

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War 1939-1945

Personal Experience

O.H 1021

STEVE KALNA

Interviewed

by

Jeffrey Suchanek

on

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S This is an interview with Steve Kalna for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II Prisoners of War, by Jeffrey Scott Suchanek, on May 11, 1981, at Mr. Kalna's home at 326 Forest Hill Drive, Austintown, Ohio, at 7:00 p.m.

When and where were you born?

D The 8 of November, 1924 in Hubbard, Ohio

S How many were in your family?

D I had one brother and I had four sisters. I was the only one in the service. I guess other kids had it a little rougher than I did. Things were not too bad. They were not good, either. I guess I was a little more fortunate than a lot of them because my dad was working during the Depression.

S What did your father do during the Depression?

K He worked in the steel mill at the Ohio Works until he retired. He died in 1957, so he has been dead 24 years.

S Can you tell me a bit about your education?

K Well, I never did graduate from high school. I went to parochial schools down at Saint Cyril's. I went to a public school. Then, when I was going into high school, I went to Wilson, Woodrow Wilson. I quit school in 1942. I did not go back in September of 1942. I was 17 at the time, so I got myself a job.

Then, we had to register for the draft when I turned 18. Well, I registered. I went up there to the draft board and I told them, "I am ready to register." And I told them, "Oh, I might as well." It was the questionnaires they gave us. I took them up, the Army occupational questionnaires, I took them up the draft board. I said, "Oh, I might as well go in now." Because, gosh, there were darn few of my friends who were left. Everybody was in. So, I went in November, 1942. Then, I got the questionnaire in January. Like I said, I went up to Fort Lawrence when I went in. Then I went into active duty the 15 of February, 1943.

S Do you remember what you were doing on December 7, 1941?

K Yes I do. I was up at a friend of mine's house. We were working on a model airplane. That is when we heard the Pearl Harbor news.

S Okay, then you enlisted into the service?

K Yes. Well, actually, you could say I enlisted. I volunteered for a draft. I went up to the draft board and I told them I might as well get in now and get it over with.

S How did your parents feel about that?

K Well, you know Nobody wanted to see anybody go. Both my parents, they came from Czechoslovakia, so this was their country now I figured this is my country, too I said, "Somebody has got to go " So, I went I still feel the same way today, I tell you, even more so

S Where did you go for training?

K I went down to Mississippi Well, it was a brand new camp down there Boy, it was a joint, and I mean it was a joint

S What was the name of it? Do you know?

K Camp McCane, Mississippi

S McCane?

K Yes It was right near Jackson, Mississippi -- Granada Right in that area there

S First of all, how did you get down there? Did they take you by train?

K Yes, yes, we went from Youngstown to Camp Perry Then from Camp Perry, we went down to Mississippi by train

S As you got into that camp for the first time, can you visualize that? What did you see? What did the camp look like?

K Well, it was just like laid out like a regular Army camp

S Was there a fence?

K Yes, by the main gate there was a fence But that place was so big you never hit the yard Whether the whole thing was fenced in or not, I do not know The front part of it there along the highway, that was all fenced in

S Now, when did you get assigned to your particular unit? What unit were you assigned to?

K When do you mean? Basic training?

S Yes

K I was with the Weapons Platoon, a company out of the 346th Infantry It was part of the 87th Division

S Did you stay with that outfit?

K Yes, through my basic training and advanced training. Then in September of 1943, they broke the outfit up. They took a bunch of us. They asked for guys for overseas, so a bunch of us, we went.

S Do you know why they broke up that particular division?

K What I think they did there was, after the training outfit, they trained so many guys and they would ship a bunch of them out. Then they would get another bunch in there. From what I understand, that division did go on to combat later on.

S But you volunteered to go overseas prematurely, then?

K Yes.

S Okay. Was training camp tough for you?

K In a way, yes. The discipline of carrying out orders, doing things when you had to do it, whether you wanted to or not. But I would say, physically, no. Heck, I was only 18 years old. So, physically, it did not bother me a bit.

S If something was to stand out in your mind about training camp, what would that be?

K Well, the marching. We could start out walking in dust up to our ankles and come back walking in mud up to our knees. That was the way it was down there in Mississippi. Every time it rained there would be a mud hole.

S What weapons did you train with?

K I was a gunner in the 60 millimeter mortar. I knew how to use the light 30 caliber machine gun. Those were the two weapons that we had.

S Before you went overseas, where was your port of embarkment?

K Camp Shanks, New York.

S In New York?

S Yes.

S How did you get across? By boat?

K Yes, we went by boat

S. What kind of a ship was that?

K It was an old English transport

S. A regular cruise-type ship?

K No I do not know, it might have been at one time, but it sure did not look like it when we were going over

S Could you describe it?

K Oh, it was a tub Let us just put it that way

S Can you describe the interior of it? What did it look like?

K The only thing that I can remember was, down in the hole when we were down below, they had just bunk beds One right on top of the other That is all I can remember

S Were there any restrictions about being on deck?

K No I guess the only restriction would have been no smoking on deck at all

S Now, did you go over in a convoy?

K Yes, yes

S. Do you remember how long it took?

K It was at least a week. Me, I did not stay down below unless I really had to

S Why is that?

K Because that was when you really got sick I found that out Soon as they would go down below the deck, boy, I am telling you, they got sick When I went out on deck, nothing bothered me

S. Now, was the convoy on any type of alert for submarines or anything like that?

K Not that I know of

S Okay, where did the transport land?

K It was on the west coast of England Liverpool, I think it was I think that is on the west coast of England Yes

S That was in what year?

K 1943

S. Do you know the month?

K. October, I think it was.

S October of 1943?

K Yes

S What did you do while you were in England?

