

Interview with Fritz Schnaittacher
[Date not labeled on audio tape]

Question: Let me just ask you, just tell me who you are and where we are?

Answer: Okay. Is that comfortable for you? All right. My name is Fritz Schnaittacher and we are right now in my home in Rockwell Center, where I have lived since 1948.

Q: Tell me about when you were born and the town where you grew up?

A: I was born in a little village by the name of Forth, which is 23 kilometers north east of Nuremberg. It's between Nuremberg and By-roit (ph). By-roit (ph), the famous Wagner town where the fesh-beeler (ph) had taken place. And I lived, I was born in this village in July of 1913, shortly before the outbreak of World War I. And hardly got to know my father because he died, to some degree as a result of World War I, in 1919 when I was hardly six years old. I lived in the village and went to the grammar school, which then was an all-Jewish school. Which is interesting because the town, the little villages around Nuremberg had become centers of Jewish life when Nuremberg was not, I mean it was no longer permissible to live in Nuremberg. Nuremberg was one of the so-called principal cities and it was only, I believe, in the middle of the 19th century or early 19th century that the Jews were again allowed to live in Nuremberg. And that is, at that time, when the Jews began to leave these small villages. When I grew up, the village had a total population of probably 1,200 and a Jewish population of maybe ten families, enough to have a so-called Minion (ph). But it wasn't long, and I would say it was in my third year of grammar school, that the Jewish community could no longer afford to have the Jewish teacher and also he had doubled as a Huss-in (ph). A Huss-in (ph) is who holds the prayers on

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Saturdays and Jewish holidays. Then the Jewish kids were being transferred to the so-called government school, which was in the main, a Protestant school. We also had a Catholic school. And I went to, I attended the government school for a period of two years and then, because of the lack of better educational facilities in the village, I moved to a so-called _____, a boarding house in Nuremberg and from there went to High School. That for a period of six years. Thereafter, I took a job. It is well to mention that on weekends, when I started to work, I would visit my mother and Aunts who lived in the village, twenty-three kilometers away. Anti-Semitism began to become noticeable. And I never forget an incident. Nuremberg had a deep, what do you call it? _____. A fortification. And we played soccer there. And one guy with a hammer and sickle on his cap came to assist us to, to ward off a bunch of Nazi kids.

Q: Do you know when this would have been or how old you were then?

A: Yes. I was 11 years old and that would have been in 1924. Shall I . . . ?

Q: Let me ask you about that incident. Do you remember what the provocation was? How do you know they were Nazi sympathizers?

A: There was no provocation on our part. It was simply an attack on the part of these Nazi kids who recognized us as being Jewish. And they stormed upon us and tried to beat us up. But this lonely Communist beat them off and it's an experience which I will never forget.

Q: How did you know that they were Nazi kids? Were they wearing anything? Did they say something?

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A: They wore swastikas and they called us dirty Jews, etceteras. Now the Nazism in certain schools was so strong that it was necessary for the Director of the boarding house to have me transferred to a school that was less stigmatized and coincidentally, the school from which I had to be transferred was near the courthouse in Nuremberg where ultimately the War Crimes Trials took place. It's, there are so many things that are unusual coincidences in my life, that some, that was in 1924, and I interrogated the Chief of Staff of the German Army, Ky-kle (ph), in 1945. And he had to get up and salute me. Also one of the many unforgettable incidences. To bring us more up to date, beyond the period of time that I had gone to school, and when I started to work for a company in Nuremberg and that was in 1930. And it was from then on that I would regularly visit my mother on weekends. This brings us to the time when the Nazi propaganda began to become extremely aggressive and particularly then, in the year 1932, when in spite of the enormous propaganda that was being put over the German people, Hitler's popularity began to shrink. And there were two elections. One was in the summer of 1932 and one was in the fall of 1932. And particularly the election in the fall of 1932 reflected a decrease in the popularity of Hitler. Which ultimately then, on January 30th, 1933 led to Hindenberg's decision to appoint Hitler Chancellor of Germany. It was followed up by another election, at the beginning of March of 1933. Which Hitler won only in combination with all the other parties other than the Social Democrats and the Communists. And it was so deeply unfortunate that these two left wing parties had failed to really create one common front. History would have been different, at least my belief. After the

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election, when Hitler considered himself in sole power of Germany, then the wave of Anti-Semitism was enormously increased and this was the time when already Jewish stores were being pilfered or destroyed. And it ultimately led to a very important, personal incident. On one of the visits in the middle of March to my mother's house, I was hardly at home, when there was a knock on the door and a policeman, the local gendarme, came into our living room and said, "Mr. Schnaittacher, I would like to see you at the police station." When I arrived at the police station, he very briskly told me that I was under arrest. And again, it was one of these painful, painful moments when I had to call up my mother, who had a severe cold, and I had to tell her, "Mother, I'm under arrest." Well, she was shrieking and she came storming out to the police station protesting that a War widow should be treated like this without any reason whatsoever, but obviously it did not do any good. My village was too small to have a prison of it's own and so I was transported to the County seat of Earl-la-len (ph) where I then, as dusk began to settle, was put into a cell in the police prison. And I was being welcomed by four or five other prisoners who had already been in there, as a result of having been anti-Nazis, not Jewish, but anti-Nazis. Shall I continue?

Q: Yes. But I'm curious about a couple of things. One, was there, did you have any hint when you were taken in, why you were taken in? You were living in Nuremberg at the time that you were arrested in your hometown of Forth, is that right?

A: Right.

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Q: How does that happen? Did you have any sense of why? How they would even have known of you?

