, we tried to dig in infantry foxholes. And the Germans were too smart for us. Around all of those dragon teeth was all loose gravel and sand. And every time you tried to dig with the shovel, you dig a little bit, and the sand would fall, keep falling. You could never get any depth.

So therefore, we had to stay there by the dragon teeth. And they were bombarding the hell out of us. And who knows how many were killed. Whatever. But we were under a hell of a bombardment.

And then tanks finally came through. And we followed them about 100 yards, I'd say, to the crest of a hill, where we finally started digging in. And a big forest all around.

And the Germans were up in the trees. And they were picking our men off right and left. And wherever we could, we would spot them and shoot them. And they would-- many of them were tied to the trees. They weren't going to be let go. And as we shot them, they were hanging.

[LAUGHTER]

And we would-- but in the meantime, we were digging foxholes. And I was at the point with one other fellow, a young fellow, about 18 years old, from New York. And we dug our foxholes. And we made parapets of sand. Put all of the ammunition, and our guns, and all of our grenades all lined up.

And just at the bottom of the hill, someone had blown a pillbox of the Germans-- maybe 50 feet down below the hill, they had blown a big pillbox. And the Germans went down this hill. And there was a valley. And you'd go up, and you can see about 500 feet-- the other side was the top of the hill. And you could see the Germans up there in the forest and whatnot.

And we're sitting in our foxholes. We're down one side. And then we made a V and go on down the other side, maybe 200 yards. And our foxholes were about 15 feet apart. And each one of us had two men.

And we had to dig our foxhole so that we could not be straight. We had to dig it on the side so we can sit back there. And if a shell came in the foxhole, it would hit the wall when they were standing there. One man was always on the go, watching.

And just below me, at the point where they had blown a foxhole, the Germans would congregate late in the day and prepare to come through for patrols at night. And every night they would come through. And we would let them go through. And they got way back there.

And then we put the-- the back portion would put on these big lights, the-- what do you call them? What do you-- flares. And we would see the Jerrys. And we would kill them off. And some got back to their quarters.

And meantime, they used to congregate in this pillbox. And we'd have to go down there during the day and chase them out. We'd throw grenades. We would do this, do that. But we would throw them out, and they would come back. And then they'd have-- what do you call them?

And then, one night, the patrol came through. And this young fellow I was with, 18 years old-- kid by the name of Painter, from New York-- he started to cry. And there was a whole patrol of Germans coming through. And I understood them, because they talked very loud and I understood German-- and were very guttural-- from my Yiddish, derived from German.

And I yelled up all the way to the line, pass the word. The Jerrys are coming through. And as that happened, this Painter started to cry. He didn't want to fight. He didn't want to die. He was crying.

So I said, Painter, you've got to do it. Keep fighting. Otherwise you're going to get killed.

So he refused. OK. I had to put all of our ammunition on the parapet and feed me. I'm going to fight them. I'm not going to die. I'm going to fight. And luckily, they went through.

And one of the Germans had-- the next hole to mine, he had stepped through into the foxhole. And the American killed him with his helmet. He couldn't get any knife or anything to get them. Close quarters. They fought, and he killed him right there. And he threw his body out.

Meantime, there were about-- oh, a big patrol. 20 odd people went through. And we killed them off. And as I say, maybe one or two got through.

We stayed in that foxholes and fought back and forth for 30 days. The day after that one big attack, I asked Painter to leave. I told him, I'd rather be here alone. I'm not going to have you there. You're going to be a detriment.

So I told him to pack his gear. And he went back about 500 yards, where they had an old, abandoned farmhouse. And the headquarters were there. And I asked him to tell them to send ammunition up. I needed it. So they couldn't send it during the day because the Jerrys had us zeroed in. So he had to come at night.

And every night they're supposed to deliver a shot of whiskey to every serviceman on the front lines. It's the rule of the house. So this night, this guy came crawling with all the stuff. And I had ammunition. I had a shot of whiskey. And he left. And he passed it around.

During the 30 days that I was there, many of the foxholes were abandoned. The guys were killed, or they ran away. I stayed there. Finally, I had to take a chance during some of the days and go way back, 500 yards, to the headquarters to get my own food and get my own ammunition. The guys were afraid to come up with it.

So after the 30 days, I was relieved. And then we went up into the Black Forest. And it had been cleared. All the pillboxes had been cleared. And we come into a couple of them.

And we-- pillboxes were built so that they were covered. You couldn't see them as you walked through the forest. And they had a lot of landmines. Used to have pencil mines. You take a pencil, put it in the ground. If you stepped on it, it exploded right up your feet, or right down your middle of your body, wherever it is. And it killed and hurt a lot of people.

Then they had the landmines for the tanks. But we got flamethrowers, blocked them up. And then as they blocked the door, the gate, we had an open slot, metal, where they had machine guns and everything. They killed us right off like flies. Then we'd get a bulldozer. After the flamethrower we'd get a bulldozer. And they'd come and shovel sand and close those pits.

And then we would get on top of the pillbox. And we'd put a string of grenades-- it was like a sewer top. And we'd put a string of grenades in there and blow them up. And then we'd get on top and order the Germans out.

First we would throw grenades down in the middle in the pillbox. And those that didn't get hurt or killed, whatever, came out. And on many occasions, [WHISTLES] down-- dead, you know. We had to do it. We got no way of keeping them. And they were killing us like flies.

So anyway, we got up to a point outside of a little town named Schmitt in Germany where we were told to stop and dig in. It was in the forest. And during the whole course of that-- that was in October. During the whole course of that, we dug a foxhole. We had a mortar about 50 feet in front of us. And all of our ammunition-- we had to carry all the ammunition and everything.

And every day, we-- luckily, we took big logs, trees, and covered our foxhole. We had about 6 by 6. And we had an opening. And many times, we were hit with a-- when they opened up on us with big guns, it hit right on top of the logs.

And we could feel it right there. We're laying in there. Then we had to run out and stop the attacks, get our mortars going, our rifles, our machine guns, and everything.

And winter came. And I was on guard duty that night. And I heard some noise. And I was plenty concerned. And I woke my partner. I said, come on, the Germans are coming. I can hear stuff, noise.

And he came. And we looked around. And it started to snow. It was absolutely beautiful.

Next morning, everything was so clean and clear. It was just like a postcard. Beautiful.

However, most every day we would go out on an attack, 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, and then come back and keep our line there. We were tying up German divisions. So that was to our credit.

We didn't know what was going on. We were up near Holland. And that's where they had your 101st Airborne Division was wiped out completely, almost. But we were away from that, thank God, far enough.

And finally, it got down to the point where we were like routine-- 60 days. And we were absolutely-- there was snow all over. My overcoat was just like leather, just hard.

Finally, we ran out of men. The boys were so tired of fighting, they were getting-- they called it shell shock. They call it nervous exhaustion. They called it everything. They were abandoning the front line.

They were running in the back. And they refused to fight. So many left their post that the orders had to come through Eisenhower-- anybody leaving the post was going to be sent back to the United States and get 20 years in prison for leaving the front lines.

And so I was removed from the infantry, a rifleman, to a mortar man-- I mean, to a machine gunner. We had to watch that way. You never knew when an attack was coming. It was big one or a little one, it was always coming.

But during the course of that, every day we had a chef way back in the kitchen, and he always promised that as long as he's alive, he'll see that we get one hot meal a day. And every evening, before dark, a whole group of Jeeps would come up with big, big pots of hot food, complete hot dinner. And they got in between the trees. And they would all yell, and this group to come one at a time, get our thing full, and go back to our foxhole.

And he did that quite a long time. And one night, while he was serving with his whole crew, the Jerrys opened up with a big bombardment. And unfortunately, he lost his head right there in the line. But anyway, so that ended that.

But I was there about 45 days. The government announced that we've been getting-- fighting so much, they wanted to give us relief. The oldest man in the outfit was first to go.

On a certain date, the oldest men from all the outfits went back about three miles and congregated in a motor pool. And they had two or three trucks. They were, hell, 14 men each, a driver and an officer. And they took them back, way back in a little city, wherever it was.

And they gave them a bath, clean clothes. And they took them back to Paris for a two-day pass. Three days-- five days was the whole traveling back and forth, and two days' freedom in Paris.

And my sergeant was the oldest man in my outfit. And he went. And he supposed to come back in five days with the group. And he didn't come back. He got a social disease. So they kept him there, treated him in the hospital in Paris-- which was lucky for me.

When the next group got together-- the first group got back, the other group congregated. That's the day the Germans opened a big bombardment and wiped out the whole motor pool and everybody in it. And I was not there, thank God. So they canceled all the motor pools.