K Well, we did not do too much, because we were there just a few days To tell you the truth, I did not see anything You could not see anything because it was too doggone foggy. I am telling you, the fog was so doggone thick that you could hardly see in front of your face -- a foot in front of your face and then that was it Oh, like I said, we were only there a few days From there, we went over to Ireland

S Where did you land in Ireland?

K In Belfast.

S What was your duty there?

K I joined the 5th Division over there

S. What was the division's function?

K Well, it was an infantry outfit division

S Was it like garrison duty?

K. No, we were training for the invasion

S So, you almost had nine months to train for the invasion? Is that right?

K Yes See, the only thing is, when we got over there, I was put into a completely different outfit When I went over there, I was in the 9th Platoon Anti-Tank Companies Our job was laying down mine fields, picking up mine fields and

booby traps

S. Was that dangerous work?

K. Well, yes, I would say. You made one mistake and that was all you ever made. If you made the mistake, they never found enough of you to bury you.

S. Now, was that your function when you finally went to France?

K. Yes. See, we went over as a division.

S. Describe the Irish people you came in contact with. What was their reaction to American GI's?

K. Well, I do not know. The ones I got in contact with were real nice people. I had no problem with any of them.

S. Did they seem happy that you were there?

K. Yes. I guess the ones that really did not like the GI's over there were the English servicemen, because we had more money to spend than them guys.

S. Did you go into town often while you were in Belfast?

K. Well, we were not stationed right in Belfast itself. That was where we landed. We were in a little town by the name of Kilkeeb. It was not too far from Belfast. It was right around in that area where they are having trouble now, Londonderry. Our company was kind of in two different parts. The platoon was in what used to be an old movie theater. It was converted into barracks for us. The rest of our company was down just a little below us where the docks were, where the boats used to go out for fishing. I guess it must have been an old warehouse or something down there. The rest of the outfit was down there. This movie theater was inside the town.

S. Could you describe the town itself? Were there tall buildings?

K. No, it was a real small town. Well, you might as well say it was like a village. There were not too many people there.

S. What were the homes and buildings made out of?

K. Well, they were just like stucco buildings you see today. Like they have over there right now. They were the same thing.

S. What kind of roof did they have?

K To tell you the truth, I really do not know I never paid any attention

S Was it a slate roof, a thatched roof?

K I do not know It could have been a slate rood But, as I say, I never paid any attention to the kind of material they have on their roof

S. Could you describe the type of training you experienced for the invasion?

K. Well, I had to learn everything all over again My job was handling demolitions We had to know the different types of German mines, British mines They had our mines And I had to know the different methods of booby trapping

S Can you describe some of that for us? What were the different kind of mines? Were German mines trickier? Describe that to us

K. Yes, they were a little more sensitive than ours They had to bury theirs a little further apart because if they buried them too close and one went off, the concussion would set another one off As a result, they had to bury theirs just a little further apart And they had the tank mines and the anti-personnel mines

S Now, what was the difference between the two?

K Well, naturally, any tank mine had more powder in it Anti-personnel mines, well the one that comes to mind is the 'S' mine. It was buried

S An 'S' mine?

K Yes, an anti-personnel mine is what it was The top of it had three prongs It had just enough of it stickin g out of the ground so when a guy stepped on it, it set a charge off See, there were two parts to it

S. Okay, describe that

K. We set this charge off and, naturally, he would be walking by That charge would propel the mine out of the ground and go up, I guess, about eight or ten feet and it would blow up They had a bunch of little steel balls in them The closer you were to it the better off you were, because when it went up in the air, it would blow apart and come down like it was an umbrella. So, the closer you were to the mine, the safer you were

S. Now, was this a flat type of mine?

K No, it was roughly about the size of a salt box A Morton salt box, just about that size

- S. These would fly up in the air?
- K Yes, they would fly up in the air when a guy would step on it. It would set a charge off and when he took his foot off of it, it would go up in the air. We heard a story about an event over in Africa. There were a bunch of high ranking officers and this other soldier who went with them. He happened to step on a mine and he heard it. When he stepped on it, he felt the charge being set off in the ground. He just stood on it and he did not move. So, as a result, it just mangled his leg all up. But, it saved the high-ranking officers or anybody else getting hurt.
- S Was there any difference between American mines, British mines, and the German mines? Could you describe the differences between the various mines? I know you said the German one was more sensitive.
- K Yes, they were. See, the American mine, right in the center, I think they had five pounds of charge in them. Then in the center was a fuse that was put into it. Then there was a ring that looked like a spider. You know, like the spokes of a wheel. You would just put that on and turn it so it would lock in place. The center of it would sit right on a fuse. Naturally, if you stepped on the end of it, I mean a heavy vehicle would have to go over it. A man, I doubt, would be able to set it off.
- S How about the British mines?
- K They were basically the same way. We experimented on one at a time. We had a steel plate that must have been an inch thick and three to four feet in diameter. We took the plate off and right where it lay down, we made this circle on the edge. When we picked up the fault, we put a British mine there. We propped it up with a 2x4 and got back on it. I do not know how many feet. There was a little gully. We tore the board out, and then somebody would put the mine down. I mean, it blew one piece, a jagged piece, about a foot wide and about that long. About 40 or 50 yards away from us, they buried it in the ground and we used the winch on the front of our truck. We had one heck of a time pulling that out of the ground. Then it sent another piece over about 100 yards up the side of the hill. So, those mines are pretty powerful.
- S They were powerful enough to knock out a tank?
- K Oh, yes. They knock the treads right off of the tank easy. No trouble at all.
- S While you were in training, did you experiment with German mines?
- K We had pictures of them there and we had the mines there.