A: No. I had no idea why I was being arrested. However, as I was turned over to the warden of the prison, I requested information. Why I was here. And he then, either that night or the following morning, gave me a slip of paper which indicated that I was arrested because of having agitated against the National Socialist Government because of knowledge of secret ammunition depots and liaison of illegal anti-Nazi organizations. Now, actually, yes I was an anti-Nazi. I was no longer involved in anti-Nazi activities. So the actual reason was to provide the local populace of the village with a degree of satisfaction, to have me arrested as a Jew. And another cousin of mine who was the only other young male Jew in the village. And it was quite an experience. As I was given the easiest job in the prison, and that was to fill, we didn't have running water in the cells, but each one of us would get a water pitcher. And it was my job to fill the water basins that we used to wash ourselves with. And to fill these pitchers with water. And in doing so, I turned around and there sits my cousin in the adjoining cell. Well we had a very friendly greeting, and surprising so. The moment that I had gotten into prison my mother did not rest for a minute and pursued every possible approach in order to have me liberated, as well as my cousin. And then followed some six weeks later and I was, which would make it the beginning of May, and, no, it made it the end of April.

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A: When I was released from prison, my cousin as well. And I was on parole for two months, which meant that I had to report to a police station every other day. Shall I continue?

Q: Let me take you back just a little bit. You mentioned that you were an anti-Nazi but weren't involved in anti-Nazi activities. What did it mean to you at that time, or what kind of activities had you been involved in? What was sort of the culture of anti-Nazism where you were living, when you were I guess about 20 years old? With your friends? What were you talking about? What were you doing?

A: Well we would have seminars to gain an understanding of what it would mean, of what Nazism meant and what it meant not only to the Jews but the people at large. The total oppression of several areas and after all, when, I want to be sure that is right. When Germany finally collapsed there were over 300,000 non-Jewish prisoners in concentration camps in Germany. And the anti-Nazi forces were, they were primarily the Social Democrats and the Communists. And who really fought Hitler physically and with all the idealism and principal and firmness possible. But I had the opportunity, after I was released not only from prison but from the parole, to travel as a salesman within limited scope. Not by car but by train. And I never forget that some very simple people who had taken the same train I did in the vicinity of Munich, that they expressed without fear when they recognized me as a Jew, that Hitler is the enemy of all of Germany. By the way, I failed to, when I corrected myself before with regard to the time that I left prison. And because of the danger of again being re-arrested in Nuremberg, I left Nuremberg and moved with an Uncle of mine

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in Munich. And it was May 1st, 1933. The reason that I am pointing out in this very interesting coincidence, I came back to Munich on May 1st, 1945, as the conquering American soldier after having liberated Dachau. I'm not speaking of myself but my regiment, my division, and it was to be sure one of the greatest moments in my life.

Q: You mentioned that you were afraid in Nuremberg, that you would be re-arrested. Was there a sense that they were watching you? It seems that if they arrested you when you went home and you didn't live there, they must have somehow known you were coming?

A: Well, yes, there was the fear that one could be re-arrested and then it would not have been a police prison but it would have meant to be sent to the concentration camp of Dachau. Now Dachau at that time was not an extermination camp but it was a camp of terror. And personally violent persecution. At that time the, a few friends of mine were shot in Dachau. And the proverb, if you can call it that, was created: shot while attempting to escape. Now, so I lived in Germany having been relieved from the duty to report to police stations, and I had the goal, as soon as possible, as early as possible, to be able to leave Germany. And particularly so because on a visit to Nuremberg, not to my village, I had arranged, my mother had arranged to meet me in Nuremberg in order to spend a pleasant weekend together. When she came home from that visit, she was ordered by the Mayor of the village to come to the village counsel and she was told, Mrs. Schnaittacher, if you have been here today, during the day or yesterday, we would have arrested you. We give you the opportunity to defend yourself. My mother had been extremely courageous and

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she screamed at them that if they wanted to arrest her, they should do so right now because the following day she was going to leave the area to live with her mother. And that's what she did. And that, the _____, the precarious actions of my mother, and my Uncles and Aunts, was my never-ending burden and sorrow here. I had, and that is, goes for so many of the refugees. We had an interesting, rewarding time here. Cost of living was extremely low and even though I only earned at the beginning \$13.00 a week, it was fully adequate to keep me alive. And to enable me on weekends to go hiking and we had a wonderful time. It is interesting to note that this now is the late fall of 1933. My brother had lived here already. He came, not because of the Nazis, in 1929 at the behest of an Uncle of mine, who lived here, had lived here for some years and had a going business and was not married and therefore didn't have any other children. And my brother entered his business and later on I joined him. We lived in the utmost of comfort, earning \$13.00, \$15.00, \$17.00 a week. On 96th Street and Western Avenue. Across the street from the, what's the name of the hotel? The Hotel Paris, which had a swimming pool and we could go swimming every night, for 25 cents. And it was really a wonderful way of living. Burdened only by our concern for our _____ in Germany.

Q: Can I ask you, before you came over, you sound like you were quite close with your mother, were you having conversations with her about whether you should go? Did she give you any advice about the climate in Germany and how that should effect your decision to, did you talk about that?

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A: Yes indeed. There was my mother, two spinster Aunts on my father's side. There were two brothers of my mother's who were married. And one of them had three children. And my mother insisted that I should leave as soon as possible after I was able to get a visa. And I left with a great deal of reticence because of leaving my mother over there, but she promised that she would visit me. And indeed she did the following year. And stayed in America for over six months. Then because of her love for her mother and the feeling of obligation that she had for her, she came back to Germany in order to take care of her mother. And it was then, only after the Crystalnacht (ph), after my mother suffered a nervous breakdown, that she and her mother, and Uncles and Aunts and cousins, all ultimately were brought over here. So we were extremely fortunate that we didn't lose anybody in the Holocaust.

