

Interview: 7/31/86
by: David Selkowsky

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Interview of:

JOHN R. WAHL

Date of Interview:

July 31, 1986

Transcriber:

Maryanne Stinson

JOHN WAHL

1 MR. WAHL: My name is John R. Wahl, W-a-h-l,
2 and today is the 31st of July, 1986.

3 Are you a journalist by originally or are you --
4 how do you come to --

5 INTERVIEWER: Well, I'm interested in the subject
6 of the holocaust.

7 MR. WAHL: I see. Second World War was quite
8 hectic.

9 Okay. I was born in 1913 in the German city of
10 Bra-tal-Bra-men, which is close to Dusseldorf, to Ernst and
11 Bertha Wahl.

12 My father was the owner of a group of department
13 stores which has its origin in our town in 1821.

14 The City of Poo-bra-tal had a small Jewish
15 community and my grandfather had built the synagogue and my father
16 for a short time to my knowledge was the president of the Jewish
17 community.

18 The family had acquired a certain wealth and the
19 reputation of our firm was very good and very large. My father
20 was able to support a great many cultural activities. Among
21 others, very large contributions to our symphony and to the opera
22 in our town.

23 We had very little Jewish life in our family,
24 except going to the temple, or better said, synagogue, but
25 except bar mitzvah, I had no Jewish education. I been through

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1 the regular course of schooling and only in the upper grades
2 in high school did I find the first sign of anti-Semitism among
3 my teachers, which made me transfer to the City of Aber-felt,
4 which was a sister city of our own town.

5 INTERVIEWER: What year was that, John?

6 MR. WAHL: In high school. The exact year I
7 couldn't give.

8 I graduated from high school in 1931 and entered
9 my apprentice years in Dusseldorf in a very fine Jewish depart-
10 ment store where I observed my apprenticeship, and I didn't live
11 at home only the last year. The apprenticeship had been
12 interrupted in '33 with the advent of Hitler and I went back to
13 my parents whose stores had been dispossessed.

14 As I had a close friendship with a nonJewish girl
15 we were attacked once in our town by SA men and we had to take
16 refuge in a home, but it became unthinkable that I stay in
17 Germany because there was no future anymore, because I was bad
18 now because coming from such a prominent family.

19 I had an uncle in Madrid who was representative
20 of the Frankfurt (inaudible) and he agreed to accept me, and in
21 August, 1933 I moved to Madrid. My father could accompany me
22 as far as Paris because he had to arrange for the payment of the
23 very large commitments we had in the French fashion industries
24 with whom we had worked for so many years.

25 Coming to Madrid I stayed in a very nice

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1 neighborhood with my uncle and his relatively new wife, also
2 a very capable journalist.

3 In order to learn Spanish my uncle had found me
4 a job in a very elegant men's store where I worked as a volunteer
5 and I got from my relatives a little spending money, and I took
6 at the same time, Spanish lessons.

7 At the beginning of 1934 a international group
8 started to form a large chain of big five and dime stores, and
9 as our own company had been in steady contact with them, I made
10 a very nice connection with them and a firm called Sep-poo,
11 made unbelievable progress. We had stores in Madrid, Saragossa,
12 Barcelona and later on, branches.

13 All this went pretty peaceful until the year --
14 oh, in 1935 I went once back to Germany to meet my former lady
15 friend. We met in Berlin in order not to be recognized, but
16 obviously we were recognized and my father was warned by the
17 Gestapo that they knew that I had been in Germany and that I
18 shouldn't come back to Germany under any circumstances.

19 In 1936 the beginning of upheavals became more
20 and more obvious in Madrid, and the political situation in Spain
21 became rather critical.

22 I had fallen sick and went to a country place about
23 sixty miles outside of Madrid in a village called Guat-a-rama,
24 which was on the main road north from Madrid. This was kind of
25 a sanitorium, and when the civil war broke out we had no idea

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1 that any harm would come to us. But with the advance of Franco
2 the village was heavily bombarded.

3 I was under the building and when we were dug
4 out we were given up for more or less dead and received the last
5 rites of the Catholic Church. We were loaded on stretchers to
6 come back to Madrid into the double-decker buses of Madrid.