- S How do you suppose they were able to get German mines?
- K They picked them up in Africa
- S I see
- K See, in our outfit, that was our job. The men in front of us, well, they would hit into a mine field, then they would call us guys. We would have to go up there and we would have to clear a path for them.
- S How would you go about clearing a mine field?
- K. We had three different groups. The first group would be with the mine detectors. Well, everybody would not be working. We would naturally have to have guards in case the enemy was around there. They would go in with the mine detectors and they would locate the mines. You would hear when they hit the mine. Then there would be another guy in back of him. They work in groups of three. He would mark it.
- S. With what?
- K. With a stick or, you know, a piece of cloth or something. You would mark it where the mine was and they would go forward. The guy coming in back was the one that had to run out there and check it to see if there were any booby traps attached. That was the favorite trick of the Germans, to have a booby trap underneath the mine. When you would pick that mine up, there was another charge underneath that would go off.
- S So how did you know that there was another?
- K Well, that is what they taught us over in Ireland. We had a mirror. We always carried a mirror with us. Then we would dig around the mine, oh, maybe an inch and a half or two inch circle around the mine and clear all the dirt out as much as you can. Then we would get a mirror and look all around and see if we could see anything, any wires or anything laying underneath it.
- S. How often did Germans booby trap these things? Was it worth the trouble?
- K Sometimes it was. After we got into France, we got a rope and went back so far and pulled the mine out. That way it saved a lot of hard work and stuff like that.
- S It would not go off when you jerked it out, would it?
- K No, not unless there were booby traps. See, they just had to use the release type of booby trap. When you picked the mine up, that was when it would set.

the charge off

S Now, if something like that happened and it was booby trapped, and you lifted a mine up and did not know it was booby trapped, would the other charge set off the one you had in your hand? Or would it depend?

K That would depend

S Of course, it did not matter to you

K No You would never know it You would never know it That was why I said our job was dangerous Like I say, you only make one mistake and that is all we ever made

S Did you lose anybody, any of your friends?

D No Doing that type of work, no, believe it or not Well, you know, I did not last the whole war, only in Germany But I found out we never lost any men handling demolitions Never We had a lot of men hit by artillery fire, stuff like that, but never handling demolitions

S: It seems to me that you were sort of in a vulnerable position if you were trying to diffuse these mines and there happened to be sniper or something around

K Yes See, that is why we had guys standing guard while we were doing that, to keep an eye out Doing that type of work, the only thing we had was our rifles We tried to get our hands on a bazooka We tried to get our hands on a 30 caliber machine gun, but somehow we could not get them

S Would it be easier to toss a grenade in a mine field to clear it out, or did you have to go individually and remove these things?

K It all depended on, I guess, what the circumstances were If you did not want the enemy to know you were around, then you would have to pick them up If it did not make any difference, then we could use grenades

S Okay, now, you did not have to diffuse these mines, did you?

K Oh, yes

S How did you do that? What was the process for it?

K Well, no, no, we did not diffuse them

S What did you do with them once you got them out of the ground?

K I remember, we got a bunch of them one time. Oh, it must have been a half of a dozen of them, I guess, we picked up. We put them all in one pile and set a charge and blew the hell out of them. I used to have a half pound watt of nitrostarch

S Nitrostarch?

K Yes. That was not as dangerous as dynamite. See, you could shoot it with a bullet and it would not go off because we tried it already. They were just pound blocks. We would put a fuse in it and light it and it would take off. We had a half a dozen of them one time, we blew them up. Boy, I am telling you, what a hole it made. In fact, that was the time when our platoon leader, we were supposed to clear a section of road, you know, mines. After we got through with our jobs, we went back to where the rest of the platoon was and we got word an ambulance blew up on the road. The Lieutenant told us, he says, "God help you guys if every ambulance blows up on the road where you were supposed to clear." He would have railroaded us. But, fortunately, it was not us. It was a different district from where we were, so it made us happy.

S Did you ever run across any type of mine while you were there that was unusual?

K Well, that was actually the only time. This was in Normandy right after we got in France. But, we did bank up the mines.

S That was the only time?

K Yes, that really was the only time we got involved with them, because we moved so doggone fast, the Germans did not have time for planning.

S Can you remember what you were doing when you got the order to pack up, it is time to go to D-day here?

K Well, I will tell you, I was fortunate that we did not hit the beach on D-day.

S When did you come in?

K I think it was D plus 34, if I am not mistaken.

S 34?

K Yes, that was in about the middle of July.

S Where did you land?

K Normandy, Omaha beach

S Omaha beach?

K Yes, I believe it was Omaha

S What did the beach look like to you?

K I do not know if you have seen the two movies they have had In fact, the one I just saw about the Big Red One, the first division, just like when they showed in the movie the way the beaches were That is just the way they were You could see those iron post heads sticking out of the ground and everything like that in the water If the boats came in, you would hit into them That is just the way the beach was

S Could you see any concrete emplacements?

K Yes, they had concrete pillars there Fortification, I just cannot place it We moved off the beach, there was no enemy around there at the time. We moved off the beach pretty fast

S Did you go right to the front lines then?

K No I guess it must have been a day or two later, we got the whole outfit together and then we moved In fact, that was the first invasion When we moved up, we relieved them of the positions they had.

S Okay, the first time you realized you were going to be in combat, can you describe your feelings to us?

K Well, I will tell you, I was scared

S What were your thoughts?

K To tell you the truth, I could not tell you what I thought in that second The funny thing is, I thought about getting hit or killed, but it never entered my mind to get caught

S When the shooting starts, does it seem real at first?

K No, not until it starts getting close

S Can you remember your first encounter?

K Yes, I do We had moved up We were just a day before we were to relieve the

first division We came to a big crossroad. At one corner was a tank destroyer outfit They were in there At another corner was a quarter mast outfit Another corner had a pitching outfit We were on the other corner There were guys sitting on our trucks It was about, I guess, maybe about 40 or 50 yards from the corner Shells were coming over. We could tell, even green horns could tell I think things were going way in the back somewhere There were German shots coming in. But they said to take caution We could tell they were getting close That was when we got scared I know I did. Everybody, we jumped off our trucks and were aiming it on the gully Well, the greatest majority of us guys in the outfit were actually draftees, as we were called That was what we were called by the rest of the guys Well, we were just kids of 19 or 20 years old. See, the outfit I joined was the regular army outfit, it was the Fifth Division I never ran into a meaner bunch of guys in my life

S How do you mean?