So a couple of weeks after that, we were relieved by another outfit. That was after 60 days or so being there. And we taken to Ettelbruck, Luxembourg, where we had a bath, clean clothes, and a couple of days of relaxation, and new equipment. They gave us all rifles and whatnot.

And one of the mornings, they announced that they're starting the trips back to Paris-- five days. And the oldest man in the outfit happened to be me. So luckily, I get in a poker game and win a couple hundred dollars, American money. And sure enough, the next day I took off for Paris with the two or three truckloads.

And I enjoyed it quite a bit. I met a Jewish fellow, companion here, Jack Bacon from Philadelphia. And we had a good time for two full days. And we got back in our trucks, and we headed back.

And the officer's truck stopped. And the officer came to the back gate. And he said, fellows, do you mind if we take another fellow, Frenchman, in the truck? He's going up to the free French front. And he asked for a ride. Do you mind? No, squeeze him in.

So he sat just opposite me. And it turned dark. We stopped out again. And it got dark. And this fellow was an officer in the free French going up to the free French area, where they were. And he told us who he was. He was Lafayette's great-great-nephew. Lafayette from Louisiana.

And we got to talking. And he starts shooting his mouth off-- antisemitism like you can't believe. You can't believe it.

Derogatory-- the Jews this, the Jews that. They own everything in Europe. Hitler never killed enough. And everything derogatory, bad.

And here I was in Paris for two days. The Frenchmen quit fighting. All they were doing was making love to the French women and having fun. And they were killing our American soldiers right and left in Paris. And they were robbing us blind. You don't have any idea how bad they were-- Frenchmen. Of course, I don't think that about the whole country, but-- and everything was real bad. And we affirmed it later.

And the more he kept talking, the madder I get. And here I got to say it to myself-- my brother got killed on D-day fighting for these pigs. I'm going back in the front. I could get killed fighting for these pigs. No way.

So I said to him and all the guys-- we were funny enough. I said, Lafayette, I want you to stop talking. I can remember distinctly. I said, I'm a Jew. I'm an American Jew. You're a Frenchman? You're no goddamn good. You talk like that-- you know, I lost a brother here fighting for you pigs. I may get killed fighting for you pigs.

I said, you make one more word, I'll shoot you dead. I had my rifle pointed right at him. And I said, I'm taking my safety catch off. You open your mouth one more word, you're dead. And he didn't say a word. And all the guys were quiet.

And the more I thought of it, the madder I got. I said, you know, get the hell off this truck. Right now. And he picked his valise up, and he threw it off on the ground. And he got off that-- he jumped off that truck going 30, 35, 40 miles an hour. Never heard of him again.

I would have killed him-- one more sound from him. They couldn't do anything to me. But here's what we fought for. And they robbed us blind. Frenchmen in Paris robbed us blind. You have no idea.

However, after we got back from Paris, I lost my outfit. And the next day, whatever, they found me, my outfit. And we were up in the hills, in the mountains of Luxembourg. And we stayed up there for about a couple of weeks. And then they moved us into the hills of Luxembourg, where-- and we could-- we were there in the mountains.

And we could see the Germans on the horizon, maybe two miles away, in the mountains. So we could see them coming in for two or three days-- armor, equipment, men, everything. And I was with this little outfit, left maybe 20 of us, maybe three or four mortars, stationed on that hill with the mortars to get the Germans as they coming over, if they came our way-- which they did. And we had a hell of a fight. We fought like heck up in that mountains.

And finally, a motorcycle came up the mountain back of us, American. And he said, you're surrounded. Get out as best you can-- which we did. But as the Germans came up the hill over the horizon, we were killing them like mad-- which was fine.

So we all took the pins out of our mortars and threw them away so they couldn't be used. And then we went down the mountains. And we met all-- there was 106 American division went over there. Brand-new division. Brand-new equipment. Never used. And the Germans surrounded them and took everything.

And we went in the swamps. And we had water up to our ears, waiting for the Germans to go by. And one of our fellow's guns went off. He didn't put the catch on. And the Germans came back and captured us.

One last thing, Germans were going up the road. They heard that one shot, and they turned around and came back with all the armor. All of our men ran up on the road. And on the side, by the hundreds, they started running up the mountain to escape. Most of us couldn't do it. And as they run up the mountains escaping, the Germans were picking them off and killing them like flies.

So when we saw that happening, I know I stayed right there with my sergeant and whoever was around. I stayed. And we were captured. That was it.

From then, we proceeded to walk. And this is December 16.

What year? What year? What year?

1944. When I say walk, that was the first day of the Battle of the Bulge. They broke through us. I think we were the first action of the Battle of the Bulge. And I mean walk-- just plain walk. No food, no rest, just walk.

They took our overcoats. Of course they took our steel caps, steel helmets. And in many instances, they took our steel-- our green wool caps that we had. Many of the fellows lost them. Many of us took them, put them in our pocket, and we kept them.

And at first, they strapped the heavy armament that they had, while we were walking on the road-- which is against the Geneva Conference. They strapped these mortars on our backs. Instead of their men carrying them, we had to carry them for hours on end.

And-- am I boring you? And they gave us very little rest. Finally got to the point where we just couldn't walk anymore. So I know myself, I was cursing the Germans to hell in American-- English, rather. I wasn't aware at that time that every German officer speaks fluent English. I was not aware of it. I was cursing them. Everybody else was cursing them.

And finally, I got to the point where I couldn't handle it. I just went over to the side in the bank. And I let the mortar carry me down. And I laid there. And all the guys started doing it. And the Germans came in with the guns-- get up. Move. Get up.

Shoot me. I can't move. Shoot me.

So they were doing it all the way up in the line. And we just lay there. We couldn't help it.

Meantime, a German officer who had been walking at my side comes over to me and sits next to me on the snow. And he said, you know, soldier-- he said, I could kill you. I said, why? He says, I hear you curse, swearing at my country.

He said, you know that I can speak perfect English? I said, I'm glad you can. I said, now you know my feelings. You want to shoot me? Shoot me. Go ahead. What can I do about it?

[LAUGHTER]

So he didn't.

So we proceeded to walk and walk and walk. No stops. No food. And it got dark. We had to walk.

When we got to the point where we couldn't go anymore, we would just lay down in the snow. And they stood over us. And they had a certain amount of guards walking back and forth. And they had certain amount of police dogs.

And they were the cruel ones. They were the bad ones. Those police dogs know how to kill you within an inch. Within a minute they had you dead. If you did anything wrong, tried to step out of line, [WHISTLE] dead. You stop to excrement? Dead. Really, you had to just go.

During the course of that time, the Americans-- and no planes could come out-- we didn't know this, but we found out later. No planes could come out of England because it was fogged in all during the Battle of the Bulge. And on Christmas morning--

Oh. We were walking over the mountains. We could see them launching all these big cannons and big bombs, the one that Hitler had especial. We could see them launching them on the side of the mountains. We saw everything was going on. It was really, really, really, really bad.

Anyway, on the morning of Christmas somewhere-- 8, 9, 10 o'clock, whatever-- we started to climb. We were walking



through a little town, a railroad town. And we started going up the mountains. It was just a two-car road of sand and gravel. And as you got up, it was all snow all over both sides. The road was cleared.

And we started going up. And it was a big gully with a mountain. We hit the road. And there was a gully all full of rainwater. On the left side was way down. You couldn't even see the bottom of the mountain.

So we were going, walking and walking in a daze. We didn't know what was going on. And finally-- it was a beautiful day. And finally, we hear all these planes. And gee, we got excited. We started yelling and screaming, kill them, kill them, kill them all. You know.

And all of a sudden-- would have been hundreds of them. All of a sudden, one of the Vs-- what, five, seven, eight, or whatever it is-- one of the Vs, we could see the bomb bays opening up clear as can be. And we said, kill them off. We figured they were going after the town.

And those bombs got halfway down, and we realized they were for us. The guys were taking off their jackets and shirts or whatever, waving. Didn't mean anything. And we realized it was for us. And we yelled, hit the dirt.

One of the men in my outfit was first. He fell into the water, head down. My sergeant, who was next to him, jumped and dived in. And as he jumped and dived in, the shrapnel cut him in half.

I dove just like diving off a board. And as my hand was over here, shrapnel came right in my hand. Went right in there. And I landed on top of my sergeant. And then the other guy landed on top of me. And unfortunately, he got cut in half with shrapnel.

And then those who-- the planes kept going. And everybody's yelling and crying and screaming. And then those who were not hurt got up and tried to help everybody.