7 As my uncle had some very good international
8 connections who were still in good contact with the German
9 Embassy, I was able to stay for three days in the German Embassy
10 and then he made it possible that I could be flown out of Madrid
11 and out of Spain to Switzerland under the auspices of the
12 International Red Cross.

13 When I arrived in Switzerland, landing in Geneva,
14 I was put on the train to the sanitorium town of Mont-ta-na,
15 which is about two hundred miles from Geneva, relatively high
16 in the mountains. I was to spend there about six or seven months,
17 mostly in bed in the open air like any lung patients.

18 After the snow melted in '37 I was permitted to
19 go down from the mountains and I went from the sanitorium to the
20 City of Loz-an, and stayed in a very nice rooming house, and to
21 our great surprise my father was permitted to visit me in Lo-zan
22 under the condition that my mother would go into protective
23 custody.

24 In Lozan we had some friends in the department
25 store trade whose son and I had been roommates for a long time.

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1 My father came to see me and while we had coffee
2 in a restaurant a lady got up and said, aren't you Mr. Wahl?

3 I said, yes.

4 She said, I'm Mrs. Frank. I used to be a singer
5 at your operahouse and I have been many times in your home and
6 I am married now to a Swiss hotel man whom I met and he said it
7 would be possible for me to find a job in Italy. So, he gave
8 me several addresses of good Italian hotels and I started to
9 study Italian and wrote also to Italian hotels.

10 The first hotel that answered was on the Isle
11 of Capri. As a volunteer against room and board.

12 I managed to say goodbye to my uncle and my aunt
13 in Switzerland and then to Capri, which must have been at the
14 end of '37.

15 On Capri I worked first in the Hotel La Parma,
16 which was a nice hotel, first-class. Having a language ability
17 I would boss. I would be in charge of the reception desk and
18 continued my study of Italian and made many friends.

19 The chain that owned the Hotel La Parma owned
20 also the one deluxe hotel on Capri, which is still in existence.
21 I was transferred to that particular property and had a very
22 pleasant job and met a great many interesting people. The only
23 money that could come to me were from the tips I received at the
24 hotel because I couldn't work for salary.

25 INTERVIEWER: Why was that?

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1 MR. WAHL: You can't get a work permit.

2 There at the hotel was official guesthouse for
3 foreign visitors on the island or even the official guesthouse
4 of the Italian government. So, I met closely some of the
5 leaders of European politics and also the leaders of Nazi Germany.
6 Among others, Hermann Goering, Rudolf Hess with whom I spent
7 quite some time. As he went shopping I accompanied him. And
8 also Mr. Boven (phonetic) and all the high ranking Germans who
9 stayed at the hotel. I also met some American people there.
10 In general I kept quite good there. Nothing had happened to my
11 parents, but my second brother who lives here in the bay area
12 and who had come to Madrid had been taken prisoner by the
13 Republican forces and has been jailed in Madrid for an extended
14 time and I hardly heard from him. He and his wife live now
15 in Daly City.

16 In May, 1938 the visit of Adolf Hitler to
17 Mussolini was announced and all German refugee Jews, they are
18 supposed to be arrested and incarcerated for the length of the
19 stay of Adolf Hitler. But I was fortunate that the police --
20 the management of the hotel asked the police on Capri not to
21 arrest me because I had to take care of all their international
22 trade and also receive. So, in May of '38 one day the German
23 Embassy in Rome called, that we would receive an important visitor
24 and that we should wait for an Italian destroyer to arrive in
25 the port of Capri and be at the portside to receive very important

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1 visitor, and that twenty rooms had to be reserved of which two
2 could not have a room above, below, to the left and the right
3 occupied.

4 So, we went down in our mourning clothes to the
5 pier and from the destroyer came a group of SS men guarding
6 a small group of civilians, among others, two young women, a
7 very heavset man and various ladies. We checked them in in
8 their respective rooms and made arrangements for the twenty
9 bodyguards.

