

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

BERNARD LOBE

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Philip G. Solomon

Date: December 2, 1994

© 1999

Holocaust Oral History Archive

Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

This page left intentionally blank.

BL - Bernard Lobe [interviewee]

PS - Philip G. Solomon [interviewer]

Date: December 2, 1994

Tape one, side one:

PS: This is Philip Solomon interviewing Mr. Bernard Lobe for the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College. Mr. Lobe is a United States Veteran of World War II. He was captured by Germany and held as a prisoner of war by the Germans. Today's date is December 2, 1994. Mr. Lobe, can you please tell me where in Europe and in what unit you were serving prior to your capture?

BL: I was in France, the 26th Infantry Division, the 328th Regiment, L Company, 3rd Platoon, 3rd Squad.

PS: That's, that's pinning it down.

BL: And I was captured somewhere between Nancy and Metz but exactly where I don't know.

PS: You landed with your unit in what part of France?

BL: Well, we were the first division, that I could remember anyway, according to what I was told. We were the first division to land from the States directly onto the beaches.

PS: Oh.

BL: We didn't land in England like everybody else.

PS: Yeah.

BL: We came right to the beach and we got off, middle of the night in the rain I remember. And we went right up to the, to the, almost to the front.

PS: Was that the Channel coast of France, around the...

BL: Yeah, yeah. Because I remember going through, I could see the white cliffs.

PS: Yeah.

BL: As the ships came through, and I thought we were going to England. But the minute we were landed we went right to the beach.

PS: So you were sort of directly on the beach in France.

BL: Right on the beaches.

PS: And...

BL: Well, it was a while after. I don't remember the exact dates even. But it must have been...

PS: And this was an Infantry Division?

BL: Yeah.

PS: And you were, your capacity was, your...

BL: Rifleman.

PS: Rifleman. Then you...

BL: Originally, originally I went in as a--in the Air Force. And I served my Basic down in Atlantic City. Then they started this program the ASTP. I don't know if you remember that, the Army Specialized Training Program. In other words they wanted the, I guess the smarter ones, so-called, to go into officer's training. And they took me out, plus others, and they shipped us up to CCNY first and then to Providence College. And we were there a while. And then all of a sudden they stopped the programs. I guess they needed...

PS: Yeah, the infantry.

BL: They needed infantry. And that's where I ended up.

PS: Now, after hitting the front lines, the combat lines, you began your advance through France, correct, toward the German border?

BL: Well, actually not right at the beginning. We were put in reserves.

PS: Yeah.

BL: And I was pulled out with some others. And we drove the Red Ball. I don't know if you remember the Red Ball.

PS: Oh, oh, yes. The Red Ball, yeah.

BL: The Red Ball was a service company...

PS: Yeah, the ser-, yeah the trucking, yeah...

BL: A service outfit to drive the, it was usually the blacks...

PS: Yeah.

BL: ...driving trucks. And they were, and Patton at that time was moving so fast they couldn't supply him. So they pulled us out, whoever had some experience driving trucks. And I had put down on my M.O. "truck driver" because when I was a kid...

PS: Yeah.

BL: I drove a truck for some little refrigeration company down here in Newark at the time. I didn't have nothing else to do. And so they saw "truck driver" they pulled us out and they put us on these big six by six, whatever size it was, I don't remember no more, and we drove. And we were bombed and strafed and everything else till the...

PS: Then eventually you...

BL: Then eventually I was sent back to my outfit.

PS: As a rifleman in your company.

BL: As a rifleman.

PS: And, okay. Now, then you advanced through France toward the German border. I wanted to ask you, in your advance through France and into Germany, did you see any examples or any evidence of Nazi atrocities against civilians or military personnel?

BL: No, not really. Not really.

PS: Again, you then entered Germany, right?

BL: No, I never got into Germany, not with the American Army. I got into Germany with the German Army!

PS: Oh, oh. You were captured in France.

BL: Right, yeah, between Nancy and Metz, somewhere there. I don't remember exactly where.

PS: Oh, oh, yeah, that is the Alsace Lorraine. Now, up until then you did not see any slave labor camps, displaced persons camps, prisoner of war camps?