[End of Side 1 of Tape 1]

Q: It was that they hadn't lost anybody?

A: Right. So this brings us up to 1939. And when my mother was the first member of the family after myself to then come back in order to remain here. And we had a small apartment on Western Avenue and 80th Street. And then we, where some cousins had lived, and myself. And when my mother came, we rented, no, first she stayed with my Uncle, and then later on when her mother came as well, we rented an apartment on 151st Street and Broadway. Which is the southern part of Washington Heights. And at that time it was just a wonderful neighborhood. You never, day or night, you would never fear of any attack or of any incident. And so my brother, who by then had gotten married and his wife was pregnant, and I, and

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my mother and grandmother, we lived in a five room apartment. And then, when other Uncles and Aunts came, we just doubled up. There was never any complaint. There was only the utmost of happiness, to have succeeded in bringing our relatives out of Germany. And even as far as, which is of some significance with regard to the question that has been raised, the integration of refugees into American life. There was an Aunt of mine who then was in her late 30's or early 40's, and she didn't have any children. And she and her husband, through another friend of theirs, started to pull threads out of pieces of cloth in order to separate them. And they started to do that in our dining room. And from there they developed a business where ultimately they employed some forty people on 26th Street and Broadway. And when my Uncle and Aunt ultimately died, they took care of their nieces and nephews, not having had any children of their own. And that went for ever so many of the people, that no job was low enough as long as they were able to sustain themselves. Whether young women that worked in households, or in factory jobs, notwithstanding, very good educations. And this, I think, is one of the unique aspects of this immigration.

Q: Can I ask you, did your mother and Uncles and Aunts talk much about their experience in Germany after you left, in the years leading up to the time that they _____? What did they tell you about what was going on and what their experiences were?

A: Well that's a very good question because it leads me to one of the most satisfying experiences that I had. As I had mentioned early, I had worked for my Uncle who

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had a wholesale business of glassware and chinaware located in Munich. And when he came over here, he told me the following story. When he approached as it was customary his place of business on the morning of the Crystalnacht (ph), the manager of the business, not Jewish, to whom I had been reported when I worked for him, was standing at the entrance to this business in the uniform of a storm trooper, and said, "Jews are not allowed here." And my Uncle did not protest because he recognized the threat that was behind him and he turned around, went home, and within a few hours a Nazi knocked on his door and arrested him and took him to Dachau. And the same thing happened to his brother, who lived some hundreds of miles away from where he lived. So my two Uncles were taken to the concentration camp and that was in November 1938. And finally they were able to get out in January of, I believe January of 1939. The Uncle with whom I had lived, the one who had lived in Munich, because of the totally inadequate clothing that they received in Dachau, suffered severe circulatory problems and that's what he died from some years later. But this is the story that he told me. So now, we go back, or we advance to the year 1945. Fritz, as a member of the 157th Regiment of the 45th Division, contributed to the conquest of Munich. And as soon as I had the time to follow up on this story which I told you, I went into my Uncle's place of business which had been bombed out, but people were there. And I inquired for the name of Hermann. Hermann was the name of the fellow who had been the manager of my Uncle's business, who was responsible for sending him back home and having him arrested and taken to Dachau. And so this is now May 1945. And I finally got

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information as to where Hermann lived. And I had the deep, deep satisfaction of locating him, having been an officer I had the privilege of a jeep, and I drove out there. And people gleefully would point in the direction where Hermann lived. And there he was. I recognized him at once. And he just wore pants and long johns. And I told him in a not too friendly a manner that he should get dressed. He didn't recognize me. His wife and daughter protested vehemently. And I took him to the CIC Headquarters in Munich where I interrogated him. And fortunately for me, because here I was on a war of my own, and which was not allowed, but I found out that he had been the guard in a concentration camp. Which made him subject to automatic arrest. Eisenhower had declared the so-called automatic arrest category and you as an American soldier could arrest anybody who was guilty of certain crimes, such as having been the guard at a concentration camp. I didn't tell him who I was until I finished the interrogation and I said, "Do you know who I am?" And he said, "No." I said, "My name is Schnaittacher." So he said, "But you should know how much I did for your Uncle." So I said, "Yes, indeed, I do know." And with that I turned him over to the CIC, who were less humane than I was and at least he was put away in prison for some months. The uniqueness of my war experience, I don't know whether, should we talk about that now?

Q: Let me ask you one thing. Did you Uncles, who were now in America living with you, did they talk about their experience in Dachau? Did they explain what had happened, what it was like?

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A: Yes. They weren't beaten at that time, yet. But there was totally inadequate food. No heating. And inadequate dress. That is what is uppermost in my mind from what I remember. My Dad, keeping in mind your possible interest in our integration in American life, that this was also the period of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. And most of us, of course, or all of us, were most sympathetic to the role of the Republican government in fighting Franco. And certainly, ultimately, in fighting Mussolini and Hitler. And we participated in the collection of funds to support the International Brigade and to render, I'm reluctant to say every possible support because we could have volunteered to go to Spain, which I didn't and very few of us did, if any. Now of some significance to my life and the lives of my relatives and my mother, I had become involved in Uncle's business. And of course it was my proud attempt to support as much as possible my mother, my grandmother, my Uncles and Aunts who didn't make a living of their own at the beginning. And ultimately they did. And my mother kept house. And then I had to assume much greater responsibility because my Uncle died. And so my brother and I became heirs, only to some degree because we had two cousins who, or three cousins, who shared in the estate in equal shares. Then we became involved in the war. The company that I was with produced medical supplies, which were being used in the war. And most important I met the girl who ultimately I was going to marry. Her father shared office space with me. And at a Christmas party, 1941, I recognized, and I told my mother, that that was the girl I was going to marry. And it was only two and a half months later, two months later, that we got married. And

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yes, all the relatives raised their eyebrows and counted the days. But nothing happened.

