

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Veterans Project

German Army Experience

O.H. 162

ERNST KOLLMAYER

Interviewed

by

Stephen R. Ard

on

May 24, 1980

## ERNST KOLLMAYER

Ernst Kollmayer of Hubbard, Ohio, was born eighty miles south of Munich, Germany on August 19, 1926 to John and Maria Kollmayer. He attended public school for ten years. Fishing was one occupation he pursued in high school. Drafted when he was sixteen and a half, Kollmayer was first trained as a paratrooper; however, after the training he was placed in the infantry and sent to Italy. There he was captured in Monte Cassino and sent to America to a prisoner of war camp in Arkansas. He was returned to Germany after the war.

On August 18, 1951, Kollmayer married Kay Wunder. Later in the decade, they emigrated to the United States. He worked for the Top Value Company for about eighteen years. Today Kollmayer is a maintenance worker for the Hubbard School System. His interests include bowling, chess, and swimming.

Stephen R. Ard

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INTERVIEWEE: ERNST KOLLMAYER  
INTERVIEWER: Steven R. Ard  
SUBJECT: World War II German Army Experience  
DATE: May 24, 1980

A: This is an interview with Ernst Kollmayer for the Youngstown State University, World War II Veterans by Steven R. Ard at 390 Elizabeth Street in Hubbard, Ohio on May 24, 1980 at approximately 9:20 a.m.

All right, if you'd begin simply by telling me where you were born in Germany. Let's start with that.

K: I was born in Eisenärzt. This is about eighty miles south of Munich right in the Alps.

A: Is that a large town?

K: No, it's just a small town, about 3,000 people.

A: What did your father do?

K: My father is retired. He is retired for over twenty years now. He turned eighty-three on May 5 and he used to work construction and then later on he worked in the forest as a sort of forest master till his retirement about twenty years ago.

A: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

K: I have eight brothers and sisters.

A: How many boys and how many girls?

K: Six boys and three girls.

A: What year were you born, the date and year?

K: The date, August 19, 1926.

A: Can you remember your childhood? What was it like growing up there?

K: Oh, it was a little rough I think, but--how should I say? We had a lot of fun. Like here, the kids, they have everything and they don't know what to do with it, but we were sort of poor and we didn't get stuff like the kids do here. But we went fishing and skiing and soccer. I am a soccer fan. I'm glad it's coming also to the U.S.A. But we had a pretty nice childhood, a lot of fun. We were never bored like the kids today. We could just go out and go any place. All day it was fun, fun.

A: What school did you attend there?

K: I went to grade school for eight years and then two years of trade school. And then I got drafted.

A: What trade did you take up?

K: I was a fisherman.

A: What did you intend to do with that then, as a fisherman? What would that qualify you to do?

K: We had to go out every morning and lay out our net, I worked at Tegernsee, one of the lakes in Germany, in Bavaria. Actually, the net we set out in the evening and then in the morning about 5:00, 5:30, we hauled them in. We catch all kinds of fish. The reason for this was to learn the fishery. I wanted to go to high sea fishery later on, but then the war came between it and sort of messed everything up.

A: How old were you when you were drafted?

K: Sixteen and a half.

A: Sixteen and a half, so you were in, really, at the beginning of the war?

K: No, at the middle of it, 1943.

A: What kind of training did you go through when you were first drafted?

K: I was a paratrooper.

A: A paratrooper?

K: A paratrooper, yes; first division in our paratrooper.

A: What did you train as a paratrooper? Can you tell me some of the things you did?

K: We practiced, I think, about four months. I had my training in France.

A: In France?

K: In France, yes, in Bordeaux. The usual routine everyday for so many hours, different equipment, the swinging equipment, and jumping, and rope jumping, and all kinds of things and then I made six jumps, but none of them in combat. But then we didn't have no more airplanes and nothing to train with. The airplanes were all used for war. Then later on, even though I was a paratrooper, I was sort of infantry. I was a machine gunner over there.

A: Why were you in France doing this training?

K: Well, they sent us over there.

A: Okay, what year is this? Do you know approximately?

K: This was in 1943.

A: 1943, okay. Which of the battles then, were you in?

K: I was in Italy in Monte Cassino.

A: Can you tell me about that battle?

