HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

INTERVIEW OF

W. DIETER BERGMAN, M.D.

CONDUCTED BY:

JULIE ROSENBERG

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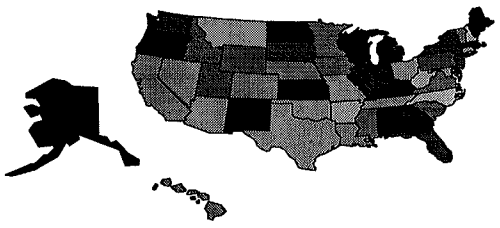

MS. ROSENBERG: My name is Julie Rosenberg. Today I am interviewing Dr. Dieter Bergman.

Interviewing with me is Nancy Magidson and our videographer is Shawn Simplicio.

Today is Friday, March 15, 1996. We are at the San Francisco Holocaust Oral History Project. This is the second part of the interview with Dr. Bergman.

Dr. Bergman, just to start off, we had discussed earlier in the tape we had gotten up to the point of your lifetime where you were talking about your time in the military. I was wondering if you could describe for us the day you invaded Poland.

A. Under the German law, of course, I was drafted. At the time nobody paid any attention to the law which specified that, kind of a silent law, that partially Jewish people should not become officers in the military certainly, and possibly shouldn't serve; but nobody paid much attention to that. There must have been ten thousand so-called half Jews in the service.

I happened to get into the infantry, which was about as tough as the Marine Corps. After basic training I was sent to Silesia, where the Germans pretended that they were being threatened by the Poles. Two million powerful German Army was threatened by a hundred eighty-five thousand Poles, untrained, no tanks,

no planes and we were being terrorized by the Poles.

On the 1st of September, maybe it was the 30th of August, 1939, we were marched East.

A few days before that happened I was assigned to be the communication's person between my company, a regular infantry company, and the staff because they thought I was bright enough to understand what was going on. So they even gave me the privilege to go to a local restaurant, which was still Germany at the time, and listen to the British broadcast to find out what was happening in big politics, because our information in Nazi Germany was very one-sided and nobody knew that the Poles were not prepared for war and the British and French, not even to mention America, were convinced they wouldn't have to worry about a war after the Munich Accord with Chamberlain and so forth.

At any rate, I listened to the BBC, which, under German law, was a court marshall offense. If they hadn't given me permission and I listened to it at home they certainly would have put me in a concentration camp.

I went home and happily reported all kind of anti-Nazi remarks that came from the BBC.

A few days later we marched into Poland and we had about 36 hours of real war, a few shots being

fired. I shot at something or other. My company commander, whose communication assistant I was, said he shot at something moving. He killed a cow. Somebody shot at both of us and missed.

By the time we marched the first 12 or 24 hours the local village was already burning and all the Poles had disappeared, except a few old folks who were trying to protect their chicken and eggs from us murderous Nazis to take over. Then we marched a couple more days. By that time the German Army and Air Force and tank battalions had way passed us up.

After four or five days we ended up in a lovely little bivouac, is that the right word, bivouac place where we could recuperate and swim in the river and get drunk if you could find something to drink.

Then we hung around in Poland for another couple weeks after the war way outpassed us to the East. Then we were shipped to the West of Germany in that phase of the war, which was called the Quiet War. There was a declaration of war by that time, but after Poland had been occupied and split with Russia nothing happened for awhile. The Nazis didn't produce any further advance until May, 1940 when they invaded Holland, Belgium, et cetera.

Q. Did the Army ever try to teach you anything

about the Nazi ideology?

A. I suppose every Army, regardless what country it is, has some national home country kind of education and that was not particularly political.

In this country, I suppose, everybody has to go to a class to understand about the constitution and liberties.

Also in Germany it was a matter of telling us what a great, number one nation we are. But it was not particularly ideological because the military at that time were about as nonpolitical as they can be. I don't know whether anybody in my camp knew anything about my partially Jewish background. I barely did myself and it was not of any importance. Nobody ever mentioned it.

We just assumed that everybody has been reading the paper and listening to the news eight times a day. There wasn't any more to convince us, except we were numero uno, and the whole world was waiting for our word with bated breath. In the military there was no real political propaganda.

Q. Did you ever talk to anyone about being half Jewish?

A. Well, maybe that sounds strange to you, but for me having a certain type of Jewish grandparents, and for somebody else having a different kind of grandparent

was not a matter of discussion between young men. You are 18, 19 years old and you are talking about football, the weather, or where you could liberate a bottle of rum, or something like that. We never discussed these things.

I don't think American soldiers, or any soldiers, are discussing political things in the boot camp situation we were in. This was in no way politicized.

Q. How were you treated in the Army? Were you treated very well? Did you have enough food?

A. Oh, yes. They saw to their soldiers. Since I was a little better educated than the rest of the soldiers, because I had gone to a very prestigious high school, and it was quite obvious I wasn't stupid, I had all kinds of privileges, such as coaching our master sergeant who couldn't pass his math for promotion, and I was his private teacher and so forth. I was treated perfectly well. Nobody treated me any different.

I suspect nobody really cared. Nobody knew anything about it. In my records at the military headquarters there was probably a note in there. This was not a problem with the military.

Q. Did you know any homosexuals in the military?

A. Oh, there are always a couple people in the

battalion that you look at and you have your own thoughts. Once in while somebody comes onto you a little closer than you thought he should, but I didn't really specifically know anybody who was homosexual. We also didn't discuss that at all. I suspect that by that time many open homosexuals out of the closet had already been eliminated from the every day functioning in the German society and put in camps and were treated just about as bad as the Jews were. Most of them were killed in the concentration camps, if they acted in any way, and admitted in any way being homosexual.

Q. So within your battalion it wasn't an issue. Nobody was afraid that they might be accused of being homosexual and taken away?

A. I don't think I ever recall. Undoubtedly we must have talked about it, but it didn't leave an impression in my memory. I doubt very much whether anybody much discussed it. Sometimes young kids make derogatory remark, "Look at this faggot over there." But this was not important. We were all buddies. This was of no consequence. Nobody was ostracized because they were partially Jewish, Gypsies or homosexual.

At least I don't recall. It may be my naivete or lack of memory. I don't think this was anything the German Army had to apologize for. It was

not official policy there. Nobody had things like happened in this country, "Don't tell" and that sort of thing. It never came up. Nobody ever told us that.

As a matter of fact, I didn't think there were many homosexuals in Germany at the time, except in some centers like in Berlin where one of the big Jewish sexologists, I forget his name now, had established an institute of homo -- I don't know what is the word for it. Studies.

And there were, of course, several homosexual bars. I don't even know if there were any lesbian bars in Berlin.

I remember my brother, who was two years older and I, we used to visit my mother in Berlin in the mid-thirties when we were 15 or so. Out of curiosity we went into some of the bars and looked at these people. When somebody tried to come a little too close to us we decided we better leave the place. That's about all I recall. It's interesting you ask me that. I never gave it much thought.

