

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

FRED KULICK

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Philip G. Solomon

Date: April 23, 1990

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Gratz College

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FK - Fred Kulick [interviewee]

PS - Philip G. Solomon [interviewer]

Date: April 23, 1990

Tape one, side one:

PS: This is Phil Solomon, interviewing Mr. Fred Kulick for the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College. Mr. Kulick is a veteran of World War II, having served in the U.S. Army in Europe. The date is April 23rd, 1990. Mr. Kulick, can you tell us when you arrived in Europe and the identity of your unit?

FK: Yes. I was a member of the 336th Engineer Combat Battalion, Amphibious. Certain Engineer Combat Battalions had been taken several years earlier in America and diverted from the normal training, given such units, and placed along the east coast of America to conduct amphibious training, which is the ability to move army across the boundary between the land and the sea. We were scheduled very early on for the Normandy landing, and we were sent to Wales about a year earlier than the landing, excuse me, nine months earlier. And we practiced on the Welch beaches that which we had to do in, for real, in Normandy on June 6th, which we did. And after that we stayed on the beach a great while because we, the Navy, could not successfully open the ports they had hoped to supply the Army with. Therefore supplies had to come in over the beach for a protracted period. At the end of that period, we were also kept back because there was supposed to be a second invasion into Belgium, in Belgium, the Walcheren Islands, to relieve the pressure on the English Army on the north flank. And finally they decided that we were doing well enough in Europe. There would not have to be a second invasion, and we joined the, I believe it was the 9th Corps in crossing the Ruhr River, and later the Rhine River, etc.

PS: That was the 9th Corps of which army?

FK: Pardon me. Not the 9th Corps. It was the 9th Army.

PS: Oh, yeah.

FK: And I don't recall the corps number.

PS: Mmm hmm.

FK: It might have been 19th or so.

PS: You mentioned June 6th. That would be June 6th of 1944, right?

FK: 1944.

PS: So you...

FK: It was called D-Day...

PS: D-Day, right.

FK: Yeah.

PS: At that time were you aware of Nazi atrocities against humanity? Were you aware at all that there were concentration camps, that there were, that the gassing of prisoners, the crematories?

FK: No, I was not aware at all of what they call the Final Solution today. I was certainly aware, I remember thinking about it actually on the beach on June 6th. I think that I felt, and I think others, if this damn fellow Hitler hadn't been so rude to, bad to the Jews, we probably wouldn't have to be there. That was very much on my mind. But we knew nothing of any plan to institute the death of the Jews. We just felt it was the old antisemitic stuff that the Nazis had been pulling since the late '30s, which is well-known around the world.

PS: Now you were then in combat through France. During your advance through the country, that is through France, did you see any examples of Nazi crimes against, like displaced persons, against civilians, against prisoners of war?

FK: No, I saw nothing of that type in France.

PS: And you heard nothing of the extreme treatment of both humani--of humans in the displaced persons and prisoners of war camps or...

FK: There were always rumors, but I couldn't, I don't remember anything specific. We knew they were bad guys, and had a great disdain for the eastern people and the Jewish people and etc.

PS: Then you entered Germany in which area?

FK: We entered Germany by crossing the Ruhr River.¹ It's R-O-E-R [Ruhr]. And went in through the Ruhr so to speak. The situation as I recall it was, it was not a combat crossing for us. There had been an, a river combat, river crossing a few days before we got there, and as I recall it, things were going very well. We were coming pell mell up against what they call the Siegfried Line. But I don't remember it being a hard go at all. We made a good many miles a day.

PS: At that point were you above the Saar valley? North of Saarbrücken?

FK: Yes. Yes. We were.

PS: When you first saw your first atrocity, whether it was a scene or a concentration camp, at what point was that, Fred?

FK: Well...

PS: That you saw your first example of...

FK: I had some trouble with this. I recall it was a town named Gardelegen, G-A-R-D-E-L-E-G-E-N. And I don't know where it is. We crossed the Ruhr River, and then we set up across the Rhine River. Then we went all the way up. I think it was after the Ruhr River. It may have been after the Rhine River. It was a small, rural town. I'd never heard of it. I've heard of it only coincidentally since. We were on the road traveling. We were on the extreme northern flank of the American Army, up against the British, which we'd been all the way through.

PS: Then you came upon a concentration camp...