K: I can't remember exactly the date and even the months, but it was in 1944 I believe, in the Spring sometime, in April or May, whatever it was. That was the first time I got in combat and within about ten or twelve days almost the whole company got wiped out. But then we sort of regrouped and we got, actually, chased all through Italy. Everyday we ran about, I would say, about ten, fifteen, twenty miles right along the Adriatic Coast clear up to Rimini. That's where I got captured in August 1944.

A: Can you go back to the Battle of Monte Cassino? Can you tell me some of the action that went on there? Who were fighting against?

K: Against the army.

A: Who?

K: I don't know what outfit. I couldn't tell you. At this time I was, like I said, young, sixteen and a half, seventeen years old. I don't even know what kind of division or whatever, but we were fighting the U.S. Army.

A: After you got captured, then what happened to you?

K: The first thing when I got captured, I got beat up very badly. They took me out of the hole and they just beat the living daylight out of me. That's how I lost one eye. My left eye is blind. Then I got shipped over to the States. I was prisoner over here. I left Italy and got shipped to the States in 1944. I was here almost two years, until July 1946.

A: Where did they hold you over here? Where did they send, you? To what State?

K: They took us down to Arkansas, Little Rock. We had to pick cotton; the old saying, cotton picker. But I sort of liked it. I like to be outside. It's much better and nicer to work than being couped up in the camp which wasn't too bad either. The food, everything was fine. We had sort of a swell time.

A: The soldiers who took you out were Americans? You were in a foxhole at the time?

K: Yes, a hole.

A: Were they Italian? Were they American?

K: They were American.

A: They were American? Did you get treated eventually for the eye wound?

K: Yes. I was in Philadelphia, in the General Hospital for seven months and I had two operations, which didn't do any good. But then when I came back home in 1946 in July, I had another operation there in Germany in Heidelberg, but there was nothing they could do. It couldn't be saved.

A: Can we kind of go back to the 1920's? Can you kind of tell me what life was like in Germany in the 1920's?

K: I guess, from what I know, in the 1920's they had

inflation. I know I wasn't born then, but from what I heard from the older people, it wasn't too good. They had a big depression right after the war.

A: What was your dad doing then? Did the depression hurt him? Did he ever say?

K: No, this is one thing, I never even talked to my father about nothing of this. I never had too much communication with my old man, father, in other words. He was in the war. He was in the First World War. He was young like I; and then he also was in the Second World War. He was about a year or a year and a half in a Russian prison camp. But we never talked about anything. But from what I heard, the older people, in the 1920's they had a big depression. I couldn't even tell you what he was doing then, I have no idea.

A: How about the 1930's? What can you remember from the 1930's?

K: That's when I started school, in 1933. Then that was when Hitler took over. Things start getting really good. They start building roads and just everything. That was actually the best time for the German People, in the 1930's when Hitler got to power. Everybody had work and things were just booming. It was one of the best times we ever had. As far as I can remember, too, when I went to school.

A: Did you listen to some of his speeches that he made?

K: Yes, oh yes.

A: Can you tell me about some of them?

K: But I was what they call a Hitler Youth. They started, I believe, about ten or twelve years or so, ten years. Well, here again, we listened to some of the speeches, but when you're ten, twelve years old or so, you don't pay much attention. You're not interested in all that. We were more interested in knowing other things, going fishing and sports and just play.

A: As a Hitler Youth, is that what you did? Spend a lot of time in the outdoors?

K: It's sort of like what they call the Boy Scouts here. We done a lot of things. Actually that was training already for later on for the army.