So they pushed the guy off of me. He was totally dead. And I tried to get up. And I couldn't move. I was in shock.

And I looked down. And I see this hole in my jacket. And I see blood coming down here. And I said, oh shit, I got hit. And I was in shock. Didn't know what was going on.

And these two fellows came and grabbed a hold of me. And I said, get a hold of-- help Frank. And Frank was wiped out completely, totally. And the guy in the bottom was free. He got up.

And these two guys walked us, fortunately, about a couple of hundred feet up in the side of the hill. Was a section where they turned around. They had a big warehouse up there, big ones, where the Germans had used it. But they were empty. And they brought us up there.

And these two fellows sat me down along the wall to go and help others. And when they did that, I felt myself turning completely white. And I passed out completely-- passed out. I don't know how long it was. And I revived myself OK.

Meantime, they took us and put us in these big warehouses. And they had big shelves there, like cases. And the Americans were climbing up there, sleeping in there wherever, on the floor and all over. And the boys were dying like mad.

Where were the German soldiers? Had they been killed? The German soldiers.

They were just the guards. They were the guards. They didn't-- all they did was threaten you. That's it. With the dogs. Nothing else.

But during this attack-- was this a German attack? Or was this an American--

American bombers hit the Germans.

I see. So but did the Germans survive? Were they still guarding you?

I can't say. But they were still holding the front of the gate, the front of this building, yes. I don't know anything that happened with how many got killed. I have no idea. As I say, I passed out. And they revived me.

And then we went-- they took us in these buildings. And I was non compos, anyway, no food, no nothing. A little ice water, that's it.

And we lay there. And I laid with a group. And got dysentery.

And one day, they came in with some food-- a little bread. And it was all mildewed. You see the mildew. I refused to eat it. And one of the other guys said-- they want it? Give it to him. Fine.

I got diarrhea. Dysentery. You ever see anybody die from dysentery? That's it. If you touched it, all the excrement-- if you got near it, touched it, you were dead. Deadly. And that went couple of days. They got that.

Couple days later, they came in with some blood sausage. Just peel it off. I never ate it in my life. It didn't look good. I refused to have it. I took it, and I gave it to one of the other guys. And that persisted for quite a while. We were there maybe 10, 12 days.

But every day, they would get a crew of the guys who were strong enough and they would take the dead out on the outside of the building. And they'd lay them in like logs, railroad logs. You see those inside the train tracks. They'd lay them there. Then, at night, they bulldozed them down to this valley, the gully there. Forever gone.

And one night I had occasion to go out. I don't know why. And the guy said, come here and take a look. And I walked over there. Must have been hundreds of them stacked like this solid. The people were walking on them, piling new ones on top of the old ones. Horrible. Dead all the way down.

Anyway, we finally ended up-- started to walk again. And during the day, there were maybe 800-- or, 1,800 in my group that I remember talking about. And they didn't have anybody who would admit to talking German. So they asked who did. And I said, I can understand and talk it a little.

So I was just a corporal, a private, whatever. I was walked with the officers. The officers got a little respect, more than we did. But didn't amount to a sack. So I walked with the officer. Anything happened, I would interpret.

So one night we were up, walking in the mountains. And we hear-- see a couple lights way up in the mountain. And we hear them talking. And then they stopped us. And they were talking in German. And I understood it.

And I said to the officer-- I said, you got a knife? Cut your shoes. They had two men, one on each side with a flashlight, and trucks. And as you came up, they looked at your shoes. If your shoes were all right, make them take you-- they took them off, threw them in the truck. Move. Move.

And we passed the word on. Luckily, I was able to cut mine. It was no good, luckily. And so we went on.

And hundreds of them lost their shoes. They took their shirts, they took their everything to wrap around their feet. They had frostbite. Lost their toes. Nothing worse than black frostbite. Really bad-- stink, and hurt to them. Gee, it was bad. And then we went on and on.

During the day, American planes would come over. They see a lot of men walking on the ground, soldiers, they're going to strafe the hell out of them. And they started strafing us.

And the guys took their shirts or whatever and waved to them. And then they comprehended. And then they'd give us a barrel roll and take off. The Germans wouldn't let us go on the side of the road and fall in the ditches. We had to keep

right on walking.

So this went on and on and on and on. And as I say, we get into a little town. One night, specifically, we were there, I'd say, 10, 11 o'clock at night. We were waiting-- the soldiers are trying to get orders what to do with us.

They used all of their equipment to go to the front. They had no machinery or trucks, horse or anything. They were going to the front. They weren't giving us any transportation-- they had it-- none of it. No medication. They needed it for themselves.

So we're in this town. And this leader of the Germans wants to get orders on what to do with us. So we have to stand there and wait.

And one of the guys is running to the headquarters, whatever it is. And he came back, and he said, you're going to have to wait. And our officer were talking through me-- what are we waiting for? Well, our officer's up there with a woman, and he's not through yet. You've got to wait until he's finished.

[LAUGHTER]

So we had to wait. So we lay down on the ground and waited. I mean, some of it was really crazy. But it was really something. And we had a hell of a bad day.

And then, finally, finally, finally, somewhere around midnight a night-- January 8th, 10th, something around there-- we ended up in a little town on the top of a mountain. And the name [? Dockweiler ?] feels familiar to me, but I'm not sure. But it was a little community.

And they had a community house, clubhouse, or whatever you call it, where they used to meet. And they had a kitchen on the end with the open doors. And we landed in this place. And the snow on each side of the entrance there was about 8, 10 feet high.

And we went into this building. And we were all piled in there. And the first shelter we've had. And so fellows started to lay down.

And I couldn't lay down. I was frozen absolutely stiff. I must have weighed 80, 90 pounds. So I said to the fellows with me-- I said, lay me down. Lay me down. They held onto me and laid me down.

My head hurt so bad. I said, please turn me over. I couldn't do anything. They turned me on my side-- terrible. On my stomach-- bad. The other side-- bad. Do me a favor-- stand me up, please. So I stood up.

How was your arm at this point?

My arm was about 18 inches thick, just mass of pus. Hurt. And all I had was a piece of string-- a piece of string to hold it all that time. And it was really way up there.

Hurt-- just get over it. You get used to it. Stink-- you get used to it. And I just took it for granted. It had to be. That was it.

And so while the fellows are there, they had a potbelly stove. Like I said, it was a community-- so the guys ripped up the floors of this. And they had matches, whatever it was. And they lit a fire on this potbelly stove, and they put all this flooring in it.

And the darn fools-- they were trying to get warm. They kept picking up the floor and pouring wood, putting more wood into it. And the wood was sticking out. And evidently, some of the wood had burned, and it fell down. And so the grass, evidently dry underneath-- and started a fire in the building.

And they started yelling, fire, fire, fire. And all the guys were running back and forth with the hats or whatever, their hands, with snow, and dumping it on. And they finally made the fire out. But they had ruined the floor.

So the Germans came in. Raus, out. Out. And I say, no, I'm not going. I'm too sick.

They're kicking everybody out. They're moving them up to the mountains to do their work. I said, I'm not moving. I'm sick. Do what you want.

So the soldier came, and he put us with a rifle, a bayonet. I said, I'm not moving. I'm sick. And so I said to this one American officer-- happened to be a fellow by the name of Schwartz from New York. Didn't speak a word of Yiddish, nothing. I said to this guy, go get your officer. I'm not moving. So he had to shoot me or get the officer, which he did.

And the officer came in. And I explained to him, I'll interpret for the officer. And the officer talked to him. But he knew English, because he's an officer. So I went literally, and I interpreted.

And the officer said, no, he's too sick. He can't go. So I stayed there. He let me get on the side. And I stood against the wall. And everybody else was kicked out.

Next day, about 6 o'clock in the morning, whatever, door opens. And in comes all these orange outfits. They were Polish political prisoners. And a lot of them were Jewish. But they said that they were not Jewish.

And they worked in this camp cutting trees and getting lumber and wood for the whole little city, or whatever it is. And they had good, clean outfits. And they had little places they stayed. And it was routine with them.

So they saw me when they came in that morning. And they looked at me-- American? Yeah. And I didn't know, but way over in the corner, under some straw, were two other Americans who didn't leave with the others. They were under the straw. But I wasn't aware of it.

So these guys see me, and they start talking. And they want to know about America. And they were in formation to get food for their breakfast, which they took back to their camp.

And I begin to thaw out a little bit, and I can move. And I get to talking to them. I found a couple who are Jewish. A couple slipped me a cigarette. When they got their food, one came back and, by his hand, he slipped me some food-- a little bit.