FK: Well...

¹The town of Gardelegen is in the Saar Valley near the Rhine; therefore he crossed the Rhine.

PS: Or another facility that...

FK: Yeah, I'll try to describe it, because I couldn't call it a concentration camp. It was a rural area, a small, neat little German town down in the valley, and on the outside of the town, oh, as much as three miles, was an intensely agricultural area, and that's where this incident occurred. There was a great barn, such as the Germans in that area used. It seems to be made out of an orange colored tile. They're very large, with large, heavy oak like doors hung from no [unclear] at the top and with a dirt floor. And there was about a quarter of a mile away from that a lot of tar paper shacks, in a glen of woods. And we were informed that these people who suffered this incident were agricultural labor from some camp nearby, where the farmers would bring in like our own migratory workers. They would live in these tar paper shacks and do the work in the fields and the barns for the farmers. Of course the difference was these people were prisoners. And there was a detail of SS men to secure them, although there was not heavy concentration camp structure. It was almost as though it were a transient operation, as opposed to what I was later to see as a full concentration camp. What had happened was, apparently as our column approached, and being the first ones in that area, the workers had been locked in the barn. It's estimated there, I, my estimate is 75 to 100, although it could have been 200, certainly the true numbers are in the battalion report of the daily report of the 336th Engineer Combat Battalion if one were to research it. And they had been locked in this barn. That is to say this large, heavy door had been shut. There were many bales of hay in the barn. The soldiers apparently had set up a machine gun outside the door of the barn so to shoot anyone attempting to escape. The barn had gotten on fire inside. Whether the soldiers set the fire with the machine gun from outside, or whether it was set from inside, there would be no evidence that we would see. But, what did happen is they were not permitted to come out. And everybody was killed by smoke inhalation or burning. When we finally got the door open, the bodies were all black. The barn itself didn't seem to burn. It was so big, and being made of masonry. The horrible thing, the thing that will live forever in my mind was the people who were extruded under a one inch gap between the bottom of the heavy sliding oak door and the earth surface of the floor of the barn and the threshold through the door. It indicated without a doubt that the pressure of the poor devils to get out was unbelievable.

PS: Did you believe at that time that the fire was set due to the advance of the American troops, rather than have them rescued by the liberators, that they deliberately killed them by locking them into the...

FK: Yes, that's the only...

PS: Barn or...

FK: Logical conclusion I can come to. I keep looking for an accidental excuse which would relieve the soul of anybody who saw it to realize it was an accident. But it could not have been. Uh, it would have been no effort for anybody outside, especially a group of tough soldiers, to open the door and let them out...

PS: Yeah.

FK: Had it been an accidental fire. It was obviously an intent to keep them in there. Just how the fire was set, I don't know. But simply a tracer bullet from the machine guns could easily ignite all the stacked bales of hay. The interior of one of these barns is as much as, oh, forty, fifty feet high. They were huge things. It reminded one of more of a little airplane hangar.

PS: When you did gain access to the interior of the barn to observe, you did observe...

FK: Oh yeah.

PS: The bodies? Could you determine, were there any children, if there were any children among these?

FK: No, I don't recall seeing bodies of children. And I think I would, because our commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Bennett, made a decision that these people at least deserved a decent burial. You must remember this was a very isolated agricultural area. There hadn't been no *Wehrmacht* in there that we were aware of. There'd been no attempt by any army to defend. It was, and to us it was just a passage through to a point we'd been ordered to go to, and we ran across the thing by accident. And we presume that the detail of SS guards, which I don't believe was more than about ten, were the only army around. And they had not exhibited no hostile intent toward us. But, our colonel had decided these people deserved a decent burial. So he sent someone down to the little town and gathered up some fine citizens there--I believe the *Bürgermeister* and anybody he could put his hands on--and brought them back and they were ordered to remove this pile of charred bodies and dig graves for them right in that site. And in turn I remember that we put some soldiers with bayonets in charge to make sure that the Germans did the job fairly and smartly and as I recall, one of our sergeants was so furious that the thing he [unclear] the Germans running by with the charred remains in their hands, to get them to act smarter and move faster. We were always concerned that the soldiers would start shooting just out of sheer disgust. It never happened in this case.

PS: Was there any communication between the men in your unit and these German civilians?

FK: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

PS: Such as...

FK: Epithets [chuckles].