Q: Was she also a refugee?

A: No. Her father had emigrated from Russia around 1900. Her mother was born here. And then I was drafted in May of 1942. And I went AWOL, do you know what that means? I went AWOL very early on when Dottie visited me in Fort Dix, and we spent the night together. Then shortly after basic training, which I took in Canncroft (ph), South Carolina, Dottie joined me with a small weekend release. And it grew to the point where we had a steamer truck and a dog and we separated when I was flown over to Germany, not to Germany, first to Africa, in July of 1944.

Q: So you had been in training for about two years?

A: Well the training, after basic training, I was transferred and Dottie joined me, to Florida, to an Ordinance Camp. And then I applied for OCS and . . .

Q: OCS being?

A: Officers Candidate School. From which I graduated in the spring of 1943. And then there was an excess of officers so we were being trained in the cooks and bakers school and in an Ordinance Camp, and we traveled from the East Coast to the West Coast. Until January or February of 1944, when Dottie's brother was killed as a Marine flyer, he was in training in carrier landings. And I think that probably was February or March of 1944, or February. And then I was sent to Intelligence Training Schools and ultimately my main effort was the interrogation of prisoners of war. So in July of 1944, Dottie and I separated. She went back to New York and I

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was flown to Italy via Africa. And in order to participate in the landing in Southern France on August 15, 1944. And that's where I joined the 157th Regiment and my buddy, Fritz, who was a Master Sargent, and I had a small intelligence team consisting of Fritz and a Staff Sargent by the name of Al Magertle (ph), from the Middle West. And after landing in Southern France and moving quickly up to the vicinity of the Borsch-Mums (ph) where we arrived in early December or late November, in a small town by the name of _____. And we were stuck there until we started our offensive that was really thought to end the war. And that was about March 15, 1945. Now from then on, or within a week thereafter, there was hardly a town or village that was of significance to my family or myself, that we didn't conquer. The first experience of this kind was the town of Ah-shaf-en-berg (ph), which is about 100 kilometers from Frankfurt. But the Aunt that I had mentioned earlier, she had originated from Ah-shaf-en-berg (ph). And I had attended her wedding in 1923 or 1924. And I, together with Fritz, as interrogators, accepted the surrender of this town. And then had some unique experiences in bringing about the surrender of more German outfits by apprehending the fortress commander, putting him in our jeep, and wherever we went, he said, put your arms down. A unique little story was some days later, when we were approaching a beautiful, mid-evil town, Bumberg (ph), where I had four prisoners in front of me. And one of them stepped out and said, "Lieutenant, didn't we go to school together?" And I lifted his helmet, recognized him at once, and said, "Yes, Lesline (ph)." Lesline (ph) was his name. "We did." And he said, "Fritz, let me go home." I said, "I can't."

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If we have time, I could tell a very humorous story which happened the following day. We had taken Bumberg (ph) and we had probably about 500 prisoners in a churchyard. We had more information than they did, there was hardly any purpose in interrogating any of them. I just walked around to hear their voices, to hear what they were talking about. And out of these hundreds, one of them came up to me, he saluted, and said, "Lieutenant, I come from a village not far from here. Couldn't you let me go home?" So I said, "Why, where do you come from?" He said, "I come from Forth." Forth is my village, where I knew everybody. Where I knew every house number. We didn't have cobblestones, we only had dirt roads. And I said to him, "But you weren't born in Forth?" He said, "No." I said, "How come that you lived in Forth?" He said, "Because I married a girl from Forth." I said, "Whom did you marry?" He said, "Gunta Hause (ph)." I said, "Gunta Hause (ph)? She lived in House Number 35." He said, "Yes." And I said, "And that's two houses from the little fire house and three houses from the Protestant Church and the ministries, and if you looked across the street there was House Number 52." And his pupils grew wider and wider, he said, "If American Intelligence has all this information how can we win the war?" So now you know how we won the war.

Q: Was it just a coincidence that you were assigned to this division that was in that part of Germany?

A: Entirely. Entirely coincidence.

Q: That must have seemed very strange to you, I would think?

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A: And a few days later we took Schnaittacher, after which I'm named. And I visited in the cemetery where my father is buried. And then two days later we took Nuremberg where I went to school. And I interrogated the Commander of the town of Nuremberg. And then we moved on across the Danube and we came to the vicinity of Dachau. And ultimately liberated Dachau.

Q: Let me stop you before we go into that. When you were talking about the interrogations, what would you be asking them? What do you remember about the interrogations themselves?

A: Sure. You never ask a question that can be answered yes or no. You want information and, by and large, what we were interested in was the strength of the opposing forces. Maybe some names because they would help us in further interrogations. Gun positions. Location of mines. Their plan. And what I did forget, and what I was being decorated for, on March 15, 1945, we, one of our companies took one of the deep bunkers, fortifications, and as they went in and picked up the telephone, they heard voices but couldn't make out what was being said. So my Regimental S2, Intelligence Officer, said, "This is beyond the call of duty, but if you want to go up, we would appreciate it. See what you can make out." And Fritz and I, we went up and it was a lively night. There was a lot of fire . . .