- A: What kind of training?
- K: Oh, marching and even shooting and sport. Just sort of getting prepared for the army.
- A: What do you remember best from your days as a Hitler Youth? What was the thing you most liked to do?
- K: There was a certain group of about four or five boys. We weren't actually interested in that kind of things. We wanted to do our own thing. Maybe once or twice a week we had to go to some kind of building and we get trained for, like I said, for later on. But we weren't interested, we skipped a lot. We just took off.
- A: What did they do when they found you'd skipped?
- K: Oh, they couldn't do nothing. I had an excuse sort of, because I had eight brothers and sisters. I am the oldest one. I had to baby sit with them. Somebody came around and raised hell. My mother said, "Well, you just go away. He has to babysit," which I had to do a lot. I was actually never without anybody almost the whole year around. I always had the little ones, my little brothers and sisters. I had to drag them around every place I went. I had to watch out for them. My father, he was away most of the time. In a way, I sort of took over the role my father was in.
- A: How would you say the town that you grew up in reacted to Adolf Hitler?
- K: I say about 80%, they were against him, especially all the young people this age didn't make a living that age, so no matter what, they were all against it.
- A: This is in the 1930's?
- K: Yes.
- A: Okay. What, specifically, didn't they like?
- K: Dictation, they wanted to be free. They didn't want to be told, "You have to do this and you have to do this," which was pretty hard thing, too, you know that? They came around and the Hitler Youth, "You have to do this and you have to do this," and we had other things on our mind.



In our town, I remember there was a lot of them that got locked up when Hitler took over and with the forming of the Nazi Party, the SS. They picked them up in the middle of the night and locked them up for political reasons at concentration camps because they were against the system. They let them go again then, but almost everybody got drafted then.

See, that's what, with the dictation you have no way out, they just come around. Then, in our town, which has grown about double in size from, I say, from the 1940's; before maybe it was about 1,500 people and over 50 got killed in the last war, all in Russia.

A: Did anybody from your family?

K: No.

A: No? No one was over in Russia? Were you the only one from your family that was in the war?

K: Yes, I was old enough. They were all young, lucky.

We had two families that three boys got killed and about three our four of them that two got killed. First they said, if two of them got killed they don't draft anymore from the same family, but later on they drafted anybody who could walk, from about fifteen up to about sixty or like I say, who could walk. They had a job or things to do for anybody.

A: When Hitler, in June of 1941, went into Russia, what was the feeling? Did you think you should be going into Russia?

K: Well, at this time I was only fifteen years old. I didn't realize then, things didn't click. What's happening? We went into Russia. It just came after the war when I was older, then I realized what happened.

In a way, it might be it was all right for him to go in. I don't know whatever happened, if they were twenty kilometer or something before Moscow; whatever happened that winter, the things just changed. Then that was the downfall. So then, that's when it started.

A: Do you remember hearing, maybe, some of the adults talking about the Russian campaign?

- K: No, not at this time, like I say, I was only fifteen years old. We didn't pay any attention. We didn't know nothing about politic. Just later on after we got older you found out a lot of things, found out about the Russians. I think if we would have licked them, things probably would be a lot different now.
- A: When you were in the army, what did the men talk about? What kind of discussions did you have with them? Do you remember talking about things? Did you talk about their feelings on the war, their feelings on, let's say, the Italians where you were at?
- K: No, actually not. From what I remember, we were so busy and the drill, we had for sometimes, eight hours a day from the morning to night. And so, we were so tired we just were glad to catch a couple hour's sleep and that was going on everyday and everyday for weeks and months. I don't remember talking about anything about the war.
- And then later on in Italy, we got a little bit itchy. We were anxious to get in combat. See, we had got the training exercise and then one night we got called out and it finally was for real, and then it was a little bit different story. We just, like I said, at Monte Cassino, we got practically wiped out.
- A: Can you recall that battle? Can you tell me some of the things that happened there? What was your position? Were you defending a road, a house?
- K: Yes, around this area, like in Italy there's a lot of vine fields. Then we have to tuck ourselves in, then they came; start with the artillery and then the planes, bombing, and everything. We sort of had to retreat. We were running for our life. I never was so exhausted in my life, all the way across Italy, everyday and everyday. We couldn't run as fast than they came with the tanks and the automobiles. But this time, in 1944, we really had not enough weapons anymore. Like when you have a rifle and then you go against a tank, it don't work out too good. It was a bad comparison.
- A: Did you have artillery?
- K: They had, yes, but I didn't hear anything anymore about. The only thing, I think we had machine guns and rifles, but outside of this, practically everything was wiped out.

- A: You said you went back home to Germany. When did you finally come back to this country?
- K: Do you mean from the war, from prison?
- A: No, you were here and then what happened? After the war they released you?
- K: After the war we had to go back, all the prisoners had to go back.
- A: And then when did you come back after that?
- K: I came back in 1956.
- A: What made you decide to come back?