K Oh, they were tough See, they were the division that went overseas before we even got into the war They were up in Iceland They went up there in September of 1941 and they were stuck away for two years up there. These were all regular armies, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia

S Would you say they knew their business?

K Oh, you better believe it I will tell you how tough, how mean the guys were The first major battle we got into, we tore apart about the best troops the German army had and we mullied the hell out of them That was the paratroopers So that was the kind of guys they were

S Did you ever experience any fire fights?

K Yes, one that was just down below Paris The guys, the engineers, were up there They were supposedly taking equipment across the river Oh, I believe it must have been a good hundred yards wide There were railroad tracks right along the river and the box cars were there They needed a little more fight power, so us guys in our outfit, we went up there I was laying under the box car aiming at anything I had seen that looked suspicious across the river I had just started shooting when this doggone TD [tank destroyer] came in back of me He got his muzzle of the gun sitting over top of the fence I was laying in there and I did not know he was in back of me I was laying there going to squeeze out a shot, when that son of a gun let go with that cannon Boy, I am telling you, it scared the living day lights out of me I was so doggone tired I laid my head down for a minute and that was when I dozed right off I just dozed off for a few minutes A guy woke me up and said to look up on the box car. So, I looked up on the box car and there were a whole line of holes up there

S A whole line of what?

K Holes, bullet holes I guess it must have been from a German machine gun The guy just fired and his fire was down the line of box cars But actually, that is the only time I ever fired my rifle That was the only fire fight We were not actually equipped to get into a regular fire fight with anybody I would say the biggest thing we had with us was an M-1 rifle.

S Okay, describe for us the day that you were captured, from the time you can remember, say in the morning, until that evening Describe that day for us

K Well, we had in our platoon three squads There were approximately 12 men to a squad and each squad had a truck We had a ton and a half truck, then we had the small trailer They carried 249 tank mines on there We had a couple cases of nitrostarch, our safety fuse and blasting caps And we had in there what we call pryma cording You could stretch a piece of that out 100 yards It would go off on one end at the same time as it would go off on us, it traveled just that fast You could put a couple strands around you and it would cut you right in two.

But in our platoon they took half of the guys, 15 of them, and they were supposed to go up to the front line. They were supposed to try and lay a mine field down, but they got pinned down there all day They got the truck knocked out, so they waited until dark The other trucks went up there and pulled it back The rest of us guys, the other 15 of us, we went up there to lay the mine field down Well, we got up there In fact, we had to cross an open field that must have been 50 or 60 yards, just right out in the wide open We saw a tank was on fire, one of ours was burning We were walking right along side the truck, you know, the Germans were just a couple hundred miles away Well, we figured if the shells hit the truck, that would be it, we would never know it But, we got into town and the company we went up there to help, it turned out to be lead by the same guy that was the executive officer that was a friend of mine

S Who was that?

K Lieutenant Andy Polish We used to call him Turk The way I know that is because I bumped into him in France before that The First Sergeant was there and the First Sergeant happened to be from Youngstown, too But I cannot remember what the heck his name was. He told us, one of his men said, "You show these guys the way you want these mines laid down " They guy told the sergeant, "You go to hell I am not going down there It is suicide " Why, he would not show us So, the sergeant told us where to go and we went down to a street in town there where it formed like a 'T' He told us to lay our mines on each side of that road to keep German tanks from coming from there either end Well, we went down there. We had our rifles thrown across our shoulders and two mines in each hand, fully armed All a bullet had to do was hit one of them

and that would have been it

Well, we got down to the corner there and the men from that company were dug in right there on the corner. Well, they did not bother us when we were going down. But, when we started coming back they stopped us. It is a good thing they knew we were supposed to have been there, otherwise they would have shot us up. But, we got up by the first building and that was as far as we got. All hell broke loose, because the Germans pulled a counter attack. That was something, I understand, they very seldom did. Like I said, they pulled a sneaky Pete on us. They pulled a counter attack and that was as far as we got. And to top it all off, our truck was facing right toward the front. If we could have had our truck turned around the other way, why, I think we could have gotten away. But, we could not get to it. Well, when we got up into town by the first building there, everything broke loose. So, myself and the guys, we just dove in a building there. We tried to get out but we could not. There was a tank with too many guys in back. They were firing on us and every time that tank let go, it just seemed like the house was caving in, you know. It was puffing in and out.

S The German tank?

K Yes. Then in front of us, about 35 or 40 yards -- and this was 1:00 in the morning -- there was a big barn set on fire. I mean, it was so bright out, it was just like day light, you could practically read a newspaper.

Well, there were five of us in this building in this room. A friend of mine was on one side of the window and I was on the other side and the other three guys were in the back of the room. The Germans were coming up. This friend of mine stepped back away from the window so they would not see him and he stepped on a piece of glass and they heard it. Then, just that fast, they had a floor burp gun like our tommy gun. They had four burp guns stuck in the window. They said, "Come right out." My friend and I, we could have gotten a couple of them, but these other three guys had no way of firing to protect themselves, so we had to give up.

S Describe your feelings, if you can remember, when you realized you had been captured.

K Well, I was scared to death because I really did not know what the heck was going to happen. It was a panzer division that caught us. Then on top of it, when they took us back, I do not know how many yards it was, but they stopped us by a big hole where there was a stoller forward machine gun placement. I saw one of our boys was laying over dead in it. They stood us right by that hole. I thought, "Uh oh, here it comes." I told my buddy, "I am ready if they start firing, I am going to start running." I said, "If they are going to get me, they are going to get me running. They are not going to get me standing still." Fortunately, they just took us back.