10 In Italy you have to collect passports. I
11 learned that one of the parties was a Mrs. Drazen.(phonetic)
12 Mrs. Drazen, or better said, the Drazens ran a very fine hotel
13 in Go-ses-berg which our firm in Poo-bra-tal or in Bar-en
14 had furnished and we had a house on the other side of the Rhine
15 under long friendship. So, I went up to Mrs. Drazen's room
16 and identified myself and she was very nice and she said do you
17 know who is with us.

18 I said, no.

19 She said one of the young ladies is Eva Braun.

20 At that time one had very little idea who Eva
21 Braun was. She was rather plain looking German woman and you
22 wouldn't have paid much attention to her if you had met her
23 outside in civilian.

24 The SS men were posted in front of her room and
25 on the floor where she lives and in the entrance and checked any

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1 person who came into the hotel. The heaviset man was the
2 infamous Dr. Morrell who gave HITler his injections, and his
3 wife. So, that upset the running of the hotel because it's not
4 a extremely large hotel like we know over here. They were
5 assigned special dining facilities, and while being on duty in
6 a tuxedo around ten o'clock the manager of our dining room asked
7 me to come down, that I was supposed to meet somebody, and Mrs.
8 Drazen introduced me to Eva Braum, and introduced me as an old
9 friend of the family and she asked me to stay with them.

10 I danced with Eva Braun whose existence I never --
11 nobody ever had heard about in Italy. She was quite pleasant
12 but not very interesting.

13 The next morning a sight-seeing trip was arranged
14 around the islands where I also was asked to spend with Eva
15 Braun and her sister and the rest of the entourage and also
16 swimming we went together at the resort of Gracie Fields on the
17 island.

18 The great event of the visit of Hitler to
19 Mussolini was a unbelievable naval review where the very
20 efficient Italian Navy showed or wanted to show Adolf Hitler
21 how much navy power Italy had, and a very strange event was
22 reported. Hitler was on board the battle cruiser Ka-boo-ah,
23 which was the Italian flagship and was over hundred submarines
24 crossing the Bay of Naples and the very fast Italian destroyers
25 criss-crossing. The Gulf of Naples became rather choppy and

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1 Hitler was reported to have become seasick.

2 He was supposed to dine that evening at the
3 Royal Palace in Naples as guest of the Crown Prince Umberto,
4 later King Umberto, and this was reported that Hitler had become
5 seasick. For that reason when Hitler reported to be received
6 by the Italian Court in Naples he did not change his clothes
7 and the chamberlain of the Court refused Hitler entrance and
8 said you cannot come in because the Italian royal family is in
9 full dress. You have to go back to your train and change clothes.

10 Hitler stormed out and went back to his train
11 and we got called right away that all Germans who were in his
12 entourage and stayed at our hotel had to leave the island and
13 come back to the train immediately. As the entourage had made
14 many purchases on Capri that had not been delivered, we had a
15 very difficult time, also to collect the purchases of Evan Braun
16 had made, and she said in my presence, Hitler will never come
17 back to Italy.

18 Then they left on the special destroyer at their
19 disposal, and that was the -- she said very nicely goodbye and
20 also Mrs. Drazen, but the SS men somehow treated me with a
21 odd-ballish curiosity.

22 Then really it became difficult. Obviously
23 somebody became anxious to find out how come that they had
24 somebody on their staff, on their hotel staff who spoke German
25 so fluently or knew somebody, and so they obviously discovered

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1 that I was Jewish, and the German Embassy asked the police on
2 Capri that I should be arrested and turned over at the bren-naw,
3 which is the -- and as the police and I were on very good terms,
4 they notified me of the request and said they would try as much
5 as they could to protect me.

6 On a small steamer that connects Naples and Capri
7 I met a lady from New York who stayed at the hotel where I had
8 worked and where I spent my weekends and we spent the evening
9 together. She came to visit me in Naples before going back to
10 the States.

11 Life in Naples was not very funny because Naples
12 at that time was already showing the great decay in which is
13 always (inaudible) but I was safe until one day in '38 about
14 September. The police called me again and recommended -- they
15 had a connection through one of the guests at the hotel, to go
16 to Rome and talk to the Ministry of the Interior. But, the
17 Germans at that time had become the rulers of Italy and they
18 said they couldn't help me anymore and that I would have to see
19 ways to leave Italy.