K: Well, different things, my wife. She had a girlfriend over here in East Liverpool and she married a G.I. She kept writing how good it is in the U.S.A. so and so. Then we decided we give it a try. We put in for our papers and it only took about four weeks or so. Like for a lot of people, you have to order, you have to wait. Some of them, they wait for years and years. And maybe with us, since I was here prisoner, they probably had this on the record and they would think that that probably made a difference and that's why we got the papers so fast.

We came over here to East Liverpool, which we thought this is the end of the road. We came in from New York about 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. We got off at the bus station and my wife, she asked the officers, "Jesus, where do we live? Russia?" And this is an old and small house.

We lived in a steam house, and real old and crummy and then we stayed in East Liverpool for five years. And I got a job for Top Value Enterprise. We had a warehouse down there and they needed a bigger place, so they got this place here out in Hubbard and they only took about two or three workers, the good workers, The ones they liked they took with them and I was one of them. So, in 1961 we came here to Hubbard and ever since, we've been here in Hubbard.

And for me, I actually never had any desire to come in this country. I didn't see much, but what I seen . . . Like over there in Germany, it was good and nice, everything was cleaned up. But like I say, it was more like my wife, but her girlfriend was over

here, coaxed us over here.

A: Let's go back when you were down in Little Rock as a prisoner during the war. Did you come into contact with any American citizens down there?

K: No, none at all. We were in what they called a war camp, about 300 men. Then every morning about 6:00 we got picked up from the farmers with big trailers about groups, thirty, forty, fifty, and take you out to one of the farms, maybe an hour away or so. They just unloaded us and we went in the field and picked a ton of this, we were picking cotton.

We had to pick 200 pounds a day. And I just couldn't see how anybody could pick 200 pounds of cotton, there's no weight or nothing to the cotton, but then we watched the older ones who were here before that were captured in Africa and they're going around putting all kinds of sand and dirt and stuff in it. And then when we seen the water, put the sack, throw it in the water, soak it good. And then we always made sure there's about eight or ten guys come in at the same time for weighing the cotton, and this farmer, he was going out of his mind watching those people and then watching us. And then we'd throw the sack up so fast that they roll down on the other side and then we ran around the truck, grabbed the full sack and bring around back to the front again. Then we figured that was enough for 80¢ a day. Why should we kill ourselves?

A: How did the farmers treat you?

K: Good.

A: Good? Did they do anything for you?

K: No, we had a guard with us.

A: Just one?

K: Yes, just one guard, and then a lot of times they were young guys too. They would maybe drink the day before or so the next day they wanted to sleep. They told us to watch out because sometimes they have officer or somebody come in for check him out for inspection. And as soon as we see an Army car or something, we wake him up.

Yes, the train, we got off, when I came over here

prisoner, in Boston and then they took us down by train to Arkansas.

A: On the train, what was it like?

K: Oh, it was really nice. I had sort of first class. Oh, it was really nice on the train.

A: Were you guarded on the train?

K: Yes, there was guards. But we even didn't feel like we were guarded.

A: Let's go back to the cotton fields. Okay, actually then, the guard sometimes slept through the whole day?

K: Oh yes, most of the day anyway, just slept it off, like I said, there were a lot who were drunk. They were just tired. They told us, they said, "Watch out, the officer or somebody comes around." Soon as we seen the car coming in, we got him up and then he was awake.

A: While they were sleeping, did you work very hard?

K: Well, but like I said, we had to pick 200 pounds. Then after we found out how to do it and how to cheat, it was easy. I was always one of the first ones done, sometimes at 12:00, 1:00. After you made your quota, your 200 pounds, that was it. But then there was older guys, the prisoners, we helped them out; not the young ones, but the older ones, we dug in and usually by about no later than 2:00, 2:30, we were done. Then they brought us back to camp.

They checked us out--and that was the funny part. When we came back to camp, they searched us from head to toe, everything, and in this came that there was everything there, tools, saw and hammer and you name it.

And then they made booze. We got fruit with every meal and we sort of collect it and there was a few that set up a distillery and everything, but we made our own booze.

A: Was it good?

K: Yes, it was good, but one time we got called out.