PS: There was no interrogation to determine how much they knew or what they were denying?

FK: I think there was. Now, I have to tell you it's going by a fading memory, but I know that we made a full report of it, and I know that the *Bürgermeister* and his people had no idea this was going on. And I can believe that. That doesn't mean to say they didn't know that there were conscripted labor out there from the camps to help with harvest and so forth, planting in the spring time.

PS: Do you believe that there...

FK: But I don't think that they knew that the SS was going to shoot these people.

PS: Or a possibility that they may not have even known that they were harshly treated, probably deprived of subsistence, as far as, you know, their food and so forth. And...

FK: Well, I can't separate what I might remember about that from what I feel about that although I spent much of my mature life in Germany. I, and even during the war I went to Dachau just after the war. In May I took a little leave to go down and look at that thing. And, Bergen-Belsen also. And whether the German citizens knew, I don't know. I know that there were some camps where these atrocities didn't go on. For instance, our battalion liberated the Volkswagen factory at Wolfsburg, and they were putting these cars out at a good rate, in spite the fact that British in night bombing had bombed a hole right in the middle of this long assembly line. We met the manager and talked to him. He had been trained at the Ford Motor Company assembly plant in Long Island in the '30s. And he was selected to run this first big Volkswagen plant. They had a tremendous number of prisoners to service the labor needs of the camp. And I don't think we heard of any gross abuse of human rights there, in the way that we speak of when we speak of the Holocaust. Certainly it was a very rugged, miserable and probably very unfair prison system. Incidentally, they assembled the cars by putting them on a conveyor belt as all people still do. But the bomb, one of the bombs from the British cluster made a hole in the assembly line, in the middle of a long, a several block-long assembly line. So they would have gangs of prisoners with a cradle pick the car, half assembled up, in a cradle and maybe twenty fellows would take it way out in the fields and around by the other end of the assembly line. Ingenious. But the point is I don't remember seeing anything except miserable, tar paper shed conditions with police guards and a lot of barbed wire.

PS: And I guess with the essential work that those people were doing, they probably were, received enough food to keep them physically able to perform the labor.

FK: Also I think because the Volkswagen plant was one of the glories of Germany...

PS: Yeah.

FK: Certain visitors would come and they wouldn't want them to see the...

PS: When you entered the barn, were any of the, were the bodies, I imagine they were so badly burned that you were not able to determine what the general physical condition was prior to the cremation.

FK: No, it's...

PS: Was there...

FK: It's, all I can compare it is if you've ever left a chicken in the oven too long and brought a black smoking thing out...

PS: Yeah.

FK: That's it.

PS: So you couldn't determine whether or not they were starved...

FK: No.

PS: Starved and just skin and bones?

FK: No. And the amazing thing, and we never found a survivor alive.

PS: Oh, I was just gonna ask you if they...

FK: [unclear] apparently after gathering them all up.

PS: We had the same experience where, I often thought that you would think that with the approach of whether the British or the Russians or the Americans, that they would feel, well, you know, these poor people have been through enough...

FK: Yeah.

PS: That, let them live, but in almost every case we've heard of, they just went on a last minute mere frenzy of killing.

FK: Apparently that was organized from Berlin. You know, I can't believe that simultaneously all those people would think to do that. I think that it must have been an order. I'll always feel...

PS: Yeah.

FK: It was a centrally controlled plan, determined effort.

PS: There were, as you say, there were no living...

FK: No survivors.

PS: In that general area, and at that point you still had not seen any displaced persons or prisoners of war that had been liberated?

FK: Oh I, we probably, we would go through a rail center...

PS: I guess...

FK: We'd see them being shunted around. We had drawn German prisoners ourselves to accomplish some engineering work. But, we wouldn't think too much about that.

PS: Yeah. I believe you said that this incident was recorded in your regimental history? It's...

FK: I'm sure it's in the battalion records.

PS: Of the 363rd...

FK: 336th.

PS: Oh, 33-...

FK: Engineer Combat Battalion, Amphibious.

PS: Then, from there, oh, do you recall the approximate date that you witnessed this atrocity?

FK: I'm sorry, I can't give you that. I know it was in the spring time. We were moving, well, it would certainly be in the months...

PS: Probably...

FK: During...

PS: April?

FK: No, no. Oh no.

PS: Earlier?