20 I was picked up and handcuffed in the hotel and
21 taken by train between two detectives up the Italian boot. These
22 two detectives were very friendly and told me that I had left
23 so many friends on Capri. When we came to Milan, and you can
24 imagine what fear I had to be turned over to the Nazis, I managed
25 to called my father to say goodbye, and he said he couldn't help

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1 me in any way.

2 Before we came to Milan the policemen said they
3 didn't want to turn me over to the Germans and that we would
4 go to the men's room and they would go out one door and I should
5 go out the other door. For obvious reason I couldn't be hand-
6 cuffed. They recommended me to go on the train to Switzerland.

7 When I left the Italian territory and the Italian
8 pest control would come in to notify or identify myself to the
9 Italian Immigration Police that I was leaving Italian territory
10 so that they had done their duty.

11 They got with me to the train from Milan to
12 Switzerland to Breeg, (phonetic) and that was the 28th of
13 September, 1938, a day which was very important in history
14 because it was the Conference of Munich. After the assassination
15 of the Chancellor of Austria, Italy and Germany were at logger-
16 heads.

17 So, after about two-and-a-half hours we came to
18 the border the train was suddenly stopped because in view of
19 the possibility of Italy going to war the Italians didn't want
20 their train to be interned in Switzerland. The border is in
21 the middle of the Sim-plun tunnel and we stayed almost three
22 hours in the tunnel. When the train advanced it was with great
23 relief that I got into Switzerland, and had given as reasons
24 for entering Switzerland that I had lung trouble and that I would
25 go back to the sanitorium in Mont-ta-na.

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1 On the train I met a young lady who said how come
2 you make or use Spanish words and you're Italian, and I said
3 because I'm very nervous and I know Spanish better than Italian.
4 She said she was the daughter of the manager of La Scala to
5 meet her Jewish friend who was a conductor in Rome, to meet him
6 in Luzerne.

7 I came to Luzerne -- no; I came to the sanitorium
8 that same evening, which I used only as ruse to get into
9 Switzerland. I couldn't stay up there for financial reasons
10 and I went back to Luzerne and stayed in a pension there where
11 I had worked for a short time before for room and board the
12 first time I came to Luzerne, and when the police returned my
13 passport it showed that I had only nine days resident permit in
14 Switzerland, which was, of course, extremely short.

15 It worked out that our former general manager
16 in Spain was in Geneva and he phoned me that he had heard that
17 the Cuban Counsel in Geneva sold Cuban visas.

18 I went to Geneva and there was a tiny Cuban
19 Consulate and hundreds of people were milling around because
20 that rumor was not a complete secret, and I went to the Counsel
21 and said that I would work for him for three days if he would
22 give me a visa, because I spoke all the language and he, of
23 course, was a Cuban Counsel and he didn't speak any European
24 language; Spanish, of course. And he assented to that.

25 The owner of the place in Luzerne helped me, and

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1 I wired to the lady in New York whom I had met on the boat from
2 Capri that I was in serious difficulty and she wired, we'd love
3 to have you in America, how much money do you need. I needed
4 in 1938 \$5,500, which at that time was an unheard fortune.

5 INTERVIEWER: This was to get the Cuban visa?

6 MR. WAHL: No. I had to put the deposit in Cuba.
7 The visa I got for free. Only the transportation I had to get.

8 Three days later I had that money, which was
9 certainly the greatest compliment anybody could have for one
10 night.

11 INTERVIEWER: I should say.

12 MR. WAHL: Yes. And I was able to buy a ticket
13 to Cuba by going through France and to go to a French port near
14 Bordeaux, and I went by train to Paris where I visited my oldest
15 brother who was living there with his wife and was secretary
16 general of the international department stores. He lives now
17 in Rochester, New York, and just today, of all things, has his
18 fiftieth wedding anniversary.

19 The reunion with my brother with whom I never have
20 been very close was not very warm, especially not with his wife,
21 but I got on the ship and after a very jumpy crossing, got to
22 Cuba. While still on board somebody called out Juan Wahl. I
23 used the name of Juan because I used it in Spain. The man came
24 and said, you are not Juan Wahl, I am Juan Wahl and I am a
25 businessman here in town.