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Tape 2

A: From the moment that I picked up the phone. If I would have prepared myself in raising questions, I couldn't have done better than the two people who were talking to each other. One, they were from two German divisions, different divisions. And one of them gave information such as, that they were leaving the following day in order to move in a certain direction giving coordinates. And that they were going to establish their ammunition depot at such-and-such coordinates. A fuel depot at such-and-such coordinates. If I really would have asked these questions, I couldn't have done any better. And because we didn't introduce, we didn't make any noise. We let them talk. And only at the very end did I try and make an effort to establish contact without indicating who I was, but our voice didn't go through. So we reported back to the battalion headquarters and he was not interested in this information. But regimental headquarters was and they recorded our findings, our information to division headquarters and then they send up night fighters and the following day, not only because of the information that we brought, but other information as well, we were able to break through the German lines and advance by over 35 kilometers or miles. And for that I received the Bronze Star. And Fritz received a Bronze Star with clusters because he already had one.

Q: What was your experience with your fellow soldiers? I don't know, how many people in your position would there have been, of German/Jewish refugees who were now part of the American army? Was it a common thing or was it sort of unusual? How did they treat you?

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A: It was quite common in that the U.S. Army trained people who had a intimate knowledge of the language and even of dialects and geography. And the school was in Cambridgy, (ph) Maryland. That's where the military intelligence training school was and you could be trained, not only as an interrogator, but also in aerial photography and many different aspects of military intelligence. Of course we thought that our particular branch was the most successful one. I mentioned we liberated Dachau and one of the gruesome experiences was when I was suppose to interrogate a Brigadier General who claimed that he was transferred against his wishes to the _____, the army, instead of . . . no, I'm sorry. That he was transferred against his wishes to the SS from the Army where he had served. And he was, quote, on a rest and recuperation leave. In Dachau, that's some fine place for a rest and recuperation, and he had come from Dachau, er, from Auschwitz, I'm sorry. And he said, "Now, Lieutenant, if you are enraged as to what you see here in Dachau, here you see a few bodies. There you would have seen mountains." And the physically, the worst sight were the freight trains, which were filled with people who had starved to death. I have some pictures, which I'll be glad to turn over. Well, the war active combat didn't last much longer and I was then being transferred to a camp near Ludwigsberg (ph), which housed a lot of the automatic arrestees and I had to interrogate them. And then I was transferred to the War Crimes Commission. First, near Frankfurt where we were to review the archives of the German Army High Command. Particularly, my, and the guys who were working with me, my responsibility was to try and find material that was of significance to Yon

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Mar-shot (ph) who was the economic czar under Hitler. Unfortunately, we didn't find much. Or we didn't find anything that was of significance. During this period of time, whenever I had the opportunity to go back to the village where I had come from, as long as it didn't interfere with the obligations that I had, I would do so. And this is also a whole chain of unusual coincidences. It was the first time that I came back to my village. The village that I was born in, my regiment did not conquer. It was an engineering company that served the same division as my regiment did. But I didn't get through there, so it was in June of 1945 that I was able to pay my first visit. And as I approached the village, as I approached the house that I was born in, shutters began to open and I heard voices saying, Fritz is back, Fritz is back. I came to my house. I knocked on the door and a young girl looked down from the room where I was born in. And you could hear her knees shake because those were the days when an American soldier would knock on the door of somebody, the Germans would be terribly fearful of what could happen. I didn't recognize her and I asked for her father to come down. And he too was shaking, until he recognized me and I recognized him. And he had been a very decent guy, a very strong anti-Nazi and so I said to him, "You can stay in my house. But tonight my driver and I want to sleep in the adjoining room." Which he, of course, gladly arranged for us. And then I drove to the other end of the village because my mother had had a driver who was a radical anti-Nazi. And he himself had served as a prisoner in the concentration camp of Dachau for some months. And I wanted to see him and, if possible, help him with money or whatever I could do for him. He had been, he had become a

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prisoner of war so he wasn't back yet, but his wife was back and I helped her out with some money. And then I drove back to my house and by then, as coincidence would have it, that the gendarme who had arrested me in 1933 was there to welcome me back. Of course, I didn't shake his hand and he had, I didn't hold it against him because he had acted on orders, which he couldn't refute in 1933. Then I drove the following day, no, I ordered the gendarme to bring to me the Mayor and to bring to me other people whom I had suspected that they had removed the last few Jews and had sent them to Dachau, or to Auschwitz. And so the Mayor came and I ordered the Mayor to give instructions to the town crier that all Jewish property that they had stolen should be brought back to the Mayor's office. Nothing came. Then I drove to Schnaittacher in order to visit my father's grave and to instruct the Mayor of Schnaittacher to repair the cemetery because many of the gravestones had been used for construction purposes. And again I drove back to my village and apprehended a guy who definitely had been involved in the Chrystalnaught (ph). And I turned him over to the CIC. So at least I found that I had fulfilled some deep, deep wishes of revenge.

Q: Well tell me about that. What was going through your head as you were doing these things? What was the motivation for you?

A: Revenge. Deep, heart-felt revenge. These bastards, without any justification, had brought so much suffering on innocent people. What I did was unusually mild. Of course, I could have been subject to military correction, you know? Because I did not have the necessary authorization to pursue them. And indeed it came into

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being. A friend of mine was at 7th Army Headquarters in Heidleberg (ph) and I had to go to Heidleberg (ph), whether it was on the occasion when I was decorated, or whatever the reasons were, and this friend of mine who had come from the town of Earlong (ph) and who was a German/Jew, and he saw me pass in the car, pass his office, and he called me in. And he said, "Fritz, you'd better be mindful of the fact that the next time you come to Earlong (ph), the town major is going to have you arrested." So I said, "Well, look, it wouldn't be the first time. After all I had been in prison here in Earlong (ph)." So indeed I was looking for the opportunity to go to Earlong (ph) and I went to the town major's office, American town major, and I said to him, "I understand you are looking for me. Here I am and it wouldn't be the first time that I have been in prison here." So he said, "No, no, but you've got to go according to _____." So, okay. I then went to the prison where I had been in prison and the warden was still the same. And I think he recognized me. And he said, "Well now a different sort of people are in prison."