And they all left. Had their breakfast. Closed the windows. Whatever period of time, they came back. And they all lined up. There were hundreds of them. And they lined up in sections, and they were given their orders for the day, what they were going to do. And so they left.

And they came back about noon, got their lunch, went to their place. And after that, they went back. They got back maybe 5 or 6 o'clock, whatever it was. And they got their dinner, had their food, and left.

They slipped me a couple of cigarettes and a little food. And all this time, I didn't know those two Americans were back there. So that went on. Good.

The next morning, the same procedure came. Pardon me. And they gave me a little bit of food, cigarette. And then they left. And a couple of hours later, I'm sitting there, and in walks a Gestapo-- a real, real top. Elderly man-- 65, 70. And he found out about me.

And he came in, sat down, got to talking to me-- German, English-- and told me about his family, and this, and that. You know. And that's all well and good. And he asked me if I was hungry. I said, I'm starved. So he said, OK, I'll leave you. You'll hear from me soon.

Meantime, those two other guys come walking over. Surprised. And they told me. OK. I said, go back there. I don't

want to be connected with you temporarily. I'm thawing out. I'm OK now.

Sure enough, a young fellow came in. He was a Russian youth, about 20, 22 years old. He was a prisoner for the Germans. And he was working in a wagon.

They had a kitchen wagon. And he worked in there with the cook-- German cooks. And that's where all the soldiers and Gestapo and everybody in the camp labor-- not the labor, the camp-- who ran the camp-- they all worked there. And they ate there.

So this Russian fellow takes me into that. I climb up the steps and go in. And I sit down. And they sit me on a bench. And they proceed to give me food-- a whole pot of coffee, a whole loaf of bread.

And my hand was so bad I couldn't even touch-- do anything. So I asked if they-- will they cut the whole thing? I ate the whole bread with honey. Drank the whole pot of coffee like that. Never in my life-- but I did.

While I'm sitting there-- I'm talking with the Gestapo man-- two young black shirts, who are the cruelest of the cruel-- they come walking in. And they start swearing at this guy. What are you doing here, what, this and that. He said, mind your business. I'm taking care of it. OK.

So I go to leave. And I said to the Gestapo, gee, there a couple of Americans over there. They're starving to death. Can you give them some? So he said, OK. So he gets the loaf of bread, and they cut it. The young fellow cut it. And a pot of coffee.

And the kid takes me back to the place there. And he goes over and gives these two guys that. And I stayed away from them. I didn't want to get next to them. I'm on my own. I got to fare for myself. So that went on for about five days or so.

But during that afternoon that I'd been served, all of a sudden, in the afternoon, I heard a lot of shooting going on-- 10, 20 bullets, whatever. It's none of my business, but, you know. So when the Polish people came back, later in the afternoon, for dinner, I said, what was all that shooting going on?

They don't understand. They killed a Gestapo man. In other words, they killed the man who fed me. So it's none of my business. I can't help that.

So I was in this building maybe five or six days. And all of a sudden, in comes a German, a Red Cross. Elderly man-- 60, 70-- but sturdy. Introduce himself. And he looks at my arm.

Some of the-- what do you call the-- Polish Jews, Polish people had told him about it. And he came to see me. And he said, gee, that's bad. He said, I'll be back later to take you someplace to take care of it.

So he came back. And he took me about four or five blocks, and into a building where they had-- the German officers ate. An immense place. 500, 600 people could eat in there. And in the front, you enter in this anterooms and all. And all the German women from the town were serving the food for them.

And he takes me in there. And he wants a German officer, or a doctor, to take care of me. And they wouldn't.

He opened up-- the doctors were there. And he opened up my thing. He cut my shirt because I couldn't get it out. And he looked and showed it to me.

The German women saw it. And they just-- couple of them just absolutely passed out. It was so bad. So we covered it over.

So he took me back to the building. And he said, I'll be back here tomorrow morning. And he did. He came in after breakfast. He said, we're going to another town a few miles-- I don't know, four.

We start walking. Snow up to here. Every step is up to here. We couldn't walk on the road because the German trucks were coming. And every time he tried to stop a truck to take us they just went right through. They didn't bother with us.

Hours, hours later we landed in this little town, wherever it was. And we enter a big building. And they open up the big doors and the big black curtains. They were absolutely blacked out from outside. No light.

And as you got in the building, all the way around the side, all straw, were people who had been operated on-- soldiers wherever were. To the right, maybe 100 feet, there was a stage, really bright lit. And on it were maybe, to my recollection, about 15 or 20 operating tables. And this guard had arranged for me to come and get my arm fixed.

So he leaves me there, by the guards. And I'm standing here. And all of a sudden, I hear a fellow yell, Yank-- Yank, Yank.

So I find him way over the other side, waving his hand. So I said to the guard, I'm going to go over and see him. I went over there. He introduces himself. I sat down.

He asked me what's wrong. I told him. He said, get the hell out of here. He said, they'll cut the hand off.

He said, they cut my leg off. I didn't want them to. I could have managed. He said, I have three kids at home in Indianapolis. He said, I could have managed. But they cut it off. They don't have the equipment.

He said, get the hell out of here. I said, how am I going to get out of here? So I go back over there. And I'm resigned to my fate, whatever it is.

And they-- finally, the guard comes and gets me, takes me up to the stage. And there's two German officers, doctors. They're getting all the equipment ready. And there's a gurney there and an operating table.

And there's a white Russian, a Russian blonde-- beautiful girl, 20, 22. She was the nurse. And she was a prisoner herself. And so she put me on the gurney and strapped me down.

And just started to give me the ether when I hear the two doctors talk. They're going to cut my arm off. I said to her, please-- in German I said, let me up. I want to talk.

She said, I can't. They'll kill me. I said, no, please let me-- I pleaded with her. Finally, she did. She took a chance. And she let me up.

And I went over to the officers. They were still facing-- and I tapped one over with my hand. And I said, officers-- or whatever it was to that extent-- I heard what you're going to do to me, cut my arm off. I says, I don't want you to cut it off. Will you please do this? Take the pus out, take the shrapnel out, drain it, and bandage it up. Let me worry about it. Please do it for me.

I said, if you do-- if you cut my arm off, I'm going to kill you. Just like that. And they swore at me. Get back on the table.

I got back on the table. I went through everything. I don't know how long.

And all of a sudden, I wake up. And I see the nurse. She unstraps me. And I take my left arm, and I go like this. And my arm was there. I grabbed the girl and I gave her a big kiss. Thank you. Up now.

[LAUGHTER]

I went back to the guard. And we walked about five blocks, to an abandoned bank that had been set for hospitalization. The Americans-- all prisoners, even their own wounded, were there, lined up all on the floor. So they put me into a

teller's cage by myself with straw.

And I laid there. And the nuns, German nuns, refused to feed me. I was an American. Refused absolutely.

But these German women who were serving, helping-- two of them were very nice. And every meal, they would slip around and give me food. Every meal. Never missed.

But the German nurse and nuns refused to give me one iota of anything. Could have killed them. What could I do?

And then, I was hurting plenty. I just had my bandage and all my thing was going. My hand was down. And the poor German soldiers, they were wounded, whatnot. And they were laying there.

And every day, once or twice, the doctors used to come by and used to check them out. And when a German was yelling and screaming because he was hurting, they would kick him. You ought to be ashamed of yourself-- in German. Look at that American man. He's hurt worse than you. He's not saying a word. Shut up.

[LAUGHTER]

You had to kick them all. Really a kick.

I was there for maybe-- whatever, four or five days. And finally, I became 15th of February. The German-- the Red Cross man came back to me. And he says, I got your transportation. I said, oh, gee.

So he takes me to the train. And I get on a train. And there's 22 or some odd Americans, all prisoners like myself, going to this prison camp. We finally got a ride. We had a potbelly stove there. And we were taking lice and throwing it on there.

[LAUGHTER]

We had good old time.

So we finally ended up in Memmingen, Germany. It was just 27 kilometers from Munchen-- Munich. And it was about 30 kilometers from Lake Victoria and Switzerland.

So I finally got in there with all the group. And they had horses and wagons. Took us up to the camp, about four or five miles out of town. And Memmingen is a big river city.

Am I boring you? I mean, is it all right?

Oh, I just had to make sure we have enough time left.

So it's OK?

Oh, yeah.

I don't want to be boring.

No, not at all.

But this is what the Americans should have done when we were liberated. We were really mad at-- they got us out of there because they knew, if we stayed there, we'd have killed every German. However, let's go back to Memmingen.