I told you the other day that I had almost continuous diaries, like about 12 little volumes, I had in my breast pocket all through the war. Possibly I made some remarks in there.

I found it fascinating after I finished

writing my book last year I went back to some of the sources I had used and I found it fascinating how many things I had overlooked. But you can't talk about everything. Contrary to what Julie says there are things I simply don't remember.

Q. When did you know about the concentration camps at the time and what did you know?

A. That's a very good question. That is also not clear in my memory. Everybody knew and accepted the fact that the nation was a powerful dictatorial government and had a history of what we considered oppression by the Allies after the First World War was afraid of dissidents. So you would assume it's all right if there were ten or fifteen thousand people in so-called concentration camps. The first one that comes to mind is Dachau. D-a-c-h-a-u. That was a place where many notable Germans who had expressed dissent were locked up, like Niebuhr, the Christian Bishop of Berlin, and a whole lot of people, including some Jewish people, who were great scientists. The other name I was looking for five minutes ago was Hiirschfeld. Concentration camps everybody knew about, with the understanding you don't talk about it. You knew the man down the street had said something Adolph Hitler, they put him in a camp for six months or something like that and then he came

back and kept his mouth shut. He wasn't tortured.

Dachau, they were not particularly kind to people, but it was not an extermination camp. They didn't get good food. They were interrogated. Maybe they were occasionally beaten. It was not a major disaster like later on in the war.

The other so-called camps, concentration camps, Bergen-Belzen, near Weimar was close enough to where we lived, where my Jewish grandparents lived in Naumburg that I knew about it. I wrote in one of my diaries, quoted in my book, that in 1937 or so when I was 17 I talked to my Jewish grandfather about this. I said don't you know outside of Weimar there is this camp where they lock up Jews and other people and treat them and mistreat them and torture them and maybe kill them. I don't know whether they do or not.

In Weimar everybody knew about it. Nobody was talking about it because if you talked about it in the mom and pop grocery store there was always somebody who denounced you and got credits and you ended up in the camp yourself. The man denounced you got some benefit out of it, whatever it was.

My grandfather, like many prominent assimilated Jews in Germany, was furious that I would talk this way. He said in this great country of Goethe,

Beethoven and Einstein we don't tolerate this talk from adolescents like you. Shut up. That is what he said. He was a Jew. He refused to the end of his life, 1940, that Germans would ever do a thing like that.

That was the general opinion the assimilated Jews had in Germany. This madness will soon stop and we won't have to worry about it. The Germans will wake up and kick out this dictator bastard and everything will be wonderful again, which is rather sad. It's one of the reasons why the German Jewish people and the German anti-Nazi groups were so unprepared for what really happened later. They all thought it was a temporary thing.

Q. How did you feel serving in the Army knowing what you did about concentration camps, knowing your grandparents might be in danger?

A. I didn't consider the military a political thing. It had nothing to do with what was happening in the rest of our lives. Everybody was in the military. It was not a matter of political commitment.

Sure in the military you have to swear an oath, in this country, to the Constitution. In that country to the leader. As a matter of fact, actually we didn't even swear an oath to Adolph Hitler. We swore an oath to the nation and its leaders. It was not a

personal oath. That's about as far as it went.

I didn't know that much about concentration camps. It didn't really come up. I never thought at the time there was anything wrong. As a matter of fact, I enjoined being out of the house. One of the ways that works with young men, maybe women don't understand it, it was nice to get out from under dad and live in the community of buddies and do your thing and be recognized as a real man and run around with a gun and shoot and be able to march for 12 hours during the night and survive.

I remember I was rather proud of all that, just like any young males in any society are, and maybe young females too. I don't know about that part of it. There haven't been enough females in the military in any country, except for Israel and Russia, too, to answer this question. Maybe women enjoy that too. But we had no trouble with that at all. I had no trouble. My grandparents and Jewish stuff had nothing to do with it.

It was a great deal of fun to run around with a gun and threaten people and feel so powerful and strong with your nationalistic background.

Q. I was wondering during this period you were in the military did you have much contact with your grandparents? Were you able to visit them?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There was one problem

though which was -- A little town of thirty thousand people that had about 25 Jews. Nobody did any harm to them, but it was not a good idea to march into their house in uniform. There were Swastikas all over the place, on your uniform. In the first place that would have hurt my grandparents feelings. In the second place, that would have led local Nazi organizations to inquire how come this young soldier is marching into a Jewish house.

On the other hand, if you march, you got there in civilian clothes and it was already close to wartime, everybody would have asked you how come this able bodied young male is traveling around the country side when we are just getting into a serious war. So it was a little bit of a problem.

My grandparents had a back entrance to their property. My older brother and I went there quite regularly. Not to demonstrate anything, but strictly because these were interesting and loving people to talk to and also to demonstrate something.

Even though on my father's side, of course, we lived with our father and his divorce had nothing to do with the Jewish problem, but still they were leery of us seeing the Jewish grandparents. Not because they were Jewish, but because they were the divorced half of

the family.

Both my father and my stepmother were tolerant about the Jewish part of it. We also -- My mother would travel on a train from Berlin to Frankfurt or someplace and would stop in some station. We would meet her there on the train and have lunch and see them regularly. This was pretty much standard.

Some of the last contacts with my grandparents are described in the book, too, in rather dramatic terms, but I talked about that the last time, I think.

Q. Did your grandparents ever see you in uniform?

A. Oh, yes. They never said much about it. They understood. On one hand they understood I had no choice. On the other hand, secondly, they understood that it protected me to wear the uniform. If I had been some civilian young man running around the streets I would have been more likely to get into trouble. Germans had great deal of respect for uniforms.

In the third place it protected me because if somebody walked in, a Nazi walked in the house, when I was presented in the house, they would have been a little more careful because of the traditional German respect for the military.

And also as a soldier I had a big chance to pick up things. I remember very well, I would use part of my ration card, which everybody had at the time, to pick up half a dozen eggs, bread, butter and chocolate or coffee and bring it to the grandparents so they had extra supply of sustenance, due to the fact I was in uniform. So this was not a problem.

In fact, I think I have a picture someplace of sitting on a bench in uniform with my Jewish grandmother who was later killed in Auschwitz. I have to look for it. I am not sure.

It's interesting when you asked me those questions you bring up some things that never really came to my mind to think about. If I ever get this book republished and edited I might have to include that in it. I got so tired of the whole thing after years and years of fiddling with it that I kind of stopped thinking about it. So your bringing it up again it's interesting how many things come out of the dark of the past. Not very important because after all it's half century ago. It's not even terribly important to me any longer.

I am not sure how important it is to people reading about it. For you young people it's just fascinating as a historical picture. But my children,

my son is 40 now, all this Hitler stuff is like reading about Ghenis Khan or ancient history of Greece and Rome or something that is so far away.