- S What was the first thing they did when they told you to come out of the building?
They obviously took your gun
- K Yes, well, we just laid them down there They searched us to, you know, see if we had any more weapons on us They moved us on back
- S How many GI's did they capture? Were there just a few?
- K Well, I will tell you, I did not know it at the time, but I found out after we started coming back to the states
- S Okay, we are talking about the rifle company that was wiped out
- K They got the sergeant, they got the company commander, and they got the executive officer, all three of them, plus the rest of the men Like I said, the only thing, from what I was told, the only ones they had left were the kitchen and supply When we were getting on the boats to come back to the states from Le Harve, I was standing in the chow line and I had seen the guys coming back on points for discharge but they all were done and might have left But, I told the kid standing by me, "If I stay here long enough, I am going to see somebody I know " About two minutes later, they came down, one was a captain's driver and the other, he was up there with us, one of the guys of the platoon He had his five men and they were closer to our lines They happened to get away That is when they told me the F company got wiped out that night
- S Okay, where did they march you?
- K. I do not remember that well It was just actually a farm house where they had marched us We just stayed there over night Then in the morning, they loaded us up on trucks and took us back. Actually, where they took us from there was inside the city limits
- S Were you interrogated?
- K Yes, they interrogated us before they moved us back
- S What was that like? Was that individual interrogation?
- K Yes, individuals
- S What did they ask you?
- K Oh, what your outfit was They knew that I was either out of an anti-tank company or out of F company They knew the outfit I was with Well, they knew this because our truck was sitting right there with the lettering on it I guess they

knew how to read the lettering on a truck to find what outfit it was. They told me, "You are either from F company or you are from anti-tank company." They were no dummies.

S: Was it an officer?

K: Yes, it was a lieutenant. And I will tell you, I was scared. I do not know whether it was from the morning -- because it was chilly -- or what, but boy I was shaking like heck. And he had a bottle of old Cognac brandy, so I took a little swig of it. But he was not bad.

S: There was no rough stuff?

K: No, no, no. No, the ones they did that to, after we got out of the prison camp we heard that the ones they were really rough on were political prisoners. Mostly the Jewish people.

S: Okay, after you spent this night at the farm house, then what happened to you?

K: Well, they took us back to, I guess it was right inside the city limits itself. We were there for about a day or so, then they rode us on boxcars and shipped us back deeper into Germany.

S: How long were those trips on box cars? Describe the inside of those box cars.

K: Well, box cars over there, they were not too awful big. They were like cattle cars, is what they were. They just herded us, about 50 of us, in a car.

S: Was that comfortable?

K: No, no it was not comfortable.

S: Was that too many people in a box car?

K: Yes. Really, if a guy wanted to lay down or something, he could not lay down very good. You had to practically sit and sleep that way. But, we were in the cars a couple of days.

S: Were you fed?

K: If you want to say that, yes.

S: What did they give you to eat?

K: Not a hell of a lot. A little bit of bread and that was about it. But, I do not think

those people had anything themselves.

S They took you to Limburg then?

K Yes, Limburg, Germany There was a big camp there We were there, oh, I guess about a week And that was one of those things that, you meet people in the strangest places. Well, by God, I did Yes, about a week I was there, and who did I bump into? My sister-in-law's brother He was with the First Division He was taken prisoner from Aachen, I think They had been north of us He was just taken prisoner up there

S As you went into Limburg, could you describe that for us? What did you see? What was it like? Describe the camp

K Well, the camp was just like one of our army camps It was divided up, but a little bit differently They had barbed-wire fences It had so many barracks and then it was fenced in with barbed wire. That was the way the camps were But the rest of the area there was, from what I could see, there was practically nothing left of it, because they were just leveled from bombings and stuff like that There was just nothing there

S Were there guard towers?

K Yes, they had guard towers there

S. Were the guards regular Wehrmacht, or were they SS?

K. Naturally they had a few SS But the greatest majority of them were regular German Wehrmacht But, I think where they had the most SS men were in the political prisoner camps like Dachau and Belsen and places like that

S Describe one of the barracks in Limburg Say you are standing right in the doorway and you are looking in What would you see?

K Well, it was just like a bunch of bunks That was all that was there

S Was there a stove?

K Yes, they had stoves in there Well, I do not know because it was still warm weather out when I got caught Well, I guess this camp was just like a gathering point where they brought the prisoners there They would stay there for so long, then they would ship them out to different camps

S How many men would one of these barracks house?

K I have not the slightest idea.

S. Was it a large building?

K. Yes, well, it was not too awful big

S What would you say the dimensions were?

K Oh, about 30 by 60, somewhere in there.

S One story?

K. Yes, yes They were all one story.

S Were there any restrictions the German told you about what you were able to do? Were you able to move freely from to barrack to barrack?

K Yes Within the compound, that was what they called a compound area We could walk around there and talk

S Was there a curfew? Lights out or anything?

K Yes, I guess right after it got dark, that was it

S What did they give you for a bed? Do you remember? What did they use for a mattress?

K Straw Straw stuck in the mattress cover we used to have on the other side of the mattresses

S How about food there at Limburg You said you were there about a week?

K. Yes

S Did they feed you any better?

K Well, they had Red Cross boxes What they did was, they used them to prepare the food for us guys But, the food was not too awful bad

S How often did you get a Red Cross package?

K Well, we did not get them The Germans kept them But they used the food out of that to cook our meals and fixed the food for us We were actually supposed to get one once a week But, the reason why they did not give them to us was because they figured the guy that got stuck ordering this instead of ordering that,

like the chocolate bars, which we never got. The reason why we wanted chocolate bars or food bars is they were what we called in the army concentrated. A guy could live on them. If he had a couple of them, he could take off and he could be gone for a week. That was the only reason why they did not give us Red Cross boxes, because we were fairly close to the German-French border.