BL: No, nothing.

PS: So, you were captured and before capture, were you aware of the risk of having the identification of the letter "H" on your dog tags?

BL: Oh yeah.

PS: You were aware of the risk of...

BL: Oh sure.

PS: ...what would happen to you...

BL: Oh yeah, I knew.

PS: ...if captured and identified as Jewish.

BL: Well, we were told that if, to make sure we left our dog tags on. Now I've heard from other people they were told to take them off. But we were told that if we'd get caught without our dog tags we were classified as a spy and could be shot on the spot. So, well all right, we didn't get up to the capture yet.

PS: Mr. Lobe, prior to your capture, were you aware of what was happening in Germany, what later became known as the Holocaust? In other words, were you aware that Jews and others--political prisoners and many others--were being shipped, transported to concentration camps? Did you know anything about gas chambers? The crematoria?

BL: Well, if I did, I guess being young at the time, and really being, you know, in the service, and being subjected myself to combat and everything else, my mind just wouldn't have focused on that at the minute.

PS: But you did, you were aware of the fact that you were, well, being an infantry and front line, that there was a high risk of being captured.

BL: Oh definitely, definitely.

PS: And that if captured, being identified as Jewish, you knew that, it was unknown. You, I'm-- what was your feeling about being aware of, being identified as Jewish?

BL: Well, I really, I really didn't think about it at the time. I mean I was too scared to probably think about that, and especially after being caught. I mean there's no sense in kidding, I was frightened. I was cold and hungry...

PS: Yeah.

BL: ...and wet and disgusted already and I--at that point I thought I was ready to go.

PS: Did you give any thought to...

BL: Well I didn't have to give it thought, no I mean...

PS: Getting rid of the dog tags?

BL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. But after we were told that...

PS: Yeah.

BL: But what happened, after capture we were brought, because actually we were almost one of the first to be caught from my division, because we were, you know, fairly new. And we were interrogated constantly. We kept, we were brought back, brought back, and interrogated. And finally, I'd say after about a week--because the timing is, you know, at that time I lost all track of time--they took us to a castle. I thought it was in Dietz, the town Dietz, but I'm not sure. This is what's in my mind, and maybe it's wrong. It's a lot of years. But anyway they put us each in a separate cell, like in the movies, with stone doors I can remember. And each of us--there was five of us who were captured--and they put us each in a separate cell. Now after a while they brought us up the first hot bowl of soup--a nice, thick soup that...

PS: And now, how long was that?

BL: It was at least five days, but we...

PS: Oh.

BL: Had, oh, they gave us some bread...

PS: Yeah.

BL: And maybe jam a little bit. You know, they didn't, not that we starved completely, but it wasn't easy. And we had the soup and then after a while they brought us a paper to fill out, supposedly from the Red Cross. And on the paper it had a, you know, on the thing was religion. Now I didn't know what to do. Now I was in trouble. But I sat there for a while and I thought about it and thought about it. And like, it was on my dog tags. The "H" was on my dog tags. So I says, "Well, I have nothing to lose." They knew.

PS: Had they looked at your dog tags?

BL: I tell you, they must have, and I don't remember. I really don't remember if they did or they didn't. But anyway, I took the pencil, whatever I was writing with there, and I put in big block letters, "HEBREW" because of the "H." Normally I think I would have put "Jewish."

PS: Put "Jewish," yeah.

BL: But here, because of the dog tags I wrote on there "HEBREW." And they collected the papers and left. A little while later the door opens up, "Raus," you know, "Come on out." And they took me downstairs to the officer. And I stood at attention and he sat there at his desk opposite me, and I stood. And he had his pistol on the table. They always had a pistol on the table. That's to scare you, I guess, though. And in perfect English he says to me, "Weren't you afraid to write HEBREW on here?" He says, "You know what we do to the Jews." And to this day I can remember my words. I said, "I always thought the German soldiers," see, this was the *Wehrmacht* now.

PS: Yeah.