FK: I'm sure it was earlier.

PS: Yeah.

FK: Well, March...

PS: That would have been...

FK: April time frame I'd have to place it at.

PS: Yeah, that would have been after the crossing of the Rhine, I imagine, wouldn't it?

FK: I have trouble with it. I don't know as I sit here whether it was after the crossing of the Rhine or after the crossing of the [pause] Ruhr.

PS: Yeah.

FK: I don't think it hap--you know the Ruhr River is on the, Ruhr River is on the French side of the Rhine.

PS: Yeah.

FK: It's a small, narrow strip of land as you're looking at a map. It could have been in there, but it could have been after the Rhine too. I know we had broken out and were going hell for [unclear] to get further up toward Berlin. We wound up across the Elbe River north of Berlin. The records will show that though.

PS: After the incident that you just described, between then and the end of the war, the surrender of Germany, did you witness any other sites or atrocities? Any concentration camps?

FK: No. After the war I did, but not up till...

PS: Yeah.

FK: The end.

PS: Do you remember the, you described the area. Do you remember the name of a, of an adjacent or a nearby area to...

FK: I believe it's Gardelegen. G-A-R-D-E-L-E-G-E-N. I probably couldn't remember a lot of this if it hadn't been for an incident that occurred a good many years ago. I'd like to tell you about it, because it'll key a lot of things here.

PS: Oh, definitely.

FK: My boys went to the William Penn Charter School, and one of them came home--I believe it was my older son Fred--and at the dinner table he told me that he had the impression from the teachings there about the war that a great deal of the [pause] horrors visited upon the Jews was the result of imagination, etc., etc. That is to say as though the thing had been overblown. And I was aghast at this. And I remember that our battalion photographer, Engineer Combat Battalion Seven, cameraman, put, had been ordered by the intelligence officer as to take pictures of the event. By the event I mean the, our interring this, interring the soldiers, the victims. And I had a, he passed out collections of these pictures to various people, and I had brought one home with me as one of my mementos of the war. I don't know why we hang on to things like that, but as probably we can't

separate, you wouldn't believe it, so here, look at it. Anyway, I was so aghast that my son was being misinformed as a student that I went up to my chest of army garbage you might call it, and brought them down and made him look at them and explained this whole incident to him. Not too long after that, within a year or two, I noticed a piece of, in *The New York Times*, put in there by Yad Vashem people in Israel, and they wanted to know if anybody had knowledge of the atrocities that occurred at two points, they mentioned--one of which was Gardelegen. And I thought, that sounds exactly like where this occurred. So I arranged through Israeli colleagues in my business--we have a plant in Haifa--that this set of pictures should go to them, along with a little description of what I remembered about it. And shortly after that I got an invitation from the old general running the Yad Vashem that the next time I was in the vicinity he would ask me to call on him. I did that and we had tea and he thanked me for it, and that was the end of that. But, it was because of that happening a long time after the war that I have a fairly good memory, though I can't seem to say exactly where it was. He said that, the story and the pictures went into their files and that was it.

PS: That's the files of the Yad Vashem.

FK: Yes, in Jerusalem.

PS: Yeah. You mentioned that after the incident of, you mentioned the barn, the burning, you mentioned I believe that you saw nothing else that was a, of a major atrocity or a concentration camp. But do you recall when you first heard, and was it prior to the end of the war, that you first heard of concentration camps, of the gassing of prisoners, of the crematorium?

FK: Yes. We, you know, the U.S. Army had a newspaper. I forget the name. *Stars and Stripes*. And I recall it was always full of the latest findings. Look what the sons of bitches have done next. So we were well aware of that. Also, one of our captains had visited Bergen-Belsen during the war. As I told you, our battalion was always the one next to the British Army.

PS: British, yeah, the northern...

FK: And they liberated Bergen-Belsen, and he jumped in there and took a look at it. He told me some horrible stories about what he saw there. But by then I think everybody in the armed forces knew...

PS: Yeah.

FK: Very much about this. It hadn't been secret for a long time.

PS: Now I believe Bergen-Belsen was the first concentration camp liberated on the western, by either British or Americans.

FK: He was shown a lot of things that, you know, people with livers ripped out of them. Why?

PS: You say that after the end of combat, you visited, you mentioned Dachau. You saw...

FK: Dachau, yes. It was...