I don't know whatever happened, somebody must have blew the whistle. They called us out and then asked you all kinds of questions. They got twenty, thirty gallons of booze and they went through the barracks. They took them ten and twenty gallon jugs. Then we didn't have any booze, everything out, but it didn't take long, they started right over again.

It was really good food.

A: What did they give you to eat?

K: We had our own cooks, we had our own. Oh, lots of meat and even steaks and all kinds of things. I think they had a sort of a menu and plan for the whole week. And then we got three meals a day. And then for when we went to work, we each got a couple of sandwiches to go work. Lot's of ice water, which wasn't too good.

The thing is, we weren't used to the heat down there, See, over in Germany, it's different. It's colder in the first place and there's no humidity in Germany. Oh, but the first few months we really suffered. Then you go almost all day in a bent down position picking the cotton and then the more you drink the ice water, it makes you sick. But they had some salt tablets, but it didn't seem to make any difference.

A: And they paid you 80¢ a day?

K: Yes.

A: And what did you do with that money?

K: We got around fifteen, twenty dollar a month and then we bought our stuff like toothpaste and cigarettes and whatever needs we had, the shaving lotion, but we got paid in coupons, not real money and we had a PX. And at this time, for a dollar, dollar fifty, you got stuff you couldn't use up for the next three years.

A: Then when you went back to Germany, did you have any money to take back with you?

K: No.

A: In other words, you had to use all those coupons here?

K: Yes, I didn't have a nickle when I went back. But,

from what I understood, I think some of the money you could actually put in the bank and had it transferred or whatever. But then when the war was over, our money wasn't good anyhow, it was inflation money. So, everything got sort of wiped out. I think it was 1948 when we got good money again. But two years or three years after the war, from 1945 to 1948 was inflation money. For a pack of cigarettes we paid 100 marks, 120 marks, 140 marks, but there was a lot of black market. Still, if you had lots of money, you'd buy a few things. It wasn't worth nothing, the money.

A: When you left the United States to go back to Germany, when you arrived back in Germany, how did you find it?

K: Well, everything was all bombed out. The big cities, they were all destroyed. We got off in Bremen. We got taken back by boat; Bremen, which was one of the cities that was oh, I'd say, totally bombed. But we were just glad to get home. We were really interested, I'd say, "If I ever get home, I never want to come back to this country," but you see, things turned out different.

A: How did you find the spirit of the German people when you got back home? How did they feel?

K: Their spirit was pretty good. They are hard workers. Germany, fifteen years later was rebuilt and so nice, nicer than ever before. It's unbelievable in the short time how everything was built up again. It was just fantastic.

A: Was your home town hit by the war or it was too far away?

K: No, that not at all, it was back in the mountains. It was close to where Hitler had his nest in Berchtesgaden that's how far. It's only about a half hour away. It's right in the mountain region, too. There was nothing, no damage. The mountains could not be bombed for geographic reasons. But when I was here, prisoner, for two years, we were allowed, once a month, to write a small letter and post card, which I did. But I never received any mail and so I had no idea what was going on over there or if somebody is living or what. I was a little concerned because I know the war stopped right down there at the Alps and you never know if some stupid fool might go and have the

town blown up, but everything was fine when I went home.

A: Did your letters get home?

K: They got home, yes, they got home.

But I still can't understand why their letters to me never came through.

A: Did they say they sent you letters?

K: Yes.

A: Okay, but you didn't get any of theirs? Did all of yours make it through?

K: I believe so.

A: Did you ever go down to Berchtesgaden?

K: Oh yes.

A: Can you describe that for me?

K: Yes, I describe it. It is so beautiful. It's also sort of a small town and there's the Black Forest and it's sitting back in the mountains; it's unbelievable. And then there's a little lake that go with it and it's just--I don't know how to describe it. It's so beautiful. That's one of the nicest parts of Germany. It's nice every place you go but especially down there in Berchtesgaden. The scenery is breathtaking!

A: Did you ever go down there to see Hitler when he came?

K: No.

A: Were you even allowed near the area when he was there?

K: No, well I was sort of young then, I never had a chance to go there. Then afterwards I got drafted. I seen him one time in Munich when we came in by train. He went someplace, just going through the hall, so I got a little glimpse of him in Munich.

A: What were you doing in Munich at that time?