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1 When we came to Havana harbor the Cuban police
2 did not recognize the visas we had and the chief of police of
3 Havana wanted \$500 bribe money to let us off the ship. I didn't
4 have \$500 because the money had been given to the Cuban govern-
5 ment to guaranty my stay there. The same happened to all the
6 people who were on board, and the ship was heavy overloaded.

7 After we had been put on a little immigration
8 island I could talk Spanish to the guard and the officer of the
9 guards told me that the chief of police had no authority to
10 detain us. I collected \$300 from the passengers to be given
11 to the sergeant of the guards who had carried us over. We slept
12 in wire cages, but it was warm and it didn't (inaudible).

13 With me was a young doctor who had practiced in
14 Milan and he and I went to a Austrian rooming house which catered
15 mostly to refugees.

16 I started to give Spanish lessons to refugees,
17 especially to those who had to stay in Cuba for a longer time
18 as they fell into a different quota; me being on the German quota
19 it wasn't quite that bad. I got \$.50 an hour for teaching
20 lessons, languages, and I also became known among some Havana
21 Jewish families and tutored some of their children, among others
22 a family by the name of Neizeg (phonetic) whose daughter I
23 tutored in French and with whom I still am in contact who lives
24 now in this country in New York.

25 The life in Havana was a rather devil-may-care

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1 life. Havana was a beautiful city and I made extra money by
2 tourist guiding, by all kinds of odd connections in the tourist
3 trade.

4 My friend, Dr. Orbach, (phonetic) though he did
5 not have a permit, worked as a doctor to many of the refugees.

6 That lasted about a year. I met a man, Juan
7 Wahl, sometimes at a bar where most foreigners hang out and I
8 knew he was selling permits to people on board. When my quota
9 number came up I was ushered into the vice-counsel's office
10 and he had my file. He took my file, looked at it and he said,
11 Mr. Wahl, you will have to wait outside a while, called in the
12 secretary of the consulate who was by sheer coincidence an
13 acquaintance of my parents. Her brother had been stationed in
14 our home town with the American Consulate. When I came back
15 there were three counsels who said, Mr. Wahl, you're accused by
16 about hundred Americans for having swindled about funds to go
17 to Cuba and they hold you responsible for the money. That was,
18 of course, other Juan Wahl, as they had only one Juan file. They
19 put all complaints into my file. It was one of the most dreary
20 moments I ever gone through.

21 I managed to clear that up because there were
22 people in the waiting room who knew that I had given lessons
23 and I had nothing to do, and the other Juan Wahl to whose address
24 those letters had been sent was in the phone book and it was
25 from which he ran his nefarious business. In addition, right

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1 here in San Francisco there are still people who could testify
2 for me.

3 So, about in August, '39 I could come to the
4 States and the friends in Havanna helped me to get on the Pan
5 American Clipper. Then I went by train to New York and I found
6 myself a place to live with a family that also had moved from
7 Havanna to New York and who had a boarding house with the same
8 type of people.

9 I contacted the lady whom I had met between Capri
10 and Naples and who had helped me so generously and I met her
11 husband and her son. I had met her daughter when she was in
12 Italy. I met her on Fifth Avenue and learned that she was a
13 very influential person in Jewish affairs. The Jewish Welfare,
14 whom I contacted for job referral, asked me one day, do you have
15 a relationship with Mrs. such-and-such.

16 I said, whose business is it?

17 She says, we make it our business because -- did
18 you meet the husband?

19 I said, yes.

20 She says, he is one of the well known racketeers
21 in New York and if he finds out your connection with his wife
22 he's going to bump you off, and we are willing to locate you
23 anywhere you want.

24 In view of my Spanish and my French, I had heard
25 of New Orleans and they shipped me to New Orleans. In New Orleans

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1 I found work in a shoe company and later on with Chandler's
2 Shoe Store in New Orleans and I spoke quite often to Jewish
3 luncheon meetings and so on.

4 I made a friendship of two Jewish men, one a
5 very well known attorney and the other one a man in the coast
6 guard, and they said that's a crazy idea, I should go in the
7 U.S. Army, which I did. It took quite a while to get an FBI
8 clearance, not leaving anything (inaudible).