PS: Was that very soon after the German surrender?

FK: Yes, it was very soon after. We were ordered, do you mind if I give you a little history of our unit so I can...

PS: Oh, oh certainly.

FK: Put it in the context of...

PS: Yeah.

FK: After we crossed the Elbe River, we were facing the Russians, who were coming in. We contacted the Russians. And the whole German SS Corps, which had never been in battle, was, had been up in Denmark. If you look at the map, Denmark is a finger running up to the north. And these people were up there and supposedly to repel an invasion, had we made that second invasion. And they wanted to surrender to us. And we were then part of the 19th Airborne Corps, which included the 101st Division. We--the idea that these SS Corps had was that if they would surrender to us, we would take them by, let them come back into Germany or to France even, and they'd be safe from the advancing Russians, who had just about crushed Berlin and nobody could stop them. So, we were elated. We thought that would be the end of the war. But we got word from Eisenhower's headquarters in Reims, France that we could not take anybody back over the Elbe. Well meanwhile we had let them come down and sit on the banks of the Elbe, and we had forced them to set up their own camps. They outnumbered us maybe 20 to 1. We were just terrified of whether we could control them, and they were fully armed, had never been in combat, were very morose about Germany losing the war and it was a very dicey situation. But anyway, these people had nothing to eat. We had no food for them. They had to forage themselves in the countryside. We just set up machine guns to contain them. And then one night we were told, "At three o'clock in the morning the Russians will appear and they will replace you at your machine guns. You get in your trucks and go." [chuckles] We were not unhappy about that. So we then went down to Trier, in the German Palatinate I think you call it, and there we were put to work stripping transformers and power wiring and every thing else off the German countryside and handing it over to the French so they could replace war damage in France. And in this period I took a little leave and went to Munich. And I went to Dachau and I saw that. That was my first real experience of the inside of a concentration camp where the Holocaust had been ordered.

Tape one, side two:

PS: ...the interview with Mr. Fred Kulick. You were speaking...

FK: Yes, we were just talking about, I was trying to respond in a very circuitous way, to the question whether, did I think the German citizen really knew of the atrocities going on in the camps in their vicinity. And as I said in my contacts with Germans I have come close to, I've always eventually gotten down to the question, "How could it have happened? Did you know? Why didn't you know?" And, I think they knew, but psychologically they couldn't admit it, and physically they could do nothing about it. There had never been a successful uprising against Hitler or any of his methods. They lacked that kind of bravery, or that desire to get killed for resisting too hard. But they had to have known about it. But I also know that sometimes a denial process occurs. I also feel that, and they've used the excuse with me, "Well, you know the camps were to accomplish the removal of antisocial people from our streets. We had all kinds of trouble after World War I on the streets." And so every good German understood the necessity for having camps. They felt they were the normal penal style and everybody took comfort in the fact that we're, making them free [chuckles]. But then, it's unbelievable that Dachau, as close as it is to Germany, people that I talked to who were not little people in any sense--they were business leaders and business owners--had to have known. Certainly they all were requisitioning people from the camps to do work for them. And I just will never believe they did not know. But I also have an understanding on how we deny things that are absolutely unacceptable to us, even though they're true.

PS: When you visited Dachau, had it been cleaned up pretty well? That is all, as far as burial of all victims and...

FK: Yes, but there were still people alive who, and I remember a medical person said to me that they probably would die, would never get to leave Dachau. But I think that they'd been set up in a [pause] comfortable situations by a medical fellow.

PS: Did you witness any other, after the war, that is...

FK: Yeah.

PS: Any other concentration camps or any other examples of sites of atrocities?

FK: [pause] Not in Germany. That's a measured answer, because certainly the French were very beastly in their handling of German prisoners, especially SS prisoners. And I suppose they justify it because of things that happened to French...

PS: Yeah.

FK: People. I do remember visiting Saint-Lo, where there was, there's monuments to the deportation of the Jews. And certainly I visited the monument of the tip of the Ile de la Cité in Paris. So I'm sure that this went on everywhere, but only in the certain camps of Germany have I ever heard of this random killing.

PS: When you first heard of the random killings such as the [unclear] gassing, the crematorium and so forth, did you really in your wildest dreams ever imagine that the

final figure would be twelve million people who were exterminated during the course of the Nazi regime?