Q. Where did your grandparents live during this time?

A. A town of 30 thousand people I was talking about is called Naumburg, N-a-u-m-b-u-r-g, which is a provincial capital. It's about an hour by train, west of Leipzig, which at that time was a geographic center of Germany. Now it's pretty close to the east. Two or three hours south of Berlin. This town was mainly known for its appellate court in which my grandfather was one of the judges, I guess. Germany has different functions there.

It was also famous for a wonderful old cathedral that everybody who knows about history of art has read about. The old cathedral of Naumburg from starting in the 12th, 13th century. Romanesque, Gothic. The area was also known for a warm enclave in central Germany and was significantly warmer than the rest of central Germany so it was possible to grow some extraordinary things such as apricots and vineyards. Vineyard in central Germany? Yes. My father had a vineyard and made some pretty damn good wine. My grandparents had grapes in their backyard. They were

participating in that. It was a nice area, still is.

Why did my grandparents come to this particular place? That's a long story I was trying to explain in my book, too. As you might know, at the end of the First World War in 1918 with the Versailles Treaty, the Germans were removed from Poland. They were ordered out of Poland. My grandparents lived in the town of Posnan in western Poland, had a wonderful house there. They had to move into Germany proper. This town became part of Poland after the war.

They were relatively clever and with the help of my father, incidentally, they found a fine job for my grandfather which was just perfect in the town I just described, Naumburg. He didn't want to go to Berlin.

Berlin was a problem because, like other big central towns in Germany, they had already too many Jewish lawyers and judges and local counsel didn't want too many Jews.

You might be aware of the fact in 1919 or 1920 Germany had only, I don't know, three or four percent Jewish population, but they had 20 or thirty percent of Jewish lawyers and judges and so forth. Everything was heavily tilted towards Jewish people. They didn't consider themselves as Jewish and didn't judge anything by this Jewishness, but they still had

the control over it.

My father was a democrat. He was wise in those things and he had the good sense to consider himself an antidote against German nationalism. Most Jewish lawyers and judges were these people that were more interested in guaranteeing Germany a democratic base rather than letting the right wing get away with all kinds of power games. Unfortunately that didn't prevent Hitler from coming to power because of the big red neck group in Germany.

Q. After your grandfather died did your grandmother have any different feelings about being in Germany or hesitant didn't want to originally?

A. There was no way for her to leave Germany in 1940. 1940, as you realize, it's about ten months after the beginning of the war. In those days it was forbidden, certainly forbidden for the Jews to travel without permission, but it was forbidden for German citizens in general to travel from town to town unless they had a good reason. They would go to a local office and show cause for it.

I know my grandmother, after my grandfather died, did a couple secret trips to some mysterious places that she wouldn't talk about. Unfortunately they didn't pan out.

One of the problems was that she had to wear a yellow star on her left chest. The way women did that, they would take their pocketbook and hold it up here (indicating) because they were afraid of somebody mugging them. So you couldn't see the yellow star. If somebody had seen the yellow star or her attempt to hide it they would have been in serious trouble. She met some people somewhere, we don't know where, that promised her for a large amount of money to get her into Switzerland or someplace, but she wasn't convinced she needed to do that.

My mother lived in England at the time and mother tried to get her out. I tried to get her out. It was much too late.

Unfortunately my grandparents in the late thirties, when there was still time to get the hell out of Germany, with the tremendous amount of money they had. They were rich people. They use to travel to Switzerland every summer and lived in some of the best hotels, St. Moritz, and other places, and everybody said why don't you put fifty thousand marks into a Swiss account. In case something goes wrong you can stay there. Grandfather wouldn't hear about it. My grandmother neither. It's one of the sad things.

My whole story and my presence here would

have been superfluous, if the idiot had done that and put his money in a bank account, rather than giving it to Adolph Hitler. This was no longer a possibility. It's a haunting question.

She tried very hard to get out of town, but she couldn't communicate properly. For one thing she couldn't travel. For another, they censored the mail. Every letter she ever wrote was read by somebody. Telephone conversations, telephones were quite expensive in those days and she didn't have any money, no income.

The Nazis had taken most of their money and jewelry and put it in into an account that disappeared later on. I have been trying to locate it, but I can't. She couldn't travel. This was an important question. My mother, my brother and I discussed it at the time. We were very upset we didn't find a way of doing that, especially since we had relatives in Sweden. My father had relatives in Switzerland. My mother had an old friend in Australia. All of these people were ready to do all kinds of things, to pick her up at the border, to sustain her life for another ten years if necessary. But she wouldn't find it possible to be whisked across the border in the middle of the night to Switzerland for ten thousand marks, which would have been perfectly feasible, rather than giving it to the Nazis and she

would have survived.

She was also too honest to do things like that. It's too bad.

My grandfather, fortunately he had some kind of bladder or prostate problem late in life. He was in his late '70s, I guess. He had some kind of uremia, which is a coma condition. We are not sure what happened. He died in his bedroom where he lived for many years and had reasonably good medical care and reasonably good food and didn't understand the world at all. He escaped the whole holocaust by escaping to the other world just before the bottom fell out, and left poor grandma alone.

We went and visited her and helped her with some extra mail and flowers and food. She did pretty well until they transferred her to a collection camp in Halle, not far from Naumburg, and eventually she was sent to Theresienstadt in Czechloslovakia.

Q. Did you ever visit her in that home in Halle?

A. Yes. I went there a couple times. One of the most dramatic visits I also described in my book.

I mentioned earlier that I was in the military in the medical corps at the time, a medical student in Leipzig wearing a uniform, which protected me in a way. But I couldn't travel without a permit from

the military. If I didn't have a permit they would suspect me of being a deserter.

On the other hand, if I were in civilian clothes they would three times suspect me of being a deserter and I had thrown my uniform away.

On the other hand, if I could get by as a civilian, like taking a stick and pretending to be a wounded soldier and discharged and hobble along the streets so people wouldn't think I was an able young man. This was very complicated. I would go in there and bring her food to eat.

While we were sitting and talking for half an hour suddenly the door opened and the political commisar of Halle marched in there. He said who is this young man over there? As a matter of fact, on that visit I had come there in uniform and had put a raincoat over the uniform. On the way from the station to the house I would find a way of putting on the raincoat so people would no longer see a soldier walking down the street and march into the Jewish collection center in civilian clothes. I was sitting there with a raincoat.

The man said who is this young man over there? He saw the uniform. My grandmother said it's my grandson. He is a student in the medical corps in Leipzig.

He talked to me for a moment. That's one thing I remember as clear as the day what went on in my mind at the time. I thought now they caught me. Undoubtedly I would end up in a camp tomorrow. I have a few choices. For instance, I could jump out the window and run like crazy hoping to get away, or I could strangle this bastard, take his gun and shoot my way out of the place and getting past the adjutant and Mercedes parked in front of the place, or I could just do what eventually everybody does, meekly sit there and say, oh shit, and see whatever happens.