BL: I was captured by the SS. Now this was in the regular army, so, I says, "I always thought that Germans were soldiers and not murderers." He gave me a smile and a salute and he says, "Dismissed." Now on the way, after we were there a couple days

anyway, we were leaving. This was, this is a funny thing. And we had to walk down--it must have been, it looked to me at that time it was like 1000 steps to go down--from way up, the castle was way up on a mountain. And we went down. And we were going over to the railroad station. We get down almost to the bottom, and all of a sudden I hear the boots, the German boots on the stone coming, running down. "Hold it! Hold it!" Somebody's hollering. Now it struck me right away he said, "Hold it." He didn't say, "*Halt*," or even with a German accent.

PS: Yeah.

BL: He says, "Hold it." So, we stopped. It was only the five of us with three guards, I think. And he stopped and he came and he says, "Hey, here, anybody here from New York?"

PS: With no accent?

BL: No accent whatsoever. This was striking me as funny. So I said, "Well, what am I gonna do? They got all my information already." I says, "Well, I'm not from New York," I said, "but I'm from Newark, New Jersey, close by." "Oh," he says, "better yet!" He says, "How would you go for a Grunnies [phonetic] black and white soda right now?" Now Grunnies, you wouldn't know, but Grunnies at that time was the most popular ice cream parlor up in South Orange Center. All the young people used to go there for sodas, and it overlooked New York, you know. It was way up on the mountain. And I says, "Well how the hell, you know, how do you know about this? How do you know?" He was in, he and his family were German descent. They lived in South Orange. When Hitler started to take over, they thought he was gonna take over the whole world, and they wanted to get in on the ground floor. This is what he said to me. So they went back to Germany. He became an interpreter. He's, he knows the language perfectly, and there he was.

PS: Isn't that something.

BL: Now, he probably came back here and maybe he was a mayor. He might have been the mayor of South Orange, I never know.

PS: Yes. You wouldn't know his name of course. Did you have any more contact with him after...

BL: No, no, after we left there we got on the train. We, they took us back and we ended up in this, I think that was, you know, at Tallbau [phonetic]; I don't remember where it was even, Tallman [phonetic].

PS: Yeah. You ended up in a regular...

BL: I went to a...

PS: Prisoner of war camp...

BL: Yeah.

PS: A *Stalag*.

BL: VII-A. After this one was VII.

PS: Yeah.

BL: VII-A.

PS: VII-A.
BL: Right.
PS: You don't know what area of Germany that was in?
BL: Yeah, that was Munich, just below...
PS: Oh, oh.
BL: Just above Munich.
PS: Oh.
BL: Because we went to Munich to work every day.
PS: Oh.
BL: They put us in the boxcars every morning.
PS: While there did you see anything of Dachau?
BL: Okay, now, when I was...
PS: Oh, before, were there any other, how many were captured? How many were in your group?
BL: Five were caught.
PS: Five from your...
BL: Then after...
PS: Your company.
BL: After we left and we got to the camp I never saw them anymore.
PS: Oh.
BL: They were, we got separated.
PS: In other words, were you the only Jewish soldier?
BL: No, there was one more. I think his name was either Greenberg or Ginsberg, I can't, from Brooklyn.
PS: Yeah. He was captured with you?
BL: He was captured. In fact, he was one of the ones who got back, across to our lines during the night.
PS: Oh.
BL: While we were walking around at night, you know, when they were shooting all over.
PS: So that was before you were transferred...
BL: While we were being captured.
PS: Yeah.
BL: At that, the patrol. We were on a patrol.
PS: Right.
BL: And he got back across the river that we had crossed.
PS: So he really...
BL: And, but he didn't know where he was. He came back again the other side and he got caught.
PS: Oh!

BL: Which proved to be maybe a good thing after.

PS: Yeah.

BL: Because my outfit, eventually they were slaughtered. Absolutely slaughtered. So maybe being a prisoner of war wasn't the worst thing that could have happened with us. I'm here.

PS: So of the five in your group, two were, you and this other fellow were Jewish?

BL: Were Jewish, yeah.

PS: When you were separated from the others, he was not with you?

BL: No.

PS: In other words they didn't separate you, the two Jewish prisoners.

BL: No.

PS: And you have no knowledge of what happened to your other Jewish friend?

BL: Right. From that point on I saw nobody. And even the ones that I saw, now I can't remember. I don't remember who they were.