9 So, I went through the basic camps, Beauregard,
10 Louisiana, Little Rock, Arkansas, then for an extensive stay
11 in Fort Custer, Michigan with the Provost Marshal General Schools,
12 Fort Ritchie for army intelligence and I went through the Army
13 Intelligence School and was shipped to England to a small --
14 and had made master sergeant in the meantime, which was relatively
15 fast promotion.

16 From England, ten days -- in June of '44 to
17 Normandy and then the whole extent of the war into the fight
18 at Normandy and to Paris. In Paris there was a pool for
19 linguists at the Army Intelligence Headquarters. From there I
20 was, in the winter of '44 suddenly received orders to proceed
21 immediately to Luxemborg, in an open Jeep that was absolutely
22 unbearably cold, and to report to General Patton's headquarters
23 as a linguist.

24 Then, in December, early December of '44 I was
25 assigned to the 89th Infantry Division and got commissioned and

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1 made the whole Battle of the Bulge and the whole advance into
2 Germany, the crossing of the Rhine where we had great difficulties,
3 into Germany and were attacked by the first German jets, or the
4 first jets we ever had seen on the autobahn, and were quite
5 heavily shot at. With me was a Captain Sturm, (phonetic) and I
6 got then a so-called IPW, Interrogation of Prisoner of War, team
7 interrogating prisoners. They kept us at the time extremely
8 busy and very interesting.

9 We advanced under still heavy fighting and had
10 many interesting events like when the Duke of Coburg (phonetic)
11 wanted to come over to see the -- to be seen by the King of
12 England.

13 We went to the eastern most part that Third Army
14 took. That was in June, '45. This is now far inside the
15 Russian zone.

16 I had learned that my parents were in
17 Theresienstadt and I got permission by my division staff to
18 proceed with one driver to Theresienstadt. We left the division
19 in Toringa (phonetic) and tried to get into Czechoslovakia.
20 At Carlsbad we were told by the point of the U.S. Army that the
21 Russians wouldn't let us get over the river. I went as far
22 south as Pilzen and left from Pilzen where I got a note from
23 Third Army that I was permitted to leave the U.S. lines and that
24 if I should be coming back should get in all the privileges to
25 which I was entitled.

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1 We proceeded into Prague and were told by the
2 tank commander who had the U.S. point that only very few people
3 had come through to get into Prague, but that there was a
4 military mission in Prague already. When we came to Prague
5 Prague was plagued, and while we were driving through Prague I
6 saluted right and left because nobody had seen an American.

7 We proceeded to Theresienstadt and on the highway
8 to Theresienstadt we were stopped by Russian MPs and brought
9 before Marshal Tsu-goff who was on his way to Prague, and we came
10 to Theresienstadt which was quite different from the other
11 concentration camps as we had seen. We had taken Buchenwald
12 and we had been in Ohrdruf, which was the most gruesome of all
13 camps and which was a side camp of Buchenwald.

14 INTERVIEWER: That was the most gruesome?

15 MR. WAHL: Yes; that was unbearable. It didn't
16 even show up on the map of concentration camps but in interroga-
17 tion we heard about it.

18 Came to Theresienstadt and we had two metal U.S.
19 flags on the fenders of the Jeep, and over Theresienstadt was
20 flew the white flag with crossbones that that was a contagious
21 disease.

22 We proceeded to the place where my parents were
23 supposed to have been. Theresienstadt was not as gruesome as
24 the other camps because it was an ex-Austrian fortress. I found
25 the address and in a -- there was an administrator and there was

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1 still 25,000 prisoners in Theresienstadt and thousands followed
2 my Jeep because they had been liberated by the Russians and
3 were all trying to get (inaudible).

4 The man took me to the room where my mother was --
5 my father had died and his ashes had been shipped down the river.
6 My mother -- he showed me the room where my mother was to have
7 been and there were still eight old ladies, and they see me in
8 a steel helmet and with guns, they thought I came to execute
9 them. It was a very unpleasant, a very gruesome thing.

10 Then a Russian officer came and said the commander
11 wanted to see me, and I took my driver, who, by the way was
12 Jewish and (end of tape).