So we got on a truck-- on a wagon. And they took us up to the camp. And the edge of the camp, first part, were the Russian prisoners. And they were living like animals.

We found out later, they lived like animals, the Germans treated them like animals. They never bathed. They never did anything. They're just not human beings. They always said that. The Germans said, they're pigs. We treat them like pigs. You Americans are white people. So we finally get to the camp.

And it was about 8, 9 o'clock in the evening. And they take us to this big barracks. And all these jets-- and I said, oh, Jesus, they're going to kill us like the Jews in the Holocaust.

But they-- all of us, we're going to take a shower. We were filthy. And they're going to kill us off. And all the guys are scared. So what can we do? We've got the German guards there.

So finally, we got all-- all got undressed. They threw the clothes away because we were filthy. And they gave us new ones later. And the water came. So we all jumped in the water and took a shower.

[LAUGHTER]

So that was great. We got dressed in clean clothes. And then they took us to our barracks. And they were long barracks.

And then we got in. It was a section there. And all the guys were there. And they greeted us.

And it's about 9 o'clock. We hadn't had anything to eat. So we asked, you guys got any food? Listen to this. You got any food? No. We haven't anything. We got our packages, and we're getting our new ones tomorrow-- Red Cross packages.

They said, well, the Jews have got food over there. What Jews? Over there. A whole section. Are you kidding? No.

Said, well, I'm Jewish. Anybody else here Jewish? No. Because these guys I just met on the train that day. So I said, wait a minute.

So I walk over there. And sure enough, all the Jews. They're playing cards for cigarettes, which is gold. Worth a fortune.

And they're playing for cigarettes. They're eating veal cutlets. They're eating chocolate bars. They got coffee. The potbelly stove is going, cooking everything. And they're playing cards. And they're fighting and yelling and screaming just like Jews do.

[LAUGHTER]

And these are Brooklynites. They are different than anybody in the world. There is nobody like a Jewish Brooklynite, or a New Yorker. I learned a hell of a lesson.

So I go over and I meet this young guy, Charlie Steinberg. I have some papers, a few letters he wrote me after we got back here. And he worked in a Heineken brewery back there.

And so I meet Charlie. He doesn't play cards. So I introduce myself. Are you Charlie? We're hungry, blah, blah, blah.

I say, you got anything to eat? He says, yeah. Come in. Takes over to me a piece of bread.

And I said, Charlie-- I said, I can't eat this. I've got 22 other guys there starving to death. The people over there have no food. They said you Jews got it all. I said, I want some food.

So he said to the guys in the poker game, here's a Jew from San Francisco. He needs some food. "To hell with him. Let him go get his own."

[LAUGHTER]



To hell with him. I went over to him and I said, look, guys, I don't go for that. I'm a Jew, and you're Jews. And I'm not going to starve. If you've got food, I want help.

And I said, not only that, I got 22 guys who haven't had food for days. And I want food. And if you don't stop it, I'll break this whole goddamn table up. I was going to pick it up and throw it at them. And they were big, rough guys too, you know. And so--

Were they soldiers?

Huh?

Were they soldiers?

They were all prisoners of war like me, every one of them. And they'd been there quite a while.

And so they broke down. They got food. And I want you to know, they had storage of food like you can't believe. They could open a store under their pillows, under their mattresses. They had straw under these mattresses. They had food they were saving. They had anything you wanted, honest to God.

They had it rigged. I don't know whether you ever watched the comedy-- the comics in the daily paper-- maybe you weren't here then. Years ago, they used to have a comic, Big Stoop. A German soldier, he used to be a prison guard. And he used to take the German soldier-- the prisoners who worked details and everything else. Well, this guy was a replica-- 6 foot 6, big, husky German with a big overcoat.

The Jewish boys made pockets in the back of the coat. He used to take them on a work detail. They had breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the workshop. They didn't eat there. This stuff was extra.

When they came in to get something, like in the bakery, they didn't wait in line like the German people. They went around the back. They had coffee. They had chocolate. They had hosiery. They'd get anything they wanted from the Germans. But they went in the back.

[LAUGHTER]

It's a book on that. They used to have baseball games, the Jews against the goyim.

[LAUGHTER]

So are you saying that the Germans allowed them these favors?

They outsmart-- the Germans didn't-- the guards, they could care less. They were getting stuff that nobody else can get. The Jewish boys had-- well, we got a box of Red Cross every week. Then they cut it-- the Germans confiscated them.

They had warehouses full. They were given to all the German people in the cities. So they were confiscating them. So they cut the Americans down to every two weeks.

So that means you got half a box of meat. So you had to rationalize everything. And they managed-- these Jewish boys had-- they made it on their own. They knew how to handle it.

Did they separate themselves from the others? Did they themselves separate themselves from the other soldiers?

I don't know who did it, but they were separate. They were in a corner way by themselves.

You mean--

The Jewish boys.

The Germans may have separated them.

I can't say.

You don't know.

I don't know. I don't think the Germans would have done it separately. They might have gotten it themselves.

Were they physically separated? Or were they--

Physically.

With what, a--

No, they had an archway. It was open. Wide open section.

So they could have mingled, if they'd chosen to. But they chose not to mingle.

Yeah. Oh, they were friendly with everybody. But they stuck together. Spoke Jewish together and all.

Now, while I was in this camp there, when I-- I found out when I got home, the 15th of February, when I finally got transportation, is the day my mother passed away. I wasn't aware.

While I was in this camp, I finally-- they found a place for me to stay in with the Jewish boys. I didn't want to, but they did. I stayed. While I was there, some Israelis, Jewish Israelis, prisoners of war, were there. And I'd befriended one-- very nice, big, husky.

He was a-- when Poland-- when Israel first started, he was 18. And he and a group of Polish boys volunteered to pioneer in Israel. And they went through all of that stuff. And they became prisoners because the American-- Israelis had a beautiful army there in the war. They did a lot of good things. They made bums out of the others.

Anyway, I befriended Abraham. And we were very good friends. We're talking.

And I got very, very sick. Temperature must have been 150. And he stayed there right with me-- rags, everything-- for days on end-- two, three, whatever.

I finally got better. And he told me all about Israel-- all about Israel. He told me all about France, how the antisemitism in France is very bad, really bad. They used to have fights every night, the Yiddish-- Jewish people against the Gentiles running the Arc de Triomphe. Used to have signs, guns, knives, everything. Almost every night, big fights, all the Jews against the Frenchmen. It was really bad. A lot of antisemitism. It made me sick to hear it.

And he told me all about the pioneering in Israel because I had a desire. I've been there twice since, to Israel. I want to go back, but I can't fly that much.

However, in the prison camp-- we were there. And we did little things. I couldn't do much because of my arm. But I went, one day, on the work detail. I wanted to see how those guys worked it there. They had it made.

[LAUGHTER]

But anyway, on about the 25th, 26th of April, we knew the end was coming, because the English barracks-- they built portable radios which the Germans used to come and look for every single day. And they used to hide them in the attic. And every night, they made the bulletin. And we'd go from one different building to the other and give us the-- from the

British BBC. Every night.

And every day, the Germans came in to look for that. And they could never find it.

And they used to come in to get a work detail to clean the-- used to go to the bathroom, you know, over-- sit on the board. And once in a while, the board would break and the guy would fall right in the-- oh, gee, that was pitiful.

[LAUGHTER]

And we had laughs too.

[LAUGHTER]

But anyway, it was 25th-- about that. We heard the American cannon. We can hear the fire. We can see the shells, the blasts. And about the 27th, 28th, all the Germans dropped their guns and ran away. Then the American officers took over.

And two days later, the 30th, the army entered our camp. And the trucks came. And they just got our names, and out. Boom.

We wanted to volunteer to stay. We wanted to go into Germany. We were going to wipe everybody out. They wouldn't put up with it. Made us go.

But never-- first time ever written is with this. The reason I wrote that statement is because I'm on disability with the-- I have the highest rating for medical in the history in the army, the VA-- prisoner of war and wounded in action. So I get-- thank God, they take good care of me. However, I have my own personal doctors for everything else.

My family is satisfied with the workings. I've had an occlusion, and they were wonderful. Teeth are my own. I have hearing aids through them. They're wonderful.

My daughters are both married to doctors, urologists. One is divorced, but she's worked in his office for years, so she's aware-- familiar with this. And my youngest one is married almost 30 years to another urologist, Saratoga. So they get a background. And they watch everything. And I have a wonderful son-in-law who watches everything.