So the man asked a few more questions and he disappeared.

At that point all I can could do is try to get home. I did get home. By that time the political commissar knew where I lived, what my address is and all that, and went home to my father's house in Leipzig, which was an hour and-a-half by train away from where I had been. I lived there, even though I was in uniform. Then of course, I couldn't sleep for the next two nights. Neither could I tell my father about it because he had suffered a heart attack. I am sure it would have killed him if he knew I was going to be picked up tomorrow morning at five o'clock.

The Germans had, and the Russians,

Communists, had this nice habit of entering houses and knocking at the doors at five o'clock in the morning and picking up their victims, because at that time the resistance of the person was the lowest. People were more likely to be frightened and unprepared and wouldn't run away and all that.

So for two or three nights I was sitting just there shaking. I couldn't sleep for two or three nights. I don't know how I ever got to medical school and studied and nothing happened, except the next day they shipped my grandmother off to Theresienstadt. The reason the man had been there was to pick the next people to put on the transport to Theresienstadt. That turned out to be the last time I saw this lady.

Q. I was wondering if you could describe that home that she was staying in?

A. It was a regular home. There were like three or four bedrooms. It was a big kitchen that use to belong to some wealthy people. They put in like 12 or 14 Jewish people that were relatively higher class Jewish people they were prepared to ship off one of these days.

My grandmother actually was teaching some kids that were living in that house English or French or something, whatever she taught them. She felt very

useful. She was quite happy there, even though she didn't have much room. A room as big as this room here (indicating) would have four people sleep there with a little bit of junk stored under their beds and little hot plate in the corner.

In a way this was an oasis for her. She was dreaming that would be the end of persecution and she would live there another year until the war was over and everything would be all right.

I don't have any pictures of that house and that room. I went there at one time to find it. I asked all kind of people, including city hall. I remember Boelke-strasse 24. I couldn't locate the place. It was probably bombed out in the war. I always wanted to retrace my steps, but it has vanished.

Q. Did you have much communication with her when she was in Theresienstadt?

A. We were permitted to send one letter a week, I think. She was there for, I don't know, maybe seven or nine months. We don't know for sure. I should know for sure. I have written it down someplace, but it wasn't terribly important.

She was permitted to send a postcard every week or so, a preprinted postcard where she put in my name and my address and her mailing address. On one of

the cards it says received your message. I will show you the card later on when we look at photos. I have about four or five such cards. We suspect many of the cards were fakes where they made them sign the cards and put future dates on the post cards to lull the remaining family into the sense that these people were still in Theresienstadt when they had already been dead for sometime.

In her case I have no prove of that. Eventually I got the exact dates of all that from the Yad Vashem people. If you have my book around where I can look up some dates, do you? Don't get it now. The dates are not all that important, I suppose.

I didn't know much about Theresienstadt at the time. You probably have heard from other people or read in the papers that this was an old military fortification going way back hundreds of years that the Nazis found ideal and easy to make into a camp for people with some high walls around it. They didn't need much barbed wire or anything.

There were city streets and real addresses. My grandmother lived in a place that is mentioned in the postcard, Schul strasse 20, or something. I have a map of the town. They had over the years one hundred fifty thousand Jews collected in Theresienstadt. Whenever

they needed new transport they would ship some old ones off.

You probably also read about the camp activities. This was a place that was supposed to be for the wealthy and important Jews, including those who had a lot of money that they had the feeling when they left there they could buy enough food to survive. Actually that was an easy way for the government to get rid of their financial support.

They also had a lot of doctors and poets and musicians, enough to actually have an orchestra play there. Everybody knows this famous story of the International Red Cross said to the Nazi government we want to inspect one of the Jewish concentration camps. We will be there next March.

So they set up Theresienstadt to look like a regular concentration camp, including getting some flowers in there and a cafe on the city square and little kids with flowers in their hair and dancing on the street, and the orchestra playing and everybody drinking some ersatz coffee and supposed to look happy and all the old nasty starved old folks were shipped off the day before the International Red Cross showed up. Then they really gave them a wonderful snow job. The International Red Cross was convinced it was pretty bad

if you were an inmate, but it's something you could survive, which in fact many people did.

Eventually Theresienstadt was liberated. There were still, I forget now, thirty thousand people there. Later on we found out that sixty thousand kids had perished in Theresienstadt. Of course, many, many, ten thousands had been shipped out to the East. I was in Theresienstadt two years ago. It's practically unchanged. In fact, I found the house where my grandmother was suppose to have lived. I couldn't go in it. Now it was locked up. You couldn't just walk into a private home in a Czech town. I rang the doorbell and nobody responded. There was no sign of anything gross and serious, except the tremendous overcrowding.

A town of seven thousand people or so, they had 80 thousand Jews living there or something like that, including many children.

I think what I should do before you wrap up this whole thing with me, and I need to do that anyhow, is get a list of all the dates that I keep mentioning and all the numbers of people. I have to do that anyhow and add it to whatever you come up with, photos and so forth, so it will be clear. I am sure that I am giving you some wrong numbers and wrong dates, which bothers me a little bit, because I have spent so much time

researching all that. It's been several years ago I did all that.

Q. At the time when your grandmother was sent to Theresienstadt did you have any idea that the majority of the people were being sent to Auschwitz?

A. No. I had been told, I mentioned a moment ago, the people in Theresienstadt were the better class of Jews. Everybody assumed that if Adolph Hitler decided to put the important, wealthy and influential Jews in some kind of ghetto that was very unpleasant, but not fatal, everybody assumed these people would stay there until the end the of the war, if they didn't get sick.

One of the reasons for people dying in Theresienstadt and other camps was, of course, they got typhoid fever and food poisoning because they would eat all kinds of bad meat that somebody had dropped in a garbage can and all that. Not necessarily murdered by the Nazis, but Jews died by attrition. Anybody who was hungry and cold, because there was no coal, no food, not enough food, is more likely to die of pneumonia and diarrhea and what have you, and not necessarily to be killed by a guard with a machine gun.

But my grandmother was quite healthy. Everybody assumed, once we found out that's where she

was, we assumed she would stay there for awhile. This was about two years before the end of the war. By that time I was just about out of the country and out of contact.

I was in a work battalion as a civilian in Poland. I had no communication with anybody other than my father in Leipzig and at the time my girlfriend in Leipzig.

Q. How did you find out that you were going to be released from the Army and from medical school? How did they tell you?

A. I mentioned earlier there was a law on the books saying that so-called half Jews, two Jewish grandparents, were not supposed to serve. The law was ignored. If it hadn't been ignored my brother wouldn't have been killed in the war in 1940. I wouldn't have been in medical school.