K: Oh, I believe it was when I got drafted. Yes, I got drafted in Munich, in Army Camp.

A: Okay, should we go back and talk about when you were captured and the train ride here?

K: The train ride here from Arkansas to Philadelphia was pleasant and then a guard was with me, we had to stay and get the ticket and then when we got on the train, and then we had one of them sleeping-- what do you call it?

A: Compartments?

K: The guard gave me a choice of upper or lower sleeping compartment. It didn't matter to me, so I took the bottom bed. Then he went with me to the dining room and sent me in by myself. With the prison uniform on, it scared a lot of people stiff! The young girls were screaming when they saw the bad German coming in all by himself. My guard got a big kick out of it!

A: They were screaming because they thought you were going to do something?

K: Yes, but I was more scared probably than all the people in there, but then I couldn't speak one word of English. That was another thing going back and then coming over here to this country after the war; I said, "I can't speak English. I don't want to come over here." We had a chance to learn English in the prison camp, but I was seventeen, nineteen years old. I thought, what for? I never need it. But things sort of worked out different. So, when I came over here, I had to learn it the hard way. Then, the wife, she bought a television and we weren't here too long; and I said, "Why in the world do you want this damn thing? I can't understand." But then I found out I learned a lot through the television and then the paper, I start picking up the paper and I'm interested in sports, just about everything in sports. I see the results so and then I figured things out for myself.

Baseball, I never seen a baseball over there in Germany, they don't have it. Now, with the football, no, I learned the rules and everything else. I figured the whole thing out by myself. And then I started to work in East Liverpool for this Top Value Enterprise and about three months later, my boss, I got a little note;

I brought it home and told the wife, I said, "I think I got a raise, I'm not sure." I read through the thing and I cannot see some about ten cents it was, which it was. We got a ten cent raise, but only about three or four men, the good ones.

One time my boss, he asked me, "Are you tired?" And at this time, I worked my head off. I worked so hard. He said, "Are you tired?" I shook my head laughing. Everybody was laughing. I didn't know what he meant, but later I found out he wanted to know if I was tired. That was a real good company, there was no union, but they were real fair, no problem whatsoever and every year we got a raise, a cost of living adjustment. I worked there for eighteen years and just before they closed down . . . We always had a company picnic out at Farmer Jim's. That was when the big bosses come from Dayton, which was our headquarters. They told us how they explain, how they did this and how they did this; six months later, closed up, closed up like that.

This is another thing here in this country, with security, you work someplace for twenty, 25 years, like over at the mills, especially this area that's got everything.

A: Let's go back down to the prison camp again, did any of the men leave it at night?

K: I believe there was a few of them that sort of sneaked out. I don't know. It wasn't easy I'll tell you, because they had them box things, about three or four of them all the way around the camp. But for some reason or another or there was someone there that spoke English, maybe had some connection with the guards. Some of them, you give them a pack of cigarettes or something, they do anything.

A: Where did these guys go, do you know?

K: I think some girlfriends. I believe some of them got in contact with civilians, but I never did.

A: Did any of those guys tell you what they were doing, tell you about their exploits?

K: No, no they sort of kept it a secret. I think they don't want to let us in on it, on what they were doing.

A: When you were first captured and they brought you in to interrogate you and find out information, can you describe that to me? What did they tell you?

K: When I got captured I was in the foxhole and then shooting machine gun and rifle and everything and then I looked down about maybe 200 yards away, I see all them tanks. It was a sort of a rainy day. It must have been about afternoon, about 2:00 or so, it started raining. There was all kind of noise, all kind of shooting and then I seen the tank coming up and then I had trouble with my machine gun. I took it in to fix it and this tank comes right in front of the hole and about a half a dozen guys around with rifle and bayonet and pointing down at the hole and I was just sitting there looking up and I think, "Oh, that's the end for me." And then they grabbed me and they dragged me out of the hole. Then they beat me up very bad. Then one stayed with me. He took me back. And the first thing we stopped at, it was sort of a farmhouse and they had, from what I seen, all kind equipment in there, electrical for the . . .

A: Communications?