I was just taken down to Stanford because I have an aneurysm. And it's pretty-- getting up too high for me. They can't operate on me because of my age. And my heart won't take it. The percentage is too high.

If I burst, then I have three to four days to live, and they'll operate if they can down at Stanford. I don't know whether you know Dr. [? Briel ?] in San Francisco. He's my internist-- the best.

What more can I say? I'm here. I'm grateful. But I'm satisfied with life.

I've seen a lot of it. I've seen it turn from horse and wagons. I've seen the whole thing change. I don't think there's ever going to be a century like what I have had. Be changes, different things.

But I'm still in the real estate business. And do a little business here and there.

Get anxieties. I've had a little problem with my driving. And my license are very high-- my insurance, rather. But I'm able to do it. God willing, that's what I want. I do what I can. The end.

May I ask you some questions? What did you know about Hitler? How were you prepared for his ideology before you came to Europe? What did you know about him?

You mean about my--

Hitler.

--preparation for the war and everything?

Exactly. Was there any preparation?

I had a very, very good, hard-working childhood-- hard-working. I was strong. At 32, I was able to do what these 18, 19 years old. And I would say that the average 32-year-old couldn't do it unless he had my background.

I used to go up the country with my family for Boyes Springs for a month every year. And all of the Jewish families from San Francisco are the same age and everything, had the same children and all, we all went up there and had good times. And we used to play baseball.

When I was in the army, I was here two weeks before I went overseas. And my family was up there. And I played baseball. And I was running like a little eight, 10-year-old. These others were huffing and puffing. They couldn't even make it.

No one could hurt me. No one. I'd have fought anybody at that time. I felt so strong, so confident. The training was so good.

And it was rough. I used to come home on weekends, black eyes. My wife wouldn't let me in. She didn't recognize me.

My daughter would say, there's a man out front. Mama, I don't know who it is. She opened the door-- Ro, let me in. It's Harry. Oh my God. She didn't recognize you.

But the guns-- I'd never had a gun in my life. My black eyes, my face was all torn to pieces. Oh, gee. But I went through the whole thing. Never backed out once.

But that's what prepared me. If I hadn't been that, I would never have made it. I really never would. You had to be prepared.

Did you understand, when you went over there, that Hitler had a primary goal of destroying the Jews? Did you understand--

Oh, I knew the whole thing of the Holocaust, sure.

You did? When did you learn about the camps?

About the what?

The camps, the concentration camps. Did you know about them?

From 1937, '38. I got the Jewish bulletin. I see that. I read the papers. I see the movies. I knew what was going on. I knew every bit of it that was going on, every inch.

As a matter of fact, there was a Jewish group that brought over many youths-- boys and girls 12, 13 years old. And one of the boys was-- they put them at the Jewish orphanage on Ocean Avenue. I forget what you call it now. Big, big Jewish orphanage. They came from the [PERSONAL NAME] family and the Crocker who banked and all them funded all this. And they brought all these out while they were able to get out.

So my mother-in-law had an extra bedroom. And they asked her if she would take a child. And they would pay. And she said yes. She'd like to have a girl. They said, sorry, they just don't have a girl. But they have a real nice boy. Would you like-- OK. All right.

So Walter Obermayer came. I don't know whether you ever heard that name, Walter Obermayer. And he worked for Levi Strauss for many years.

And my wife and I had been married about a year or so. And we took him under our wing because my mother-in-law was 60 years old, 55. That was an old person in those days. So we took him over and more or less helped raise him. And he adapted himself good. He lived there.

How old was he?

Walter was 13.

And when was this? In 1937?

'38? No, '40-- well, Walter is 73 today. So we're talking about 1941-42, probably. And we used to take him to Golden Gate Park. We took him everywhere and did everything, my wife and I.

My day off was Thursday. I used to take him everywhere. And he was just like a cousin, or-- he called us a cousin now, and his wife and family.

And he came from there. And we raised him. Walter's a very prominent person today. He's retired-- Levi Strauss.

What happened to Walter's family?

Walter's family grew. Beautiful. Walter married a girl from Germany through the Jewish organizations.

But his mother and father.

His father was-- he had a big hardware store in Augsburg, Germany. And he died when all of this commotion started. His mother was there. Couldn't get away.

And finally, I think just before the war broke out, they were able to get her out. She was a diabetic. She was on the boat. And from what Walter learned later, she was unconscious. And she woke up just enough to see the Statue of Liberty, and she died. So he didn't get to see her anymore.

Walter's aunt and uncle got out of there, escaped. He was an attorney. And he worked for Crocker Bank. He was the head attorney there. No children. And Walter was their only survivor. So they're both gone now.

But Walter was president of the Sherith Israel-- not the Sherith-- Beth Israel Judea. You know, on Brotherhood Way? He was president for three years.

He's really a good family. I don't know whether you know the family. One daughter is married to a professor of computers, Scanlon College. The other daughter is an attorney at the department of-- a public defender. And the other son is a graduate-- all three graduated.

The two older-- I mean, the two daughters-- one daughter and one son graduated Cal. The other one graduated a private college. The son is a graduate of Cal. And he works for the United States Department of Forestry up in Oregon. Married with two kids.

I don't know whether you know the Khan family here, [? Ezel ?] Khan. You don't know them? Very prominent in the city. Her husband is-- she's an attorney, he's a doctor at UC Medical.

And so there's a good background. He's a great guy, Walter. My very best. He was very fond of my wife, myself.

Did he treat you as he would have treated parents?

He treats us as a cousin, with a lot of respect. Good, good guy. Well, let's say, every Monday night since my wife passed away-- 10 years-- every Monday we're together. We have dinner. Come back to my house and play gym and fight, and fight. I mean, we have a good time. No money. We have a good time. He was there last night.

He's the best. He'll do anything for me. I haven't called on him for anything. But I sold him his place he's living in now. And I'll be selling it again in another year or so if I'm still around, still in business. But he calls us cousin. And everybody knows him, because my in-laws were very prominent in the city-- a whole bunch of Romanians.

So would you say, largely, that the people that you-- the Jewish people here were aware of the concentration camps?

100%. 100%.

Was there a problem for you and for other Jewish people here that getting out of Europe was a great difficulty for them?

No. No. Well, let's say-- no, there was nothing. Just the same, normal antisemitism you have now. Always have it.

Now, let's say-- you probably want to know, my being Jewish, was it ever known in Germany? There were three occasions where I made it known because, of course, all the Americans throw their keys away in the-- you know, the thing, whatever you call them.

Dog tags?

Dog tags. All thrown away. When I was--

When they're captured?

When I was first interrogated, they asked me, and I told them that I was Jewish. And they let it go. Where did you learn to talk German? I said, I went to college. I studied German. I speak it. Yeah? OK. That was the extent of it.

One time, I was on a train. Remember I told you I was on a-- I finally got a ride? The train was full. And two German Gestapo, German Youth, they got on it. And I was sitting there with this old guard on it. Every seat was taken.

They were standing right there in front of us. So they took a cigarette out each. And I looked at them like this. Oh. One of the guys was nice. He took the cigarette, gave it to me.

And I didn't have a light. So I said, light? The other guy grabs the cigarette, and he takes it, throws it in the ground, and stomps it.

I looked up at him. And I said, you [GERMAN]. That's the worst thing you can say to a German. Takes the pistol right to my head.

The other guy said to him, leave him alone. He hasn't done anything to you. OK. Put his gun down. He said, come on. They moved to another-- well, he left-- he put a cigarette in the back of me. In the back of him, I got a cigarette.

The next time, we were in Koblenz, Germany. I was waiting to get back. And I was in a building. And it was a hospital. Three wings, main-- two wings. One wing was bombed out. And while I was there, about four or five days, I was put in a big room with two Italian prisoners.

[LAUGHTER]

One had the outfit of a general. Beautiful voice. And the other guy was like a little private.

And the general would sit there, and he'd strip naked. And the other guy would pick off the lice and kill them. And he would be singing. And I'm laying in the straw here, just waiting for whatever happened. And this was absolutely wonderful for two or three days.

And next door, it was a big area, a big room where they-- Germans who are going to the front and coming back used to stop there. And they used to have women, provide women for them there. And [LAUGHTER] they had parties there all the time.

And one woman, a blonde, came and sees me. American? She locks the door and she comes in. And the Italian says, sh. Go, go. [NON-ENGLISH]

[LAUGHTER]

So anyway, that was real nice. And I got along with her well.

But however, the English-- the Americans used to bomb, certain time of the day, a city. The English bombed-- I forget whether it was night or whether-- the English were never on their mark. They were always off their mark. The Americans were precise. So every time they came over, they could tell who was coming.