13 Then somebody told me that the mail carrier had
14 seen my parents to the very last when they brought it up, but
15 hundreds of people assembled in front of the place and the mail
16 carrier was an extremely attractive woman and I took her for a
17 ride, among others, and brought her later on even to America,
18 and I brought twelve hundred letters of Theresienstadt, gave to
19 the Jewish Welfare Board to go with them around, and we drove
20 back to the American lines without any great difficulties and
21 were sent to Toringa and I got the counter-intelligence for the
22 28th Cavalry Group.

23 This was basically at the end of the Turingian
24 Woods (phonetic) where it -- when later on became the Russian
25 Zone, the last city in the Russian Zone.

1 Strangely enough, in that area there was a
2 resistance by the Germans that they would put wire rope across
3 the highway and Jeeps that came down at night would run up the
4 windshield the rope and cut the GI's heads off, which was very
5 ugly. There I put a curfew on the area.

6 On the 31st of June the order had come to
7 evacuate the zone, that it had to be turned over to the Russians,
8 which became East Germany.

9 We were assigned to a group in southern Germany
10 to Studtgart and in September I was assigned to the Nuremberg
11 trials, to the War Crime Investigation Team, Nuremberg, which
12 oversaw all the intelligence and counter-intelligence connected
13 with war crimes. They had a very large region, up to the Czech
14 border and down to the Danube River.

15 I left out; before I came to Nuremberg I go to
16 intelligence staff of a very large prisoner, Nazi prisoner camp
17 where former Nazi officials and so on were interned. With
18 prisoner labor I had them build a cemetery because we had mass
19 graves left and right, with a cross, a Jewish Star on the --
20 Greek Orthodox Star.

21 In Nuremberg we worked very closely with the
22 court, with the counsel section of the court and we also enter-
23 tained our counterpart of the Russian, French and English
24 detachments, and as I spoke all the languages I made a great many
25 acquaintance of influential people of the court.

1 Also in Nuremberg it had become known that I had
2 that command and a man approached by lady friend one day and
3 said he could turn over to me the commander of the most nefarious
4 concentration camps in Bavaria called Flossenburg.

5 There had been a trial, or investigation, but the
6 man who was given all the guilt was a commanding officer, like
7 all the Germans used to do, and he couldn't be found. And really
8 one day in Nuremberg the man joined me and south of Nurember,
9 coming out of the woods we captured an old, grizzly man who was
10 the commander of Flossenburg.

11 Flossenburg was especially important because --

12 INTERVIEWER: What was the name of that commander?

13 MR. WAHL: Kogel. In Flossenburg they had the
14 quarry where the prisoners had to quarry rocks and carry the
15 rocks on their shoulders and then jump with those rocks from the
16 top of the quarry and in that way they were smashed, which was
17 extremely important because in the doors of Flossenburg were
18 names of Americans with the serial numbers who had been prisoner.
19 That was in the Bavarian Woods and was completely unknown to --.

20 So, this was quite a feather in my cap.

21 I arrested him. I jumped him and had only a German
22 policeman with me because at that time only the Germans had
23 power. Put him into a jail in the small town of Schwa-ba and
24 called Dachau that I needed a military escort to transport him.

25 The next morning I came and the jail door was open

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1 and there he was laying. He had committed suicide by punching
2 the flat doorknob under his eyeball and broken his brain out.
3 I promised the doctor ten cartons of cigarettes if he could keep
4 him alive but it didn't work. He died. That was published in
5 "Stars and Stripes" and so on and I got a commodation, but it
6 didn't do much good.

7 Now, in contrast -- oh, yes, then at the end of
8 the Nuremburg trials I was transferred down to Dachau to the
9 counsel section, and in Dachau there's a subsequent procedures
10 for Nuremburg. But that was much uglier because in Dachau you
11 dealt with the people who really had actually committed a crime.
12 In Nuremburg we dealt with the so-called big shots. LIke, I
13 could tell Goering that during interrogation that we had met
14 before in Capri under more pleasant circumstances. But there
15 were the actual killers. I don't want to go into too much detail.