Q: Can I take you back to Dachau for a moment?

A: Oh, sure.

Q: We went over that quite quickly and I'd like you to tell me, what do you remember about that, what the timing was and when you were there, what you saw, what you heard?

A: Yeah, very good. You raise good questions. It was, dust began to settle. And I was as usual at my regimental headquarters, which wasn't in the camp, it was outside of the camp. But I received the orders to come to the camp in order to

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interrogate that Brigadier General. And as I approached the camp, and there were the freight trains outside of the gate, and as I came to the camp headquarters there were a lot of prisoners. And the living prisoners looked worse than the dead ones. And they, some of them had cornered a German in uniform and they really wanted to do away with him. And I tried to stop them, which I shouldn't have. Then I went into the camp headquarters where I met with that Brigadier General. And then thereafter I went back to the headquarters of my regiment.

Q: What day was this event, do you know? What day?

A: What day?

Q: What was the date?

A: I think it was April 30, 1945. And then the following day I didn't get into the camp anymore. But moved on to Munich, and we took Munich. On the way, I do remember that, a few incidences. Some anti-Nazis made contact with us. The impression I had was that they were left wing underground. Another incident was when I came across a kid who had come out of the concentration camp and he was in the home of some German where we had established a temporary headquarters. Temporary being only maybe an hour or two. And there was a woman, and I said, "I want you to take care of this boy." I asked him, "Where are your parents?" He said, "I don't know." I asked, "Where are you from?" He answered, "I don't know." And I'm going to show you something.

Q: Tell me what this is. Can you describe this to me?

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A: We're looking at a piece of newspaper, The New York Telegram, of April 4, 1945. And it reads, "A-shop-en-borg (ph), Germany. April 3rd. American powers shattered even the nerves of one of Germany's most fanatical commanders. A friend of Adolph Hitler and today the last resistance East, in A-shop-en-borg (ph). After six days of attack, a Nazi Commander, a Major Lambert (ph), immaculately dressed in grey-green _____ cap, neatly pressed trousers and riding boots stepped out together with his command staff of 100 selected officers, many carried white flags. When they reached the American lines, Major Lambert was sent in a jeep to a school house where a Colonel O'Brien was waiting with two interpreters, First Lieutenant Fritz Schnaittacher, New York City, and Second Lieutenant Fred Kaufmann (ph), Fritz, Port Arthur, Texas. The Nazi Commander, his spirit broken, told the Americans, 'You Americans don't fully appreciate the real power that's in you. We do now, at long last.'"

Q: Who had clipped that for you?

A: Dottie, sure. And this is a picture of what I once looked like. And it says, "With the 7th Army, Germany. First Lieutenant Fritz Schnaittacher of New York City was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Meritorious Service in connection with military operations against the enemy by Lieutenant General Hi-slick (ph), Commander of the 7th Army. Lieutenant Schnaittacher is the son of Mrs. Freda Schnaittacher."

Q: Yes, wonderful.

A: And what I did want to mention yet, on the lighter side, after we had taken Munich, one of our battalions was headquartered in the apartment of Eva Braun. And so, of

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course, we liberated things that had some significance, like letterheads, but somehow they all disappeared.

Q: Let me take you back just a bit, about Dachau again, if you don't mind?

A: All right.

Q: I'm wondering, obviously your family had had experiences there. Your Uncles had been in the camp. You must have been aware that you were entering this place where they had been. I'm wondering what emotions you might have been feeling at the time? What were you thinking?

A: Well as I tried to say earlier in connection with the experience with Hermann, that it was just unbelievable that I should be able to participate in the liberation of this worst German concentration camp. I think it was worse than Buchenwald and any number of other German concentration camps. It didn't compare with Auschwitz, so I felt deeply, deeply gratified and I tried to bring that out in the letter that I wrote to Dottie.

Q: Had you heard from the people from your regiment who had gone in the day before what the conditions were? What did you know about the camp when you went there?

A: No, you know, to my best knowledge we were the first ones. But Dachau made an enormous impression upon me from the very earliest days on, it was the first concentration camp that the Nazis created. That's where friends of mine were killed back in 1933. Killed, shot while attempting to escape. From the personal point of

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view, no spot could have given me more satisfaction that I should be able to participate in liberating it.

Q: You mentioned that you tried to intercede with the group of captives . . . ?

A: Right.

Q: What happened? What did you try to do and what happened?

A: It was stupidly humane. I'm ashamed of it that I should have interceded. Where do you want to go from here?

Q: You tell me. Where would you like to go?

A: Well, this is 1945. Do you want to develop more of the story of German/Jewish refugees living in America?

Q: Well, yes, we can get to that. Tell me, just wrap up the rest of your, _____ a little bit for me on before you came home and all that. You mentioned the research you've been doing in the archives?

A: Right. And that wasn't a, our screening of the archives in pursuit of the case again _____ was not successful. We couldn't find anything. On the other hand, I came across some absolutely inhuman documents of a young child who was maybe 13 or 14 years old and he describes the gift that his father gave him, which was arrival in a Jewish prison to do target practice. We couldn't identify this particular individual, but still that was a letter that we came across. [End of side 1 of tape 2]. Thereafter, it wasn't too long before a degree of disillusionment began to set in. Disillusionment from the point of view that we had nothing to do. And I was stationed in a beautiful part of Germany, Arch-wipe-vah (ph), and there were beautiful spas nearby. And

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then the news reached us of the atomic bomb and meant, sort of concluded the likelihood of a military career, unless I would have volunteered to remain in Germany with the occupational force. Which I didn't. I wanted to get back to my wife. She had hoped that possibly there could be the opportunity for her to come to Europe but that didn't pan out. And then, of course, I had to assume responsibilities in the business that ultimately I became the head of.