S. Do you know if anybody tried to escape from Limburg?

K. Yes, there were a couple of them, a couple guys. I do not know if they ever made it or not.

S. Did you know that they were going?

K. Oh, yes.

S. How did that work? Was there a system?

K. Oh, yes. See, the guys, well it worked along the camp we were in, because there was one in the main camp.

S. Let us go to that, then. Where did you go after Limburg?

K. We went to Tall Bay.

S. Moosburg?

K. You know, I still cannot get those two straightened out, which camp was which. I think Limburg, Germany was Camp 12A.

S: Okay, go ahead. You went to Moosburg.

K. Yes, we went to Moosburg. Well, they used to pick a bunch of us to go to Munich, which was about 30 miles or so south of the camp. They would take us there to work. Guys would find maps and stuff like that and they would bring them back with us.

S. But there were escape attempts?

K. Oh yes, yes.

S. From Moosburg?

K. Oh, yes.

S I forgot to ask you What was your rank at this time?

K Private First Class.

S So would you say Moosburg was an enlisted man's camp or were there officers there?

K There were officers there later on, yes. The compound I was in, they were naturally all enlisted men in there But in the other compound there they had all the American officers Guys that were non-combat were in charge of our barracks The barracks I was in, they were South Africans, you know, from the English army

S Did you have contact with these people?

K With the South Africans?

S Yes

K Oh, yes They were in charge of the barracks there They lived right in the barracks with us There were three of them They were able to get around and get information throughout the camp easily In fact, sometimes the guy used to go with the officers, where the officers used to stay and did some work over there and one of the guys traded places with them [officers] So, he came over in our barracks and the next day when he went into work he had his maps and information and stuff like that, so he took off

S What were some of the various ways you could try to escape?

K Well, the best advantage we had was when they took us into town We just walked off

S And you knew of the guys who did this?

K Oh, yes Me

S You tried?

K I tried

S Go into that

K Well, there were two of us and we just took off We were just walking around We had a German guard there, naturally He did not keep too good an eye on us because he figured, where in the heck could we go But we took off

S Who made the decision to go?

K We both did

S How did you arrive at that?

K What the heck could they do to us? We just decided we would go, so we took off. The only reason we got caught is because we could not speak German.

S Where did you go?

K Well, we were down in the southeastern part of Germany. We were very close to the Swiss border. We were down in Munich, so we started heading to what we thought was east and went to the border. But we never made it.

S How were you caught?

K Well, there were a lot of displaced persons and they walked around there. They were dressed the same thing like we were. We had coats they had given us from, I guess, they belonged to the French army. The German officers stopped us. They started talking to us. We could not speak German good enough to them. They got us and took us back.

S Were you given any type of punishment?

K Yes, we were put in the sandabarracke.

S A what?

K Sandabarracke. Like the guard house.

S I see.

K That is the interpretation I got from it for a week.

S A week?

K Yes, for breaking out. That is all.

S Was it a type of isolation?

K Yes, it was isolation.

S Would that be similar to what they refer to as the cooler?

K No, we were able to look out a window. See, we were not put down underneath the ground there. We were just in a barrack. You know, brick barracks on top of the ground.

S Were you read the riot act or anything before you were put in?

K No, not really. Actually, they were not really too tough on us because they had real good army personnel in there. The tenth commander was not too bad of a "Joe" because we were told that he expected some of us to escape. I guess he must have been a regular man and he knew what to expect from us.

S Did any of your comrades feel it was your duty to try to escape? Did you have that feeling at all?

K Oh, yes. Some of them wanted to get out of there. They wanted to get back.

S Do you know of anyone who was killed trying to escape?

K No, no I never heard of anybody getting shot, never. Well, I would say there was actually a foolish one that tried to escape through a camp itself, because all they had to do was, if he was an officer, they would make arrangements from one of the guys in the enlistment to switch places with him in his barracks. Then, when they would go out to work he had a better chance of getting away.

S Was there a type of roll call in the morning?

K Yes, their officer or sergeant would come around and check the barracks.

S A German?

K Yes.

S Sort of a head count?

K Yes, they would keep check.

S What was your relationship with him? I mean the men in general.

K Well, we just had roll call once a day, that was all.

S Was there any type of fraternizing with the German guards, trading cigarettes for more food or something like that?

K No, not with the guards. I guess some of us did. But we got to know one guy who was pretty naive. He turned out to be a pretty nice guy. He was a real short

guy I guess he must have only been about five feet tall. His last name was Shafer We found out that his wife and kid had been killed in an air raid up in Berlin He had nothing against us

S Were these guards older men?

K Yes, the base majority of them were older men

S So they were put there because they could not take the strenuous day to day combat?

K Yes Then we did have some that were awfully young I remember men -- in fact this was right towards the end of the war -- that were very young I guess they could not have been any more than 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 years old They were troopers and they caught them very young

S How do you mean?

K Because they were all together different They all thought of it as just jobs They told us when the officer comes around he said you work, when the officer goes away you do not work In fact, one of them told us, "The harder you work, the longer this war is going to last "

S This was the German?

K. It was the German guard

S A young German?

K Yes, some of them were young

S Did you have an opportunity to talk to them at any length about the feelings toward you or the feelings about the war?

K No, I did not because the greatest majority of them could not speak English I got from the way they acted toward us that they did not hate us at all Although, I think the one guy was mad at me one time

S Go into that

K He was trying to explain something to me and all I had to do was say, "Ich verstehe nicht," and I would have got clobbered right across the head Boy, he was mad You could see the fire coming out of his eyes

S What did you do that made him so mad?