How did that occur? The Nazi party organization -- I don't know whether you realize each state had a Nazi, they called it Gauleter, state controller of political liabilities or something like that. They were responsible to check up on those things. They realized suddenly that some half Jewish guy was still in uniform and studying medicine in Leipzig.

They would go to the University and say how come this man Bergman is still a student. This is 1942. He was not suppose to have permission to study medicine, being a half Jew.

The University said, including I think the president of the University, who happened to be a good friend of my father's, who was a professor at that University, he said I don't know. The military have sent this fellow to medical school. Who am I to argue with the military. This is wartime. The military are the boss in town.

Then the party people would go to the military and say how come you let this man Bergman be in uniform in Germany and they would say well, the only way he could study medicine is in uniform at the time. The Minister of the Interior has declared two years ago Germany needs another hundred twenty thousand physicians because pretty soon we are going to take over the whole world and we need all these people to treat syphilis in Angola and obviously we need all the doctors we can get. We are not going to kick this guy out. He is more important as a physician than he is in a concentration camp. The two parties, military and University kind of played a game. We played the game with them. My father, knowing some of these people, I hung around

another year or so.

Eventually the military discharged me, as they should have much earlier. In the middle of a semester of medicine I suddenly found myself in civilian clothes. The lecture in the morning at the time was at the Anatomy Institute or something. It's on the outskirts of Leipzig. I had been a member of the military medical department student company that met every morning at seven-thirty on a certain place outside the Anatomy Institute for roll call and instructions before the seminar started at eight o'clock.

Everybody was in uniform, except this guy. I had to go through there to the lecture. When these guys, my old buddies saw me in civilian clothes they said what the hell is the matter with you? I explained I had been kicked out. They lifted me up and carried me around the courtyard with a big holler and whoop, as a sign of rebellion against the stupidity of the government. That was a very nice moment in my life.

None of the students were Nazis obviously. They wouldn't have dared do that, including the Company Commander, who pretended he was busy with something silly like tying his boots or something, to have given them a chance to express their view.

He said you guys get back and stand in

formation. Bergman, get the hell out of here.

So I was a student for a little longer and finished one semester, I guess.

Then I was no longer in uniform I was picked up as a civilian laborer and sent to a factory in Lodz Poland. L-o-d-z. I was suppose to work in the factory as a flunky.

That happened I think eight months or so after being kicked out of the military. I am talking about 1943 now. That was the year when eventually we were bombed out in Leipzig and everything burned while I was in Poland.

Q. Were you ever concerned about your safety after being discharged from the Army?

A. That's a very interesting question. It never occurred to me. I don't think I was ever really worried being 23 years old and competent and being clever and avoiding stupid remarks and kind of playing the game as being another good German.

Unfortunately, and I have to be honest about it, if you walk around and somebody says to you, you walk into the office of the party commissar and you don't raise your arm and say heil Hitler you are in trouble already. So you go around and say heil Hitler. What the hell. I can say heil Hitler. It doesn't mean

I am a Nazi. I had played a survival game. I don't think, until I got orders to go to Lodz, I was never really physically threatened by anybody. Maybe I was and I have forgotten about it, in juvenile idealism, and being a optimist and survivor. It's possible there was more going on than I realized.

Nobody ever knocked on our house door and said get this Jew out of there or something like that. Except one man who lived upstairs, who was a big shot Nazi officer. He was rather intolerant. He was too much of a gentleman to take steps. No, I never felt physically threatened.

As a matter of fact, in Poland, in Lodz, I felt much safer than in Germany. There was no powerful German political structure, there was no threat of bombs falling down. Nobody bombed Lodz. I was much safer than at home.

If I had been home asleep in my own bed in December, 1943 when Leipzig was one third destroyed I might well have been killed there. In a way I was safer in Lodz than I would have been in Leipzig. I had a good time and interesting job. Even a nice place to stay.

Q. How did your father find out he was going to lose his professorship?

A. That's just a routine thing. First of all,

my father use to be -- My father joined the Nazi party rather early, at a time when nobody really knew the Nazis would be murderous to this degree. In 1936 or so everybody could see in Germany that Germany had suddenly become clean and orderly and people had jobs again and had homes again and food again and were more respected in the world than they were after the First World War.

My father was a professor of theological philosophy. He had dug up some ancient heathen religion having to do with Celtic and Teutonic background, like the Greek Gods, somebody living up there in the sky, and protecting us. He didn't believe all this mumbo jumbo about sinfull birth and virginal Mother of God. He was writing books against all that in the twenties. He was trying to start a people's religion. And considered Christianity kind of a sickness of the modern era. That is what he was lecturing about.

For him, the Nazis were the perfect people to execute his thoughts. He was hoping they would make him the theologian in charge. He didn't realize, many people didn't realize how bad these people were. He did eventually realize it, especially when he had to suffer with his son when the Nazi persecution of Jews or part Jews became obvious.

He one day woke up and said my God, what have

I done? When they asked him -- One of the key moments was that he got a letter from the local party commandant in Leipzig. Leipzig was a town as big as San Francisco. Six hundred fifty thousand people or so. He got a letter. I lived at home in uniform as a medical student. There was a German word called racial defilement. That meant if a genuine gentile German person was living in the same apartment with a Jewish person, it didn't say man or woman, it says person, that is a case of race defilement.

The reason was, of course, to avoid that the Jews would hide in a gentile house. So they wrote a letter to Ernst Bergman saying how come you share a house with an unworthy third class partially Jewish person?

Don't you realize this makes you a collaborator to the Jews and puts you in danger. My father went to the man and said look, I have never made love to my son yet, but why don't you shut up. At any rate, here's my card. You can go to hell with your party membership. He was very brave at that moment. Of course, his behavior was such they kicked him out. He also lost his job at the University. He never was fully ordained professor anyhow. He was a lecturer I guess is the word, freelance lecturer. He happened to retire

into his summer house.

We had a vineyard in the town I was talking about where my grandparents lived. He went back there and wrote books and books and books. Altogether 32 books. Eventually he died at the end of the war from heart disease in 1945 because he couldn't get his digitalis pills any longer.

We had a young woman, a cousin of mine keep house for him up there. In April, 1945 the Russians had just marched into this part of Germany. The Nazis had blown up the bridges. They lived on the south side of the river. The town was on the north side of the river. All the bridges had been blown up, except one bridge way down somewhere that you could only get to with a bike.

My cousin, pretty woman at age 20 or 22, she wouldn't dream of taking a bike ride for an hour and-a-half through Russian occupied areas. Everybody knew the Russians raped every female, especially pretty ones. I don't know whether they did or not. I doubt it. Apart from the fact she didn't have tires for the bike, because you couldn't buy them. Neither could she walk that far. It wouldn't have done any good. The pharmacy in town had been closed because the pharmacist was in the military. There was only one doctor. He was so busy and he couldn't get digitalis.