K: Communications, yes. This is the first time I sort of relaxed a little bit then. There was one guy, he gave me a cigarette. I was so happy, we didn't get that, no cigarettes or no nothing. At this time, I smoked, they gave me, actually, a couple of cigarettes. Then about an hour or so later, they transferred me further back with one of the guards to another small camp. There was about twenty prisoners. We were there about, I believe, three or four days. Then to another camp, there was about maybe 100, 150, and from there I got transferred to Napoli, which was the main camp. There was about, oh, I say 3,000 or 4,000 prisoners there.

This big camp, it was split up in different sections. Every day you moved from one section to another to be processed for a group for the States. Then when they shipped us over here, they took us to the boat. They had to go through the whole city in Italy, and there was the Italians, there were about 100 there. They have a big market there and the Americans, they took us there with their trucks, about twenty or thirty guys on the truck. I think about fifteen, twenty went back and then we went through there and the Italian with their . . . cut the head off, if they

could, they would have cut our heads off. See, they were our Allies, but, well they did this in the First World War, as soon as things turn around in the war, what's best for them, that's where they turn. Even in this camp in Italy, all the guards were all Italians and as soon as you walk around and you get a little bit close to the fence, he was ready to blow your head off. That's why I had sort of a bad experience with the Italians, over there and over here, all kind of bad experiences. Sometimes I think they're worse than the niggers.

A: When you were first taken prisoner and they interrogated you to find out what you knew, tell me about that.

K: They wanted to know all kind of information, what company and this and this companies, but the way we were trained, they told us, if you get taken prisoner, you just don't say nothing, no information whatsoever.

A: Did you know the information they were looking for?

K: Well, I know I did, but they also did. They know exactly, the Army, they know exactly what company and where is this and this company stationed and everything. They know more than we did.

A: Did they threaten you?

K: Oh yes.

A: Tell me about that.

K: They said there's this one particular guy, he speak German and he said, "All right, if you don't want to talk, we have different methods." He said, "There's a Polish company which is not too far away. If you don't talk, we take you there and they make you talk." But I said, "I don't care." At this time I couldn't care less. I said, "I don't care, all you can do is kill me.

A: What did they threaten would happen to you if they took you to this Polish company?

K: Well, they didn't say exactly, but I found out from a few other guys, not from the company, but from the division. One time I think they captured about fifty or sixty and they killed just about all of them.

There was only about three or four of them got away. That's how I found out how they reacted and how they were cruel. But at this time when you're young and you're sort of careless and everything. You go through all that thing, but you don't care anyhow. I didn't care back then. In fact, a lot of my friends got killed and didn't make it. Most of them, the ones I was together with for over a year, they got wiped out at Monte Cassino and then we regrouped. We were sort of a mixed up outfit, but from there on, that's all they did was chased us and chased us. Then they finally got ahold of me.

A: You said your father was away much of the time. What was he doing?

K: Yes, he was over there in France building what they called the West Wall.

A: At the West Wall?

K: The West Wall, yes.

A: Okay, and do you want to describe what that was?

K: They got huge, from what I know, sort of cement blocks sticking out, I don't know how far. I really don't know exactly. But the thing is, with my father I hardly any communication at all. He was in the First World War, he was in the Second World War, I don't know where he was. I know the Second War he was a prisoner in Russia for a year or a year and a half, but outside of this, I have no idea. But I know he worked over there in France before the war started. I think it took about two years to build this wall.

A: Exactly what was his job at the wall?

K: He was a shopmaster.

A: Architect?

K: Yes.

A: Architect, and so he helped design part of the wall?

K: Design, yes. He was in charge of maybe there was more but he was one of the two people in charge of this project. But from what I heard, it didn't take long

to build.

A: Didn't hold up?

K: No.

A: Is there anything else you can think of that you would like to tell me? Any comments? Did you bring to this country any souvenirs from the Second World War?

K: No, nothing. See, when I was taken prisoner, they took everything. The little bit we had, they took everything off of me. They sort of stripped us. Even when I got taken prisoner, they even took my shoes off.

A: For what reason?

K: Taking pictures. I don't know, maybe for propaganda purposes or whatever, I assume. It's just, I was so glad when everything was over. It's just one of them things you don't like to talk about. Like when I get home, never, never ever, even here, some people, they ask me a few things. They sort of bait me, but I say, "No," and just forget about it.

END OF INTERVIEW