Q: How did you come home? When did you come home from the war and how did you get there?

A: By the way, I flew over and I came home by a relatively small boat, and it was a stormy trip. But it didn't bother me and I think it was either late November or the beginning of December, and Dottie expected me. And, of course, there was a glorious welcome. And then not too long thereafter, we took really our first honeymoon by going to Mexico.

Q: Where did you sail from and where did you land, when you came home?

A: Good question. We left from Belgium, from All-vair (ph) and we arrived in the Port of New York.

Q: And she was right there?

A: No. That couldn't be arranged. But let me see, I forgot. How did I get to my mother's house? That I forgot. And from there I made contact with Dottie.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you first saw her again?

A: I think she came to my mother's house. I think so.

Q: Let me pause here for a second. What is that you are reading?

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A: Reading: "Yanks enter Nuremberg, first shelling Lab-sig (ph)." You know, Lab-sig (ph) is in the east. "Lab-sig (ph) was expected to fall soon, along with Nuremberg where the 45th Division," that was my Division, "of Lieutenant General Alexander _____ 7th Army was fighting through the heart of the city after a surprise assault from the Northeast. The Germans had expected Nuremberg to be attacked from the West. To the North, the _____ Army of Lieutenant General William H. Simpson reached five miles beyond the Albe (ph) mowing down some of Adolph Hitler's personal troops sent to hold the river line. Other units . . .", let's see, this is of no, this I don't understand myself. Forth, my village, "11 miles Northeast of Nuremberg and _____, 20 miles northwest were cleared. To the west, French forces along the Rhine advanced up to 18 miles during the day and took Offenberga (ph)."

Q: When you got back, you were living in New York City?

A: I was living in, no, I was living in Brooklyn. My in-laws had rented a furnished apartment from friends of theirs and that's where Dottie and I had opened up headquarters.

Q: And tell me about how that went, when you came back? Did you start working right away? Was she working during the war?

A: She was a psychiatric social worker and she worked in Brooklyn for, I forgot the name of the agency. And I would imagine that she immediately got time off. And I didn't start working right away. Maybe I took off a week or two weeks, and then after New Years, we went to Mexico where I had some distant relatives, whom I didn't

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know, but we made contact and ultimately developed a very nice friendship. Probably I took three weeks off and I was discharged as a Captain, which was nothing unusual because of a friend's got the same incentive to possibly stay on. But I really was disenchanted and possibly in retrospect unjustified so, because my feeling was that we were beginning to get into the cold war. My impression had been that the Russians had done more than anybody else in bringing Hitler to his knees. And the battle of Stalingrad (ph) was the decisive battle in Europe. And it was only two years later, well let's see, in May of 1947 we had our first child, Peter. And Dottie's mother was kind enough to take care of our son and we left for Europe. We didn't go to Germany, but we left for Europe in August of 1947. It was a business trip but I had the privilege of taking Dottie with me. And because Dottie's brother had died as a flyer so her mother prevailed upon us not to fly. So it was a two-month trip. And we went to Holland, Scandinavia, Switzerland, France. In France, we made contact with a relative who had survived the war in France. She and her husband, but she lost her son, one of her sons whom the Gestapo picked up and who never returned. That was 1947. Then my foreign travels were more directed to Central and South America where I tried to build up, and succeeded in doing so, an export business.

Q: What kind of business?

A: We manufactured surgical dressings, gauze bandages, gauze, silk and cotton, adhesive bandages. Not to say Band-Aids, etceteras. But in the years to come, our ambition began to grow and we covered Australia, New Zealand, Iran, Lebanon,

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Israel, Germany. Not only to sell, primarily to buy from Germany. And ultimately I sold the business in 1972 and my son, Peter, is still with the company, or what's left of it.

Q: You had other children?

A: Yes, I have Richard, who is our middle son. He lives in Richwood (ph), New Jersey. And he is particularly gifted in many ways and also in difficult languages, like Chinese and Hebrew. And Paul, who had been a psychiatric social worker like his mother, but got burned out and he has become an excellent photographer. That's my family. And I have grandchildren.

Q: How many?

A: Five.

Q: How much did you talk to your family, to your wife, to your sons, about your experiences during the war? How important was that in shaping your lives?

A: Not too much. I gave each one of my sons copies of the one that Washington made.

Q: _____?

A: Yes.

Q: But before that you hadn't talked about it with them much?

A: To a very limited degree.

Q: Do you know why?

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A: No. You know even though one of my sons had, the photographer, had asked me to write up my memoirs. And I started to. Today they have their own lives to live. But particularly because of the death of Dottie's, I speak to them daily.

Q: Did you remain active in any veteran's groups?

A: At the very beginning there was a progressive veterans group. What was the name of it? I could not see myself joining the American Legion or any organization such as this and the veterans group which I did join, that's no longer in existence.

Q: Is it a strong part of your identity, that you fought in the war? I mean, does that form a strong part of you in any way?

A: Well it is interesting, I don't have too many friends who had been in the war. And the ones that had been in the war and that I see, somehow we talk about it.

Q: Is it a painful thing to talk about?

A: No.

Q: Tell me about your friend Fritz.