At any rate, the old man didn't get digitalis and he died of decompensation of an old serious heart disease, hoping all the time that tomorrow morning his son, me, would -- He expected that the Russians came from the East and the Americans came that far from the West, in tanks, he hoped one of the tanks rolling down the street I would sit on top of it and come back with the American occupation. Everybody hoped in that part of Germany that the Americans would take over rather than the Russians.

As you know, eventually the Americans and British and French had to withdraw back west beyond the Elbe River by arrangement between Stalin and Churchill. This part of Germany that was happily looking forward to be liberated by the Americans, and not reoccupied by the Russians, suddenly found themselves under the Russian control after all. It was one of the greatest disasters at that particular time.

All this went past me because I wasn't there. I was in France in a forced labor camp. All this I found out later.

Q. You had mentioned the last time you were going through your family tree an incident that happened with your Aunt Valerie. Can you describe that?

A. My father's sister Valerie, and especially

her husband, were fundamentalist Christian of a Protestant type church that was called Herrenhut. H-e-r-r-e-n-h-u-t. It's a synod, very small fundamentalist, very strict, presumably Christian laws. These people were very religious. They had a prayer hall. They lived in a beautiful small town. The prayer hall was up on the fourth floor where they had prayer meetings every morning and night.

The sin of the forefathers was called down on me when I was there. Everytime I picked my nose, chewed on my nails I had to recite three Our Fathers to get rid of my sins. They even had some sins I never heard of before.

Otherwise, they were very loving people. They had country store where they roasted coffee when coffee was available. We loved to go there. The whole place smelled of roasted coffee and herring and pickles in big barrels. We loved these people dearly. I thought she was a most fabulous woman, regardless of how religious she was. That didn't bother us too much.

The last time I went there and, again I don't quite remember the date, my brother had already been killed. That was in the war in 1941 maybe when I was 21. I went there. Aunt Vally and I went for a walk. They had just finished a huge damn that was very

instrumental in keeping the energy of Germany during the final part of the war in shape, in a beautiful part of the country called Bleiloch. We went to that place. We were sitting on the bench overlooking a beautiful countryside, the trees, and looking at this lake, artificial lake.

I told her everything that happened to me. She told me everything that happened to her and her children.

And then she said Look, my boy, you know I love you very much, but the way you talk I am beginning to understand why it's necessary that people like you need to be locked up because you are a threat to the survival of our beloved country. I am sure that God would not approve of your behavior. I think you should be locked up and put in a concentration camp.

That in a way was the biggest shock of my life at the time. Since that day I have inherited a very strong allergy against fundamentalist religious statements by anybody, Islam or Christian or Jewish or anybody who claims having superior knowledge of what God wants. One of the many gods, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, whatever they are up there, can tell them what is right and what is wrong and they have the right to kill people. I was so shocked by that. I didn't say a

word. I got up and walked back to their house and picked up my suitcase and went to the station and went home and never heard from her again. I don't even know whether she survived the war or not. I didn't want to ever hear her name again, until it became an important part of my memoirs. I don't remember how much of it is exaggerated and made up or maybe underrated, the memory of these things. Very traumatic events. They burn themselves into your memory in such away that after awhile you don't know anymore what is really true and what isn't.

When somebody says to you, you bastard, I will kill you, the reason for him saying that to you, you will never in the future be able to understand what happened at the time. It's like a blinding light has blocked out the whole relationship with the person, especially when you loved them. I wish he burns in hell.

Incidentally, this Aunt Vally story has become, whenever I wrote to literary agents about my book, this was usually one of the chapters I added to people and most people were impressed by the writing as well as the facts of the case.

Q. I want to talk a little bit about Lodz. When did you live there?

A. Well, at first I lived behind the factory in a crummy old room. I was the guy that was suppose to sweep the floors and clean the toilets and be there every time there was a catastrophe, some pipe had burst or something. I don't remember how this came about.

There was a German couple, a wonderful house a mansion outside of town, that was renting out a room. For peanuts. There weren't many reliable German citizens. These were Germans that thought the Poles were all dirty and unreliable and wanted a real -- In this country it would be a white educated person. So they were delighted to find a man with almost a medical degree. I was musically inclined. They had a big piano in one of the rooms. For peanuts, not for peanuts, but we had enough money, but it was moderately expensive. I could rent this room and had my own balcony and flowers. As I say, a big grand piano I would play a little bit on and could use the kitchen.

Later on it became clear to me the Nazi control included this man who owned this house to supervise me and find out whether I had any illegal contacts. For instance, there were several people at the rubber factory, Polish people, who were interested in my presence there and we became good friends. In fact, I was hoping they might save me at the last minute

before I was being shipped off and arrested as it were. By that time I couldn't find them.

I suppose they had become leery of my presence there because obviously I was not any longer a janitor type cleaning a factory. How come I lived with those wealthy people in a nice house? They were probably suspicious that I actually was a snoop and had come snooping around the factory. There is a fascinating part of living. First, I have had to walk to the streetcar a couple blocks and take a streetcar to the city and streetcar went through the ghetto. This was the first time and last time I have ever seen a ghetto. I have a picture in the book, it so happened the ghetto was on both sides of the streetcar tracks.

In order to separate the two they built huge wire fences on both sides and had built passenger bridges over the streetcar and you could see the Jews running from one side of the ghetto to the other and guards standing there with whips.

Every morning and afternoon I would go through the ghetto on the streetcar. Eventually some people told me why don't you read your paper and not lookout too much and watch these things too much. They might suspect you are a Nazi of some sort.

At any rate, the job turned out to be very

interesting because they had an old chemist there in the factory whose job it was -- They had a large collection of tools. This was a rubber factory originally.

They collected old tires and would pile them up. It was the factory's job to process old tires and make some third rate new tires out of it that would still be useful for tanks and planes and cars, even though it wasn't very good third rate material any longer.

This old chemist, who was quite knowledgeable about rubber chemistry, and I, who was very knowledgeable about chemistry in general, because I just finished my medical course in chemistry. He thought I was a genius in chemistry. I understood what he was doing with oxygen and nitrogen and sulphur and whatever they do with the tires. Eventually we experimented with new jobs they had given us. A new job was to produce gasoline containers for the airplanes that had three levels. The outer level, the outer layer, was highly resistant against heat and cold. You realize that Poland is almost half as bad as Siberia in winter. It's ice cold, four, five, six months periods where most car gasoline containers and planes froze up. You had to have very a powerful outer protective layer. The inner layer had to be uncorrosive so gasoline won't destroy

it.

Our job was to put a fancy middle layer in there. Namely some material when it was exposed to gasoline would swell up. If somebody shot through your container and there was a bullet hole through it the stuff would swell up and block the bullet hole. It might not save the plane altogether, but it saved enough gasoline for the plane to get back into a safe harbor. We built a couple of these with his expertise at rubber and my expertise at modern chemistry. We built a couple of these containers.