FK: No. No. One would hope the world had moved away from that type of retribution, reprisal. It hadn't, and it made one very uneasy about the future.

PS: Yeah, we often, so often hear the slaughter of the six million Jews. And I guess a lot of people don't stop and realize that there were just as many non-Jews--Poles and Gypsies and all the political prisoners...

FK: Antisocials. [chuckles]

PS: Antisocial, of course which could apply to I guess anyone they cared to label...

FK: And I think the key...

PS: Label as such.

FK: The key belief of Rosenberg or Hitler, whoever cooked it up was, that people of eastern origin were inferior, someone less than human, a sub-human species, and therefore had not to be treated with the reasonableness that one--which had been going on for centuries. I think the idea to downgrade a whole continent like that, I just couldn't believe it happened. I couldn't believe it could happen.

PS: Were you at any time aware that--well now there were first the rumors, but then I think it's, it was backed up by facts and records--that the German soldiers themselves, as they advanced through eastern Europe, were encouraged to kill, with the, being told that they were entering countries that had an inferior civilization...

FK: Yes.

PS: And encouraged to, you know, we heard that quite often.

FK: Well, it was like the government gave them moral absolution for the deeds the government required to be done. It's not the first time that's happened. But certainly that's true. And, but I also know that it didn't work too well. There were just too many *Wehrmacht* people to--you know the German Army conscripted soldiers--didn't have it in them to kill that way, so they always had to back them up with SS people, the death sentence people. Not the *WaffenSS* And they--seemed to take a delight and enthusiasm in doing this job, which I think would have been repugnant to the average German soldier.

PS: I've always been very proud to say that my own experience in combat through Germany, that regardless of what we saw, all the evidence of the just unbelievable, all but unbelievable atrocities of the Nazi regime against humanity, I've always been proud to say that I actually never saw an American soldier mistreat a German civilian. Do you have any comments on the men in your outfit and your, you know, the attitude, physical, mental, toward German, the German civilian population?

FK: [pause]

PS: Any resentment that was taken out on, let's say unarmed, defenseless civilians?

FK: I was told of cases of rape, against women, which I suppose is not rare in any war. But, where certainly the American soldier, no, I can't say he [chuckling] might have raped a woman in Wilkes Barre the same day...

PS: Yeah, yeah...

FK: That is, so I can't...

PS: In other words there was no...

FK: I can't believe that there was...

PS: There was no...

FK: There was no...

PS: Really organized...

FK: No, quite the reverse. I think that the American soldiers even tended to share their rations and...

PS: That's...

FK: A certain sympathy with the German civilian who was as much a victim of the ravages of war as anybody.

PS: Yeah. I know we felt the same. In fact I think in most cases, to us they represented a mother and father image. Those that we saw were, you know in their middle 50s and 60s. And I think being away from home and our own loved ones for such a long period, I think I sort of really, looking back on it, I kind of think that in many, many cases or most cases, we related this to a mother and father image.

FK: I think so.

PS: How long did you remain in Europe after the German surrender?

FK: Well, after surrender, as I said we'd been sent over back toward France to Trier to do the stripping of power, electrical things for the French. Then we were sent down to Regensburg, which is over very next to Czechoslovakia. And there we were told to sit down and keep ourselves out of trouble until they found boat space for us to go down through the Suez. We were definitely scheduled to go to Okinawa to get ready for the final assault on Japan. Because we were amphibious we were not permitted to have a leave home--despite the fact that we'd been there since a year before the invasion--because of the necessity for a rapid build up against the Japanese. And so we sat in Regensburg and stayed out of trouble as best we could. The men were put in athletics and the things you use to divert troops from being too bored. And the Germans finally told us that Harry Truman dropped the bomb. The army never did tell us [chuckling] until it was pretty old news.

PS: It was a military secret you know.

FK: But, how down in the guts of Bavaria, the *Bayerische Wald* [Bavarian Forest], I mean really rural forest, how these peasants knew and we didn't I'll never know, but that was the way the world was then.

PS: What was the approximate date that you left Europe?

FK: Well, I think it was June, late June, early July. I know I got home in mid summer and I'd left, at this point, since we were not going to go to Japan, we were selected

as individuals and were, our right to go home, parody to get home was a basis of how long we'd been there, etc., etc., etc. And we traveled as individuals, not a unit. In fact the unit stayed in Germany quite a while. So I rode a train out to, they called them the cigarette camps around La Havre. They built up these large areas.