A: I met Fritz in what we use to call the dust bowl of Naples. In our regiment, our division was being mobilized for the invasion into Southern France. And Fritz, who had been abroad from Africa on, through Sicily, Cer-learn-no (ph), Ansio (ph), he hardly had missed any landing in any campaign. And experience had taught him that most important is to have food because very frequently during these campaigns the regiment would outrun the kitchen and you had to live off the land. So he said, "Lieutenant, we've got to keep soul and mind together. And we are going to go to the ration dump." The very first day that we were getting ready to go aboard ship in

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the afternoon, and he said, now you have an interesting story to tell because you only came from America a few days ago, and these guys were guarding the ration dump, anxious to hear this story. So you keep them fascinated with your story while I go into the ration dump and when I see, by then it had been dark, when I see some boxes that look interesting and promising, I'll whistle, you'll follow my whistle and I'll throw the boxes across the fence. A very tall fence. So I followed his instructions and there I can catch one box, two box, three boxes. And we saw ourselves eat canned chicken for days to come. We couldn't wait, but we had to wait because you were not allowed to strike a match or a flashlight. So we couldn't wait until the following morning when we woke up aboard ship. And what did we get? The boxes were in our jeep. We got three boxes of canned peas. But we lived through it. And we exchanged the peas for other stuff, as it was customary. Interesting was the very first day that we were aboard ship, about to land, and he was ahead of me. And I saw my first German prisoners. At that moment I could have killed every one of them. Until I was able to talk to them. And then that disappeared. And having been totally inexperienced in the, not just the art of questioning, but what kind of information we wanted to have, I got the most important strategic information, how to end the war within a matter of days. And, whereas, Fritz had known the regimental Commander, a Colonel O'Brien, for a long time and he had gained his confidence. The Colonel came to me and said, well what do you know? And I told him that. And, without changing the expression of his face, he turned away from me and said,

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Fritzi what do you know? Well, that didn't last long. I learned. But I never forget that one.

Q: And you two stayed together for much of the rest of the war? You two were in the same . . . ?

A: Same regiment. Yes, we were together.

Q: You're still in fairly close contact with him?

A: Every Saturday at ten minutes to ten, my time. Ten minutes to seven his time. There is a call. Either I get to him before he will or the other way around. But it's a very, very brief conversation. Particularly because he, his wife is quite sick and he takes care of her. And its of some significance too, she also worked for the War Crimes Commission. A very highly intelligent and very interesting woman. And when we went, Dottie and I, to Europe the first time in 1947, he joined us together with Greta, his wife, and we had to give our consent.

Q: What do you mean?

A: For them to get married.

Q: I see. Were there other people from the army who you stayed in touch with after the war?

A: Yes there had been. But only, no, let's see, two people, two men. One who became the supplier of printing supplies and we would meet at his printing shop which was close to where our office was in Manhattan, around 28th Street and 5th Avenue. And the other man, who started to work for me until he passed away.

Q: And was your mother still alive when you came back from the war?

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A: My mother lived to a very ripe old age. Unfortunately, in her later years, she became senile but she lived to be 96.

Q: When you came back and saw her again, she was still in New York at that time?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you talk to her about going back to your town, going back to Nuremberg and what you had seen and what you had done?

A: Yes. I did.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: Well I don't remember these details but I do remember that she was anxious to know whom I met and my grandmother was alive when I came back. As a matter of fact she had the joy of having her children in closer proximity to herself then for many, many years. But it became painful and difficult when my mother had to be taken to a home. And once when I had to play God when she required the possibility of an amputation and I had to give the okay.

Q: It seems like your whole family was able to remain close by and also very close for a long time?

A: The older generation is gone. Now I have three cousins on my mother's side, three boys. And I have one cousin on my father's side. And we remain in contact.

Q: Have you gone back to Germany?

A: Yes. Because of business, I have gone back maybe three or four times.

Q: Ever to your hometown?

A: Once I took the whole family, the boys, to Schnaittacher and to Forth.

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Q: Really. What was that like?

A: Well it was very pleasant, I mean, yes, I think it was pleasant. And my sons enjoyed it. And I have a picture someplace where the five of us are standing at a sign, Schnaittacher _____, you know? Not named after us but it's the street that goes to Schnaittacher.

Q: Do you remember what year it was that you went there?

A: I could easily . . .

End of Tape 2.

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Tape 3

Q: And I think I missed at the end, when was it that you went back, what year was that?

A: With the family?

Q: Yes.

A: I would say it, I went back with the family around 1966 or 1970.

Q: About 20 years?

A: 20 to 30 years ago.

Q: Yes, and 20 years after the war?

A: Right.

Q: Was it much changed?

A: Not in my village. Nuremberg had changed a good deal. Munich had changed. You know, these towns, Nuremberg had been devastated and it was fully rebuilt. Munich also had suffered enormous damage and that was fully rebuilt. And, of course, Germany had made enormous headway, economically. I might add that in doing business, having bought from Germans, I made it my business, whether I got truthful answers or not that's another question, but I emphasized the fact that I was Jewish and that I would not want to do business with Nazis. So, of course, they were not Nazis. You know, I do believe that Germany has made an earnest effort to remove the, not the guilt, but to remove anti-Semitism and to be sure they have the policy that any act of anti-Semitism is punishable.

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Q: That sounds like something you were very aware of as you started doing business dealings?

A: Yes.

Q: How important has Judaism been in your life since the war, with your family?

A: Well it, early on in my life I had been orthodox and the boarding house that I mentioned where I lived for a period of six years was orthodox, strictly orthodox. Afterwards, I had lost the belief that God could have sustained or permitted the Holocaust.

Q: And your wife?

A: Dottie was not religious.

Q: And your sons?

A: They are not religious. One of them married a girl from Israel. And he, formalistically he might be, somewhat.

Q: But you felt like your loss of faith was tied to the war?

A: Right.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to talk about before we end?

A: No. Up to you. If there is anything else that comes to your mind?

Q: I think I'm happy. If there's anything else that you would like to say we have plenty of time.

A: Okay.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Not at all, not at all.

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Conclusion of Interview.