One of these days the German military procurement office came down from Berlin to investigate what we had done there, because it seemed like a fabulous new thing. I am not sure other people hadn't done that. But these people -- The old man said it's not my job. He did all that. He is a clever man. Next thing I know these people come down from Berlin and said how would you like, Mr. Bergman, how would you like to be the chief of the chemistry in the rubber factory in Krakow in Poland. At some fabulous salary $2,000.00 a month, chauffeur and all that. I thought it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. I realized the dream couldn't last very long. These guys from the material resources department in Berlin hadn't

investigated my terrible racial background. Instead of going to Krakow and having a chauffeurred limousine, a couple weeks later they sent me to a collection point with guns and dogs and we were shipped off to the West. That was the end of Lodz.

That's a better summary than I did in my book. I hope I can get a copy of this. Are you transcribing it really in words, too? That would be wonderful if I could get a copy of that so I can readjust my book.

Q. When you were in Lodz did people talk about the ghetto at all?

A. Only when they were very close to each other. A couple would talk to each other, some with buddies. To me they talked reasonably freely about it. I was known to be suspect and not a Nazi spy. But basically Lodz was the first ghetto I think that was ever instituted by the Nazis back in late 1939 or 40. Everybody in town had become, had learned how to live with it.

The next question would be how much did they know about the ghetto. Very little.

Whatever happened in the ghetto, if you asked me how many people were in that ghetto, my knowledge that I mention in the book comes from reading about it

in the 1980's. How many people were tortured or killed or shot I have no knowledge of my own. The people in town didn't know that either because it would be very dangerous to mention anything like that.

There is one episode I mentioned in there how they beat this little boy to death by the side of the streetcar. I saw part of it. Because he had stolen something very valuable. Namely some potato peelings out of a garbage box. That was a mortal offense. So they beat him to death, I think. I don't know how much of that is any longer true. That's been so long ago.

I mentioned Bergen-Belsen and Weimar and all that earlier. Usually there was a conspiracy of silence by the local citizens. Everybody knew if you talked about it the Nazis assumed you are subversive and you will be picked up and sent to the same camp you have been talking about. So you pretend you know nothing.

You didn't smell any smoke from burned bodies. Did you smell anything? No, nothing.

So I wouldn't have picked up any details about the ghetto, except you could tell by the size of it, looking at it this way and that way there must have been a hundred thousand people in that camp.

Q. How did you react when you next received the letter calling you to the suburb in Lodz where they

gathered before you went to the Organization Todt.

A. It was put in such a form that they said we would like you to attend -- I don't quite remember what the expression was. I had the impression that it was just a matter of overnight information gathering; bring a tooth brush and one or two days of sandwiches and fruit.

At that time I understand all half Jews in Germany that were known to be half Jews were rounded up in different parts of Germany. Some of my buddies I met much later and am still in contact with today were picked up in Berlin at the same time. Not picked up. They were asked to report to a collection point in Berlin Grunewald Saturday morning at six o'clock. You know if you didn't go they would pick you up and force you. So everybody went there. Some people in their street clothes.

I had three days, four or five days before that. So I had time to wind up my business, even packed packages to send home with my personal belongings.

I tried to -- I called my girlfriend in Leipzig, told her that I was probably going to be shipped away. She actually came to visit and spent a couple days with me in Lodz. That in itself is to me rather incredible. In the middle of the war you could

pickup a phone to a town that was bombed out six months ago and ring the phone in that woman's house and she would get on a train. The train from Leipzig to Lodz was 16 hours or something. She came there and acted as if it was perfectly normal. That gave me a great deal of help and support and hope. She was standing outside the barbed wire waving to me. At least she could tell the rest of my friends and family what had happened.

As a matter of fact, I just remembered that she is going to have her 70th birthday next month and I am going to sent her flowers. She still lives in that town in Germany.

When you marched in and showed your identification they said please step over there. You walked through a barbed wire gate and suddenly there were a couple SS men and furious dogs and sidearms. Now you know what is going to happen.

We hung around with several thousand people. We didn't even talk to each other to find out why we were there. Eventually on the train ride it became obvious we were all partially Jewish. We talked about it. Eventually we were shipped after three or four days on the train, treated reasonably well, we got some food. We could step out to the bathroom every once in a while. Nobody was hitting us or anything. It was a little

tight in the railroad cars, but this was wartime. There were not enough carriages left over to transport soldiers and military stuff, so we had to take our time to get there. Eventually we ended up in a forced labor camp in Boulogne in France.

Q. I was wondering if you can describe that place where you met the SS guards. How many people were there?

A. Very faint memory. My guess is we were three or three and-a-half or four thousand people.

I am looking forward to reading the transcript of what I am saying to find out how much my memory is moving around over the years and changing facts.

Probably two thousand five hundred, three thousand, three thousand five hundred people. I think it was not a race course, but athletic facility with big central building where they had certain facilities and food and SS people were stationed.

We spent most of our time outside. I think it was in April. It wasn't particularly cold any longer.

I and several other people had been smart enough -- You always prepared in those days. You wouldn't go with slippers and nice Sunday suit. I would

take some heavy shoes and warm sweater and warm jacket and slip a bottle of red wine in my pocket and extra money, sew it up in the seam of your pants in case you needed some extra cash to buy yourself out of a tight spot. Many of the other people did the same thing. Except my naive little friend, Willie whose beautiful, $20.00 brown shoes fell apart in the forced labor camp after six days. I was a medical orderly and had to bandage his bleeding feet after marching every day. That's another story.

This collection point was moderately benign. Many people actually had their family come and visit, like I had my girlfriend. Some of the Berlin people had family come to the barbed wire and the kids would say I am hungry and they would go to a local pizzeria or something. They didn't have pizza in those days. But a local store and get sandwiches and pass them through the barbed wire where you could have extra snack. Nobody prevented us from doing that.

Everybody told us the place where you are going to go is called Organization Todt. T-o-d-t. Mr. Todt was the Minister of War Materials in the Berlin government at that time and he was responsible for building the, fortifying the western wall against possible British American invasion in France.

He was a very clever man. He realized the only source of reasonably healthy young hard-working, hard labor people were those people who had been refused jobs and were not worthy to serve in the military and were not subject to extermination because they weren't fully Jewish and there were suddenly, I don't know, sixty thousand people like that, like myself, in the whole country, sent to the West Coast. They were an ideal source of hard work, especially since we felt we had a job. They even paid us a little bit for it. We were respected as workmen. It was terribly hard labor. Some people didn't survive because they would fall and they would carry big cement sacks and couldn't take it, it would break their backs.

Basically it was perfectly reasonable for a country at the end of a terribly strenuous war that needed all the help they can get that they would pickup people like us and make us do some extra work to try to prolong the war.

Q. How long were you in that?

A. A couple three days.

Q. How were you treated?

A. No particular problem. Bowl of soup and hunk of bread every once in a while and sitting on the grass, sitting indoors, that was no problem at all.