And we'd have to go way down in the dungeon-- five, six stories-- way down. And all the German soldiers and everybody would go down. And I'd sit on the side, mind my own business.

I was dirty, filthy. I had a beard. Just total filth. I was a rat. But I had my sense.

And one German officer was sitting there every time we came down. And all the German soldiers used to come to me. American. Wow. Where you from? Blah, blah, blah.

They gave me cards. If you get back, stop and see this. Call this. Call my uncle, my brother.

[LAUGHTER]

I had everything. I put them in my pocket. And this was burning him up.

So every time the raid ended, I went back up. Come down again, whoever was there would come in to me. This happened three or four times.

Finally, we'd come down, and all the guys are there. And we're talking. And the worst thing that used to happen is, who's winning the war? I don't know who's winning the war. I hope we're winning.

So I used to say, the Germans. You think the Germans are winning? Yeah. You guys are winning.

How long is it going to take? Five more years. Oh, that was like killing them off, [LAUGHTER] to go through that five years. That was the worst punishment there is.

So finally, after that had happened this one time, this officer comes over to me. And he says to the guys, get out of here-- because they punch and kick and beat their men. You know, nothing. Get out of here.

So he sits down next to me. And like I say, I'm a rat. And he takes his gun out. Puts it to my head. He said, you know, I could kill you.

I said, yeah? You can do anything you want. I says, what have I done? He said, you're degrading our country-- propaganda against Germany. I said, I'm not saying anything wrong with Germany. This is my opinion.

He said, well, I'm going to shoot you. I says, go ahead, if you have to. What can I do? I'm sick. I have nothing to offer

you. I can't fight if I have to. I said, but you know, you people are different than Americans.

And then he started listening. He said, why? Well, in America, if we have trouble, we're going to fight. We'll fight with our fist. We may kick. We may fight with our fist. But when one's had enough, he quit.

When he quit, he either makes up with the person and they're friendly, or he just takes off, and not friendly. But we don't go to kill people. We don't get clubs. We don't get rocks, knives, and clubs. That's what you people do-- want to kill right away. That's what's wrong with you people.

And he listened to me. And he put his gun back in his holster. And he said-- walked away. And he said to the guys, you want to talk to him, go ahead. Talk to him.

Isn't that funny? Two times. I got away with it both times. Nothing else I could do. Those are real, real, real facts. That's why I'm happy, you know, came back.

I spent a year in the hospital when I got back, where I had five operations on my hand. I went to psychiatry for a year, once a week. I didn't need it.

The only thing that was my big problem was I was-- too many times at night we're in a location where the cannons start firing. There's nothing worse than the cannon firing when you're not expecting it, laying down on the ground maybe 200 feet away. And you get out of there right now, because you know the enemy's going to shoot cannon back at you. Out as far as you can go. Boy, when that happens, you're really in trouble.

And then the planes, of course-- that one was on my mind a lot. And for quite some time, I used to-- when I hear, at home-- I used to hear a plane. I would get down on the ground and try to crawl under the bed for a good period of time. But I got over it.

And I went to a psychiatrist. And it was just nonsense. I really didn't need it. I was never cuckoo, ever.

But when I get back, I was in the hospital for a year. Six months in Auburn and six months here, in the city. And I had Class A pass. Passed my time playing poker and Pinochle, winning money to help certain-- with my income.

[LAUGHTER]

Was that surgery that the Germans had performed on your arm, was that--

No.

Was that effective?

Oh, it was infected like you can't believe.

Was that effective? Effective?

Oh, yeah, sure. They drained everything and put the bandage on it. And the one thing I forgot-- the day after I got to the camp, put in the camp, they came and picked me up and took me to the headquarters for my arm. And there was the fifth doctor to the King of Yugoslavia. He was also a prisoner of war. And he looked at it. And he cleaned it out further. And that lasted me till I came home.

And were you-- did they give you any antibiotics?

No. Antibiotics. No. I had ether when I had the operation. The original when they cleaned it out, that was all. No, it was-- no [MUMBLES] They didn't have any antibiotics.



But they stole our food from the Red Cross. And they gave it to all the German civilians. We used to go in the towns, and we'd wipe them out. Then we'd have to go house to house, get the Germans out of there. And the German soldiers used to get civilian clothes and walk out of the house. And we'd have to shoot them.

And we'd go in the house and see safes in the wall. We'd put grenades and blow them up and get rid of them-- do all we can. We had to get them out of there. That was not easy.

And I was so used to sitting-- sleeping in a foxhole-- I [LAUGHTER] forget the town we were in. That night we stayed in I went in a bed. I had to go to the bathroom. So I go to reach up, and I fall down on my head. I was going to reach up to get on the ground.

[LAUGHTER]

I tell you. That's really-- yeah, I'm telling you, it was a worthwhile experience, having come back. Really, I'm telling you. I think of it.

But I brought my brother back here. So that's fine.

Harry, how do you attribute your survival? To what do you attribute your survival? And since you had so many brushes with death-- near brushes with death--

It was an everyday job. I had to do a job. Whatever I had to do I had to do. Whether I did it right or wrong, I did it. I did it according to the rules that I was taught. Nothing else. Didn't know where I'd be the next minute.

In the forest, when we were in that Black Forest, I'm going to tell you, we had to get to our mortars. And we're in the wide open. And they started a bombardment.

We ran. My partner and I ran. And we got to that hole. And that hole was only a little bit bigger than that little section there. And we just dove right in there.

And a bomb landed right there when we did many times. And a bomb landed right on top of us. That's what you call-- you just take it.

Thank God we were-- but I tell you, we didn't put-- what do you call them? We took logs, and we rolled them over there. Took us hours to get that place covered-- and sand, and everything. If it weren't for that, we'd be wiped out like nothing. We were wiped out anyway.

I would venture to say that there isn't a person in my outfit left. I lost them when I stayed in that little town when I refused to go, because they took them up in the mountains. They had a reunion of my outfit. I think they're having it this month. And I wrote the fellow and asked him-- the fellow who's more or less having it-- asked him if he could find any of the original from the old outfit. And he wrote me back and he says, no, they're all replacements.

So there's no sense my going to Pennsylvania if I won't know anybody. See? I'd love to go, but there's no reason. Now I can't fly that far anyway. But--

Did you feel separate, as a Jewish soldier? Or did you feel a part of--

No.

--the effort?

I was an American. Because I was told that the day before we went through a road in Germany, before we went up the hill to the little town-- we were there. And the day before, they had had this-- 80,000 Americans were captured. They had this big, big group of servicemen go through-- prisoners go through. And before they went up the mountains, they

stopped there. And they asked all the Jewish boys to step out. 360 did.

They asked them to keep going, the others-- took them up there. Well, when they got up there, the German civilians went, got picks and knives and everything, trying to kill the American prisoners. And the guards had to fight them off-- civilians.

These 360 Jewish boys were marched into the-- what, about-- forest a couple of hundred feet from the highway and gunned down. All covered with snow. There was a hell of a big do here, I understand. But I didn't know about it. 360.

But I was an American soldier. That's what I am. That's what they are and were.

And we weren't briefed enough on survival. I had one lesson of survival if you were captured. In the grandstand was sitting there and the guy gave us 10-minute lecture. Name, number, that's it.

But they treated us very bad. I have no use of them. I expected it from the Japanese, because you always considered them one step from savages. That's my thinking. These are educated people.

The Geneva Conference meant nothing to them. They did anything they wanted. They killed us like flies. They stomped us to death. Terrible.

When I was in that prison camp, some guys, they were tunneling like you used to see in Stalag VII-A That was my stalag number. In the movie Stalag VII-A they tunneled underneath. Our boys did it in our prison camp. And they got outside the fence.

And when they got out there, the Germans were waiting, and shoot them dead. And they run in the building, and they finally found the entrance. And they get those guys. And they would take them out and put them in dungeons or shoot them.

Next thing that bothered me really bad was when we were in prison there, and some of the guys were able to escape. They had 27, 30 miles-- kilometers to Lake Victoria, into Switzerland. Once again, in Switzerland, neutral country. Supposed to be safe.

The Swiss people turned every one of them into the Germans. They got \$50 a prisoner. The Germans used to take them back and bring them to our camp, put them in dungeons, beat the hell out of them, and starve them. Some made it, some didn't.

And that's your Swiss. No way. No way.

I saw a lot of things. We heard a lot about the French. We saw a lot. We knew what was going on. The boys used to get into Paris on leave like I got. If we had a fight, we could kill anybody. They couldn't touch us. We were front line men.