- K I told him I did not understand I told him, "Ich verstehe nicht " He tried to speak to me in German. I did not understand him
- S Did you ever understand what he was trying to tell you?
- K A little bit, but I just did not feel like doing it. That is the way we got away from them
- S Did you notice that the treatment changed toward you as the allied armies came closer?
- K Yes
- S How so?
- K Like I said, right toward the end there, when we had guards they were ski troopers They were young fellows They treated us like anybody else. They were not "green" or anything like that
- S What kind of work details did you go out on? Were these mandatory, that you participated on these work details?
- K I do not know I guess the reason the greatest majority of the guys went out is it would break up a day It would give them something to do We used to go to Munich and we would clear up where bombed out places or buildings were We would clean up the rubble and stuff like that But one time they did have a bunch working on the rail road yards I guess this must have been a pretty big marshaling area in just about ten or fifteen miles north of the camp Landshut, I think it was It was where the Air Force settled
- S What was the name of it?
- K Landshut.
- S Landshut?
- K. Yes. As a matter of fact, I went up there to work one day with them, too And I was amazed at all the houses hit along the railroad tracks They bombed the hell out of that place There was a funny thing, too, the day they got the lines built Guys came right over I was not there, but the group that was up there, they came back and they told us the Air Force came over again. They caught them with their pants down, working on the railroad They just took off like a bunch of scared rabbits. Guys tried to keep them in order and they were not going to keep them Like one of the guys told me, he said he looked around and he saw the bombs coming down Man, that made him run all the faster And

they knocked the line out again

S Did you ever see, while you were in camp, flights of bombers going overhead?

K No, but I did see them before I got caught, when we hit the Mosel River, I guess this was a week or so before we got caught. Well, when we first got up to the river we had done our job to clear the main road to town of mines. Then we took the fork to the left to the next town, which was just a few miles away. When we got down to that town, we found a German flag flying on a flag pole. One of the kids who could speak a little French, he asked the Frenchman there, he said, "When were the last American through here?" The guy looked at him and said, "1917." So we got out of there in a hurry. But when we went back, this was in the afternoon, I was laying down there looking up in the air and I saw the bombers starting to come over. We laid there and we counted 500. One guy said, "Boy, I would hate like hell to be where them guys are going. Somebody is going to catch hell." That was the only time I saw any bombers.

S How about food while you were at Moosburg?

K I will tell you, the German people, they did not have anything themselves. But, they did make an attempt at Christmas time to kind of give us a half-way decent meal, which was a heck of a thing for them because they made mashed potatoes for us and they had a little bit of meat.

S What would be a daily ration?

K Well, we would have meat soup, potatoes, or whatever we could scrounge when we went out to work.

S You were allowed to forge a little bit on your way to town?

K Yes. That was what happened when they bombed the railroad yards. They hit the box cars and the flour. So, I had a long overcoat on and a lot of it stuffed in my coat. I took it back to camp. I got some tooth powder and I made myself some pancakes. We fixed ourselves up a little furnace like a stove.

S Out of what?

K Old metal. It would operate the same principle, like a furnace. You had your pot here and put your fire in. You would have like your blower would be on your furnace. You would have to hand crank that and that was where you would get all of your heating from.

S Was there a lot of yankee ingenuity like that?

- K. Oh, you better believe it I will tell you, you would be surprised what the guys could do when they really had to
- S How about medical care if someone got sick?
- K They had doctors there, yes
- S German doctors?
- K No, the one I bumped into was a Greek doctor I had to go see him myself The whole one side of my head around my ear was swelled up from an infection Then, I could not communicate with the doctor because he was Greek and could not speak English and I could not speak Greek. But he did what he could for me, and it helped
- S Do you get the impression that he had any medicines to work with?
- K Very little, very little in that area
- S The day you were liberated, then Before we get to that, how often did you get mail? Did you get mail at all?
- K Yes, I was fortunate I got a couple of letters I do not know if I still have them or not One letter was from Helen Well, she was not my wife at the time I got one from Helen
- S When you got home, what was the reaction? Did you find out what their reaction was when they found out you were a P O. W?
- K Well, I found out that the kids I grew up with, when they found out I was missing, they figured I was dead Well, you know I used to do crazy things and take chances About three months later they found out I was a prisoner In fact I saw, when I got home, the telegram that my mother had gotten notifying her that I was missing in action And another letter from the Red Cross saying that I was taken prisoner
- S Were you able to write?
- K Yes
- S What did you write about? Did you try to keep it optimistic?
- K Yes Well, naturally, we could not write anything because they read the mail before it went out

S Oh, they did?

K Oh, yes They censored it, all mail coming in and going out

S Did your parents ever tell you they got letters with stuff cut out of it or anything? That it was censored? Or were you just careful about what you wrote about?

K Yes

S Did they instruct you on what to leave out, what not to write about?

K Well, we knew you could not write anything about the military and stuff We could not even tell them where in the heck we were.

S You did not know exactly where you were?

K Yes, we knew where we were, but we just could not tell them To tell you the truth, I do not even know what the heck I wrote about

S I wanted to ask you, I know some of these camps were bombed by mistake Were you aware of any kind of markings on the roof tops that would signify to the allied pilots who these prisoners of war were?

K Yes, there were supposed to be markings on the roof tops

S Did you ever come close to being striped or anything?

K: No, no we did not get striped, but we had the Air Force's planes, fighter planes, they flew over the camp As a matter of fact, well, it was the day we were getting liberated That guy must have been out of his mind He came flying over the camp upside down I mean, he was so close we could see him

S What kind of a plane was it? Do you know?

K B-51 He must have been crazy. Well, he looked down and guys waved to him and he waved back When he got to the other side of the camp, he turned over and he must have spotted something over there because we could hear machine guns fire

S What did the guys talk about? What did you do for recreation while you were a prisoner? How long were you a prisoner?

K I was in there for seven months

S Seven months?