There were all these people with guns around. By all these people, I mean three thousand young males in that particular compound, maybe 20 SS guards and soldiers and dogs. Nobody attempted to break out.

In the first place, we were in a foreign country that was just teeming with all kinds of military people which would have shot us on sight if we tried to escape. So nobody thought it was worthwhile risking your life to get out. In a foreign country where you had no food and no friend and no money and no telephone, it would have been absolutely ridiculous to try to escape into Poland, especially when you didn't speak Polish. Poles were not particularly interested, especially they were as antisemetic as anybody and still are. We didn't expect any help from the Poles.

Q. Were the majority of the people there German?

A. Practically all of them, I think. I don't know if you realize Germany didn't have any real national minority of any sort in those days. There were no blacks, no Asiatics, no Turks. Maybe there were Greeks or Bulgarians. Basically 49 out of 50 people you would meet on the street in Berlin were standard white Germans. The Germans had never seen a black guy until the Americans took over in the west. No Asiatics either because we were the super race. We wouldn't tolerate

them.

It's amazing when you think about it, everybody in this country is use to the fact half of the population in this city is not white. Leipzig, my hometown, I think out of six hundred fifty thousand there were probably eight thousand that were not standard whites.

Q. Was the reason that the majority of you were summoned was that because of Jewish religion or other homosexuals or other reasons why?

A. I was thinking when you asked me earlier, I don't think even in this group, the Organization Todt, there were any homosexuals that we ever run across. In fact, we talked about it in one meeting in Berlin a couple years ago to some of our survivors. One of the kids in the group disappeared without any evidence. I had a friend, who still lives in Munich, who survived the war, who turned out to be homosexual, but at the time I didn't know it. In those days nobody would come out of the closet and admit that he was homosexual, not even to your dearest friend or your mother. You always had girlfriends, I suppose.

If you admitted it it was an immediate death warrant. Possibly there were some, but I wouldn't know.

When you say Jewish background, full Jewish

people wouldn't be involved in this group. Germans with three Jewish grandparents were usually considered Jewish, and already were eliminated. One Jewish grandparent didn't count. You were still German. Only people that came into this category of having to be incarcerated were the ones with two Jewish grandparents, fifty percent half Jews. The Germans used a word, mischling, m-i-s-c-h-l-i-n-g, which is very strange, considering we are all mischling from two different parents.

Q. How long were you on the train?

A. Three or four days, I think.

Q. Were you treated all right there?

A. Yeah, no particular problem. I mentioned earlier every once in a while the train would stop at a station and they had some Army soup kitchen standing there. We would all get a bowl of rice chicken soup or something and sweet roll. Enough to keep us going another day. Nothing fancy, but it wasn't starvation either. All the railroad stations had water fountains. We got all the water we needed.

At that time people were treated like just low class German citizens, without any particular hatred or rancor. On those stations the SS guard would block the ends of the platform and stairs that go downstairs,

and the other side of the train, so nobody would run away. They didn't interact with us at all.

Q. Is there any way you can describe the physical day in Boulogne?

A. Typical day in Boulogne? I think there was roll call maybe at five-thirty. Somebody would wake you up. You would try to wash someplace and get I guess we got breakfast somehow. I have no memory of food, that sort of thing. There was a roll call. At six-thirty we would start marching to the site of the fortifications to be built.

It had been raining a lot. We would march through town for maybe an hour-and-a-half, some of us having to carry certain things. We would get there, I don't know, seven-thirty and we would spend 12 hours with a lunch time break, carrying stuff around to build a fortress.

Some of us would carry cement bags on wooden beams to build an entranceway or, what do you call it when you built a cement wall and you put wooden framework in there before you pour cement?

Some of them were clever with their hands and would do that. Others would have to carry cement bags and work on the mixers and pour that in there.

Some of us had to carry very heavy bunker

doors that needed about six people to carry that thing. When it was raining and the hill had been worked on for the last three weeks and it was slippery as all get out. Fortunately I didn't have to do that. For six people to walk up with a heavy thing to the top of the hill and slip and fall down and try to get this door up to the top of the hill and put it in the right spot was a real nightmare.

As I mentioned earlier, several people would actually slip and fall and some were crushed by the heavy doors. They still talked about it 50 years later.

In a way, that was the most horrible part of it.

It was already getting dark we would march into town. We had worked very hard. We hadn't had much to eat.

By the time you got back to camp it was eight-thirty or something and we had been up for 15 hours without rest and without much food. We would have to stand in line again, because amazingly some people got letters from home. Like a military number, you know. In this country it's called -- I forgot the key word. You have a code number. Civilian worker Bergman, 9375. That would get into our district. It took three weeks to get the letters, but it was a great deal of

comfort to everyone to hear them. Every once in a while you would send a letter home. You stand around waiting for your meal and everybody was ready to collapse at that point and they would hardly have the strength to take their clothes off.

Showers, I don't know we had showers. We lived in some private homes, six guys to a small room. The water was -- Once in a while there was no water. I don't know if we took a real shower or washed in the bathtub. Most people fell asleep. Since I was the only person in that battalion -- How many people were there in our battalion? 80, 90 I was the only one with medical experience. I was the one that was suppose to be the substitute doctor in that group.

I mentioned my friend Willie, who had bloody feet because his fancy brown half shoes had fallen apart. I had to bandage his bloody feet.

Somebody else had a sore throat or diarrhea. I remember somebody would throw apples down from the French population. I used the apples to grind them up and give ground up apples to people with diarrhea because I had learned that from my mother. That's a very effective anti-diarrhea medication. That's about all I had.

Every once in a while I got a few aspirins.

I had a room with two beds. Time came after three weeks I was permitted to stay in there and treat people. I don't know how to treat them. I had nothing, some bandages, some aspirin and some alcohol to clean wounds. That sort of thing.

I was called the camp doctor until the commanding officer used me for some secondary purpose which I'd rather not talk about at this point.

In this town of Boulogne where we lived, harbor town, maybe 40 thousand people, they had bombed out the railroad switch yards. There was a serious problem because material couldn't be shipped to the front.

So they used us to clean up the debris and carry -- That's another serious problem. Ties, railroad, what do you call railroad tie, railroad track there are two, what, rails? We had to carry those rails around. They are about as heavy as it gets. We had to rebuild tracks. That was hazardous also, because at that time every once in awhile some British bombers that hadn't gotten rid of their load, because they were chased away by German attack Messerschmitt planes, they turned around and dropped their bombs wherever they could before they went back to England. Wherever they could was very often where we were in Boulogne. First

the Nazis bombed the hell out of Boulogne and the British threw some bombs in there and we were in the area where the V-1, V-2 bombs of the so-called Final Solution was started in the Pas de Calais and Boulogne area. These sometimes were misfired and killed some people in our group. That was a pretty tough time.

(At this point a recess was taken)