16 That became very, very difficult for me, and in
17 '49, beginning of '49 I asked to be sent home.

18 In the meantime, I changed my status from army
19 intelligence to judge advocates on a civilian basis that paid me
20 immeasurably more money and gave me much more leeway. We wore,
21 of course, uniform and wore decorations. I asked to be sent to
22 San Francisco because I never had been on the west coast. I get
23 to San Francisco to the Presidio to the judge advocates division
24 and the work I did there was completely useless and I quit. Now
25 I'm in San Francisco.

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1 That's my story.

2 INTERVIEWER: May I ask you a few questions?

3 MR. WAHL: Yes.

4 INTERVIEWER: You said that you escorted Hess
5 shopping?

6 MR. WAHL: Yes, and so on, because he was a guest
7 at our hotel.

8 INTERVIEWER: What was his first name again?

9 MR. WAHL: Rudolf. This is mine, too; John
10 Rudolf.

11 INTERVIEWER: What was he like?

12 What kind of person did he seem to be like at
13 that time?

14 MR. WAHL: Well, being the atmosphere where they
15 were, he was a very large man, rather taciturn man, but he was
16 polite. They all wanted to get a bargain.

17 I remember also the arrival of Field Marshal
18 Blumberg with his masseuse wife, and they staged a protest
19 meeting against their merits in front of our hotel and they had
20 to flee through the back door.

21 I also met quite intimately Mrs. Tur-boven,
22 whose husband was the German gauleichter (phonetic) in Norway,
23 who also was later on executed by the Norwegians.

24 INTERVIEWER: Another question I have is in
25 reading about the concentration camps and so forth and interviewing,

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1 in some movies they indicate that some of these commandants
2 had their families living there in real special areas.

3 MR. WAHL: Yes. After all, they had officers
4 quarters. For instance, when I worked in Dachau we lived in
5 the SS officers quarters and had the SS officers clubs as was
6 converted.

7 Very funny; into this chronicle in the last few
8 days is a story about a woman in Mon-ta-wa who complains about
9 events on the beach in Mon-ta-wa, by the name of Ilsa Koch. Ilsa
10 Koch was the bitch of Buchenwald who made lampshades out of
11 human skins. I interrogated her, too.

12 INTERVIEWER: Did you?

13 MR. WAHL: Yes. She died --

14 INTERVIEWER: Do you think this is the same Ilsa?

15 MR. WAHL: No, not the one. The name is
16 (Inaudible). Ilsa Koch could not be executed because she was
17 made pregnant by a Polish guard in Dachau. You see, the U.S.
18 Army, we came rather far strung and so we had Polish DP's as
19 prisoner guards and according to American law a pregnant woman
20 cannot be executed.

21 INTERVIEWER: What happened to her?

22 MR. WAHL: I guess maybe they turned -- I have
23 no idea what happened to her.

24 INTERVIEWER: Even after what she did?

25 MR. WAHL: I mean, many of the people fled. I

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1 have had little bit contact with some of the inmates, ex-Nazis.
2 For instance, there was a man with whom I kept contact because
3 was very interesting and whom I saw even in Germany who was the
4 general manager of Frigidaire, and all these men had become high
5 SS officials only to have a title and had to be interned. I
6 have kept after the war and I came here very, very far removed
7 from any army connections.

8 INTERVIEWER: You mean after you finished at the
9 Presidio?

10 MR. WAHL: Yes.

11 INTERVIEWER: You had been in the army quite a
12 while by then.

13 MR. WAHL: Yes. I enjoyed my stay in the army
14 but in a peace-time army it becomes very difficult, very
15 difficult.

16 INTERVIEWER: Is it boring then?

17 MR. WAHL: Useless; you don't know what to do.
18 I mean, I was put on Japanese intelligence reports. I hardly
19 knew where Japan was. When the Japanese intelligence after
20 Pearl Harbor I was overseas already almost. So that was -- and
21 I had never been a civilian.

22 I had a travel agency at 703 Market which was
23 quite successful.

24 This is not recording right now?

25 INTERVIEWER: Do you want me to stop the recording?

JOHN WAHL

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MR. WAHL: Yes, I think we do.

INTERVIEWER: Is this the end for you?

MR. WAHL: I would think so, yes. We can talk
a moment.

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