- K Yes
- S What did you talk about? What did the guys talk about?
- K Oh, things they were going to do when they got home
- S Did you have any information on how the war was progressing?
- K No, well, a little bit. But you know, to tell you the truth, when Roosevelt died, we never knew who the president was. We got word when we were coming back from Munich working. We could tell that something just happened because there had been prisoners in from different camps. A group that they were bringing in at the time, they came from Poland, they were Canadian. We had to ask them. I said, "We heard that Roosevelt died. Who is the next president?" Who was the new president? They were a sorry looking bunch. They marched all night. They marched about 500 miles.
- S They were Canadians?
- K Canadians. But when we got liberated, we had, I guess, in the neighborhood of 75,000 guys. See, we were practically the last camp to get liberated. We were down there around the right, near the Czechoslovakian border. Right in that corner there, that was where they brought all the other camps, just brought them all down to there. We had Canadians, Americans, they had Russians in there, Greeks. Right near the end there they had all the Americans there. They had us in one great big mammoth tent. Oh, and that tent must have been 40 foot wide and 100 foot long. They had us all in there.
- S Describe the day you were liberated.
- K Well, in the camp there they had trenches. They had dug outs throughout the camp in case we happened to get bombed by mistake. Well, in fact, if there were planes flying around, we sat in the trenches. Well, myself and the guys in the infantry were just sitting there normal.
- S There were bullets flying around there?
- K Yes. Definitely, the Americans were coming through there. We were starting to get liberated. The Americans were coming through there.
- S The Germans fought?
- K Oh, yes. Well, not much. They put up a little resistance and it was risky. One poor kid from the air force, boy, I am telling you, he was shaking like a leaf in a wind storm. He said, "Is this real?" And I said, "Heck, this is not anything." I

said, "I have seen worse " You know, you ought to live through it 24 hours a day. The Germans, you know, they did not put too much of a resistance because it was over within no time at all

S But they did put up a resistance at the camp there?

K Outside the camp Outside the camp, there was no fighting inside the camp itself

S But there were stray bullets flying around?

K. Oh, yes And those guys, we figured, well, we have come this far There is no use taking a chance We just went and got in some trenches and sat there until it was all over.

S When they opened up the gates, what were your feelings?

K They would not let us out

S. They would not let you out?

K No The officers took over The American officers took over and they would not let us out of the camp

S Why?

K They figured we were going to rampage through town and tear it apart The Red Cross truck came through there, a Swiss Red Cross truck, came through the gate and I guess there was not more than six inches between the gate and the bed of that truck And I squeezed through there while that truck was moving. I got out. I snuck out. Then, I went down into town there. There was a quarter master sitting there, so I was talking to the guys sitting around there by the fire When it came time to eat, that was where I made my mistake My stomach was shrunk up It was not used to rich food He told me, "Come on boy, we are going to eat " And boy did they feed me. Anything I wanted I got I ended up eating too much I ate two mess kits full You know how big a mess kit is? Well, I had two of them and I had three canteen cups of hot chocolate That night I wished I was dead. That is how sick I got On top of that, there was a little bit of wine after dinner

S Just a little bit?

K A little bit I never drink much of anything

S Was this a shock to your system?

K Yes Oh, I was sick after that In fact, after that, I would never stuff myself Even to this day, I will eat a lot of times, but I will not eat a lot at one time

S. What was your physical condition after that seven months of confinement?

K It was not too bad because when I went out to work, I got a lot of potatoes I would eat a lot of them and this bread they had, brown bread -- it was not white bread It was brown bread But they were not too bad

S How much did you weigh when you went in and how much did you weigh when you came out?

K I weighed about 175 when I got drafted and I went down to about 145. I stayed that way until about three years ago Then I started putting on weight because I quit smoking In fact, it was three years ago this month I quit smoking

S Good for you

K After 45 years

S Were you debriefed at all after you liberation? Were you asked questions about your treatment?

K No, not really They really did not ask us too many questions because the day after we got liberated, Old Blood and Guts came through there

S Did you see him?

K Oh, definately

S Did you talk to him?

K No, I did not get a chance to talk to him But I saw him He had a bunch of officers with him and one was medical officer He came in asking where the Americans were He walked down one end He came in one end and walked all the way down, turned around, and went all the way back He looked around and did not say a work to anyone I did not hear him anyhow He got up to the entrance again and walked around with the boys He looked at this medical officer and he told him in a nice tone of voice, "I want these boys out of here I want them out of here now." And that night they started moving them out

S We are talking about George Patton, of course?

K That is right I know a lot people did not like him, but I will tell you, he was one hell of a man If they were to listen to him, that war would have been over with

six months before it was

S Did men have a lot of respect for him?

K Oh, yes they did. During the Battle of the Bulge was one prime example of the respect they had for him. When you can move practically a whole army a distance of roughly 100 miles in 48 hours, you have got to have respect for him. And fighting all the way. That picture they made of him, that was the truth. The way he talked in that movie, that is the way that man talked. And the dislike they showed in there he has for Montgomery was the truth. He hated him with a passion.

S. The last thing I would like to ask you is, did you know of any brutal treatment, any beating, that happened in your prison camps?

K No, I did not see any of that.

S So you would say that the German guards and officers were, maybe, sympathetic toward your situation?

K Yes, like I said, we were regular army personnel. We were not political prisoners. I would say the guards were not bad. They were not bad at all. I mean, they could not get too friendly with us because it stands to reason. But as far as mistreatment of being in the cooler for a week, it was not too bad.

S Were you aware, after your liberation, that the guards were mistreated anyway after they, in turn, were captured?

K The guards themselves, no. When we went to get on the boat at Le Harve, the camp we were in, Camp Lucky Strike, we were talking to some of the guys up there -- the quarter master outfits. They used to tell us that a boat would come in and it would be unloaded on a barge. Then when it got into shore, the German prisoners would unload the stuff there and load it on trucks. We found out that before we came through there, they were treated pretty good. But after the prisoners got up there, and some of the stories started circulating around what some of the guys went through, when they were waiting for that boat to come in, they had to stand there at attention.

S Thank you.

End of Interview