PS: Yeah, Lucky Strike, Old Gold and...

FK: Yeah. And finally I got a ride home and came home on I think it was the U.S.S. *Anderson I*, no, no, I think that was the ship [unclear]. Anyway, army transportation quite sure all over.

PS: So you then remained in Europe about six, seven or eight weeks after the end of the war...

FK: Oh I called May 8th the end of the war.

PS: Yeah, May 8th.

FK: And I don't think I moved for, it'd be right, I don't think I moved toward America, I didn't get to La Havre it was about the 1st of July.

PS: Yeah, so around that.

Another Speaker: When was the bomb dropped?

FK: I don't know. Oh, it was before this. No, no. I don't know. What was it? It must have been late May, around that time.

PS: During those few weeks, did you see anything of the handling of displaced persons, of the survivors of concentration camps, or our prisoners of war or the survivors of labor camps?

FK: Well I saw, I remember as we crossed the Elbe River, we got into this Schleswig Holstein rural area, great farms, and quite a few American prisoners of war approached us, and came along the road. And they weren't in very good shape. They'd been--they had been to these farmers what the chaps at Gardelegen had been within I guess, conscripted to agricultural work, although they were American prisoners of war. And they were in terrible shape. Their teeth were all falling out and they were hungry, and it was hard to believe in this very fertile agricultural area. If you can imagine being in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and being hungry? So we would always give our rations to them. They were very thin. The number of outfits that got over the Elbe River were very small, and supply was, we only had one bridge. We'd built it over the Elbe River. And you could never tell when something would come over. It was very interesting. I was in control of the bridge for a little while and a German woman approached me and offered me a string of fine diamond rings if I would let her two girls who were adolescent age get a, roll up in a tarp in the back of one of the supply trucks that we switched back over the bridge to get our daily rations. And she'd be happy to do that piece of business with me. Of course I didn't do it, but it shows the terror of these German mothers of young women had, of the daughters being raped, etc., by the Russian Army which was pouring in. War has so many adjacent horrors which have nothing to do with combat.

PS: Yeah, that spill over...

FK: You have to be there to believe it.

PS: I believe, Fred, that I have covered just about all that we had intended to accomplish. In closing, is there anything you would like to add that we haven't covered, or things that I haven't led you, areas that I haven't led you into?

FK: Not on the Holocaust thing, but on the hate thing.

PS: Well, we'd love to hear it...

FK: It went both ways. I know that, this is confidential. I saw a German prisoner shot on the beach at Normandy. I told you we stayed around helping the ships unload. And a soldier got very angry, and a German prisoner who'd just surrendered, he'd been up doing a minefield, and there were trenches in it. On the trenches, running along the brow of the cliff at Normandy, you know that, and somebody had flushed a German *Gefreiter* corporal out of the, a bunker, and it'd been a week since we'd landed there. And we thought, what is he living on? Is he a spy or what? We had no idea what he was doing but, he said he'd been eating grass. And he opened his mouth and he showed us all this green, the way you'd get it with fresh cut grass. And his story held together. So, he was used to clear a mine, to guide us through a minefield. And half way through it, someone decided he was trying to lead us into the minefield, and shot him. He was a, just a poor, disarmed...

PS: Yeah.

FK: Scared, probably. He was probably a deserter from the German army. Otherwise he should have fallen back when they did. So, war is just, forget your morals. It's, I always felt bad about that.

PS: Whenever I speak about these experiences, I think we all have a, just a habit of referring to the *men* in our outfit. Then I suddenly think, oh, yeah, we weren't men. We were kids, 18, 19, 20, 21. I was one of the oldest men in my outfit, and I was still in my 20s. So I think we, too often we think of it as, we refer to ourselves as men in those days. This has been...

FK: You want an excuse for that fellow, yeah the, and there's always an excuse, was that he was a Polish extraction from Chicago and his Polish family had been run down by the Germans pretty badly and so a little, see a little vindictive you see.

PS: Yeah. Okay, this has been an interview with Mr. Fred Kulick, and Mr. Kulick, on behalf of the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College, I want to thank you very, very much for your most valuable testimony and again, thank you very much.

FK: Thank you. It's delightful to talk to another veteran.

PS: Thank you.