The boys used to go into Montmartre, which is the-- like the Tenderloin. And you just [LAUGHTER] get the girls. And the girls would go through one room and say, put your clothes in here and go in the next room, and there's a bed. That's fine. They go in there and they come back, the clothes are all gone-- the money, wallet, everything.

[LAUGHTER]

And the guys used to-- they have pimps, you know. Used to take them, throw them out on the street naked. And Americans had the MPs with the blankets. So they used to take them [LAUGHTER] in a blanket. Wrap them up and take them. And they brought them, give them outfits, and take them back.

[LAUGHTER]

Oh, Jesus. And when we were really fighting, at the very beginning, the orders came for no American soldier to leave

front line at night when there was no fighting, if you could help it, and go to the German girls-- French girls, because the French girls were cutting our boys' throats, because they lived with the Germans. The Germans gave them everything they wanted. They had four good years. And here we kicked them out.

And they were getting the American boys and cutting their throats in the bedrooms and wherever. The orders were, no more. So they stopped. Had to move on. That's right.

God, that's about all I can say. I can live every memory, every inch of it. But I don't dwell on it. I very seldom talk about it. People say, gee, I want to hear you. Come on over. No way.

But there's no heroes. No heroes. It's no good. I'll tell you that much.

Harry, having spoken to other soldiers from World War II, American soldiers, I've learned that many men did not know about the concentration camps. Many non-Jewish.

I can't believe that. If you could read a paper or listen to a radio or watch television, I can't believe that. Even when Americans entered in '44, it was number one on our mind.

About the concentration camps?

Absolutely. I knew everything that was going on. I didn't go over there to fight to liberate them. I went over there because I was-- my job. I was taken. I had to do it. That was the only reason.

I didn't have a lot of things-- you get over there, there's only one thing you learn-- me. I come first. You don't want to help the other guy. Let him help himself. You have to do it.

I mean, do your job. Everybody does the job. You get accomplished what you're supposed to. But you don't do it.

How many times when I offered to be a sergeant-- from a private or a corporal to a sergeant in front lines? I said, no way. I got myself to worry about, my job to do. I'm not going to be in charge of this.

Because we never had an officer in the front line, ever-- ever. Officers never fought in the front line. Sergeant run the whole war. First sergeant, the master sergeant, and the officers-- never.

They used to come up in the front lines. And 5 o'clock, they used to call to the back, I get nervous. Send a Jeep up and take me back-- every day.

They used to come up there with guns and everything. They were big shots. Get ready for an attack or something. Go ahead. I'm nervous. Send a truck up, or send a Jeep up.

Never saw an officer in action, ever. I mean, there were a lot of them. Maybe I didn't know the officer because they-- the other people in the world think you kill the officer, you kill everybody. They don't know what to do.

See, the Americans are different. We take up where they did if they're not there. So I can't really say that you never saw an officer fight, because I always fought under my sergeant. And as I say, the officers, they take the emblems off or they turn it around, because they wanted to kill them because they're the leaders, because they go by leaders.

They have to be led. We think individually. They don't. It's a big difference.

How did you deal with fear? Did you feel--

Fear?

--fear?

I never feared. I really never did. I did what I have to. I never feared.

I was never afraid to do what I had to. I just did. Whether I was stupid or not, I just did it. Really.

That's why I got rid of that kid in the foxhole on the Siegfried Line. I can't have you here. You're going to be bad. You're no good for me. I'd rather stay here and fight and die myself than have you here. You're derogatory.

What became of him?

Him? I sent him back to headquarters, and I never knew. I could care less. I didn't know. I couldn't change him.

The only thing he helped me was that night. He helped line up all my ammunition. That's it. And I threw him out the next morning-- get out of here. Man, I can't handle you. I went back to find out where he was, but I didn't check too much. I had to get my supplies and get back in.

We couldn't sleep, you know. They used to fire at us all day long and have these attacks. And we couldn't sleep. And I had to have some sleep. I just couldn't handle it.

I snore. I'm a very bad snorer. So they were afraid if I sleep, the Germans know where I am. They're going to come and drop a grenade right in there-- all done. So I tried to sleep, and every time I'd fall asleep, this guy would wake me up.

I said, look-- I took my rifle and put it right to him. I said, if you do that, wake me up again, I'm going to kill you. I have to sleep.

[LAUGHTER]

I don't recall what happened, but I managed. It was so bad, because I snored so bad, really.

[LAUGHTER]

Did you receive any correspondence from home?

Not very often. Not when I was over there, no. I never got anything from home. You know, I never even-- to be honest with you, I never checked to see if my wife wrote me.

I don't recall how I found out about my mother dying. I was liberated. The next day was Mother's Day. And we were taken to a camp.

And I met a Jewish officer. In this camp they had a Western Union. Was Mother's Day.

My wife had received a letter that I was missing in action and believed to be wounded in my legs, but no further information. And I got to this place, and I met this Jewish officer. I said, jeez, do me a favor. The guy wouldn't take a telegram from me. He said no.

So we went in, and I gave her a telegram-- I'm safe. "Liberated. Safe. Right arm injured. Happy Mother's Day. See you soon." That was it. That was the first correspondence.

I don't recall where I found out that my mother had died. The first day I got a ride. The first day. Yeah. So be it.

Did your injury affect use of your arm?

Well, after the fifth operation they-- I had a tendon here. They took it out, and they put it over here. And that went on till about 15 years ago. Everything was perfect.

I was playing golf, and I stroke, and the club flew over the next tee and just missed a guy. The tendon broke. And I could see it. I could hear it-- Zzz. And I could see the thing, the knot, going right up in there.

And I can't play golf. I can't grip the club anymore. It's impossible. And at my age, I don't need to golf. I don't want to take a chance.

I have full use, excepting-- when I came back overseas, my hand was like this. That's why I had five operations. But I don't want to have any operations. I'll leave it the rest of-- this age, what the hell do I need it fixed?

Did you see men shot or attacked by dogs on your walk?

Oh, sure. Like I say, when we were first captured, I saw them slaughtered. Then, in the marches, I saw them killed by dogs. I saw them killed by rifle. You saw all you had to see-- too much.

And what was your response to that?

Take the next step. Take the next step, next step. That's all. Every step counted.

Used to see the signs-- kilos, kilometers. Used to count them. You just kept going, and that's it. Go. No stop, just go.

The Germans-- they changed their guards every so often, but not us. We'd stop, and they-- go on. I'll tell you, endurance you got to have. Either that or you just laid down in the snow and died. That's all.

I can't venture to even give an opinion on that. I wouldn't do it. Big guy here, next minute, he's gone. Now gone.

There's only one thing that ever bothered me and still bothers me-- is our great President Roosevelt. I don't want to say what I hope to say because I don't want to commence anything.

Why, for three years, he didn't even move a finger to help the Jews? Three years. Had us so head up with the Germans, not a thing. I don't--

Why do you suppose he took that stance?

Pardon?

Why do you suppose he took that stance?

Why do you think we brought German economists and German scientists here after the war? Hmm? Why do you think he let them all go to Argentina or South America? Why'd he let them all go to the Arab countries? Why? Hmm?

The country. People don't mean a thing. You don't mean a thing. I don't mean a thing. You have to exist on yours. They're not going to do it for you.

You don't do it, homeless. Go and be homeless. Who cares? Your family will take care of you, great.

They're eating us alive as a country. I wouldn't want to be here 15 years from now. I really wouldn't. Great to see my grandkids and everybody, but they'll be grown up. They'll be able to handle it-- the way we handle it.

I really wouldn't want to be here. Too many things I'm seeing, I'm not happy. But I have to mind my business. Play my poker, go out with my lady.

I have a nice lady friend, you know. When I need, I go take her places. She's very capable. You know. She lives over in Terra Linda. And I go over there every Saturday. We have dinner and a show.

And now she moved up to Petaluma. But she comes in town for events and affairs. She's nice, clean, good mind, strong thank God.

I need her-- my daughters are excellent. My one son-in-law is super excellent. The other one is gone. He's remarried and gone. But I have four nice grandchildren.

I call them-- Tuesday night is my grandchildren night. I'm on that phone from 8:00 until 10:00, 10:30. Minnesota--

[LAUGHTER]

--way up to Garberville, Santa Rosa, and San Jose, and then Sonoma, and then now Saratoga. That's my Tuesday night.

I belong to MCI. It's a big savings, a big help. You designate the numbers, and they follow through. It's a big saving. I still have a big bill.

Got to change the tape.

All set? What is it? 2 o'clock?

One more minute.