PS: Yeah. 50 years...

BL: It's a long--even...

PS: A long, almost 50 years.

BL: Yeah, I know.

PS: Now, can you tell the circumstances of your capture, there were five of you in the group that were in...

BL: There were seven.

PS: Seven?

BL: Seven. The lieutenant and the corporal and us five. Now, when we were over here in the States, we had compass training. They used to take two guys, put them out in the woods with some rations and a compass and a map and say, "Okay," and mark on the map where the Jeep was.

PS: Yeah, I was...

BL: You went through that. And I was good at that. I used to like that.

PS: Yeah, I loved it too.

BL: So, and we walk back and you find the Jeep. Okay, everything was fine. Now we get over there, we go on patrol--with no compass. So I don't understand...

PS: Yeah.

BL: ...what the training. The lieutenant and the corporal, they had compasses, and they got back.

PS: We received a, what they called an escape map of Ger-, a detailed map of Germany, and a tiny little compass about the size of your little, the nail on your little finger.

BL: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

PS: Which we were told, yeah, to use if captured. So, from that point, from the *Stalag* VII-B...

BL: VII-A, yeah.

PS: VII-A, can you relate then, Mr. Lobe, where and the circumstances of your imprisonment? Where you went from there.

BL: Well, we went every day, we went to work.

PS: Oh, when you went down from the castle...

BL: We were taken back.

PS: To another...

BL: To another, well, actually we kept moving back and back. And here, I said we were here two days, and our armies were starting to get close. So they moved us again. And in fact while I was in Munich one thing did, I just thought of it now, the, you know cigarettes were a premium. Well anything was almost a premium in Germany, because nobody had anything. And we had, at least we had our cigarettes or that. I never got a Red Cross parcel. I think we got one parcel for...

PS: Never.

BL: ...ten men. They sent them. The Germans, they must have stole them.

PS: Oh sure.

BL: Because they were starving. And, what happens, we got a, some cigarettes. And I was a smoker at the time. So we went to work, and I had the cigarettes in my pocket. Now I must have had a pack with maybe four cigarettes in there left. And we were waiting for the train to pick us up to go back to the camp on this platform. And on the other side of the platform were Jewish prisoners. You know, they had the...

PS: The striped garb, yeah.

BL: Striped and with the target, the star on, the target.

PS: Not, not prisoners of war.

BL: No, no, these were Germans.

PS: Right.

BL: Evidently, otherwise they would have their uniform...

PS: Yeah.

BL: You know, regular, whatever you had. And they kept looking because I was smoking on the platform. And they kept looking. And I could see that look in their eye that they would have given I think their life for a cigarette. And I felt so bad. So I walked up and down a while, and then I took a look around and I made sure that nobody was looking. And I took the pack of cigarettes out of my pocket, and kept looking to make sure, because I was frightened. No sense in kidding, I was scared. And I took the cigarettes, I threw them on the ground, near them. And before I turned around I had a rifle butt in my back.

PS: Oh!

BL: And somebody was looking and when I didn't see who it was, you know. Well, I didn't do that no more.

PS: Yeah.

BL: That was the last time I did that. Now whether they picked up the cigarettes or not I just, I don't remember. But I do remember throwing them down there.

PS: Yeah. You were being moved then, Mr. Lobe, with, as an individual or with a group of fellow prisoners?

BL: You mean when we went to work?

PS: Oh, when you came down those long steps.

BL: Okay, then we were moved. The five of us were taken again, first on a train. And we got to Cologne, I remember. And the bombers came, and we had to get out of the train. The trains just had pulled out of the station and it stopped because the sirens started. And we had to jump out. And we ran up to the, to a shelter, an air raid shelter. And the Brown Shirts were there. See, I remember that it was the Brown Shirts. And because they had the shorts on, short sleeves. And it was cold there.

PS: And they were youth? The youth org-...

BL: They, no, I don't know if they were youth or not. They didn't look so young to me. They looked like they were older. No, I think the youth must have been in the army. And the guards said, you know, they wanted to get in. They wouldn't let us in. They said, "They're American prisoners and it's American planes. They're staying out here." And the reason I could understand a little bit of the conversation, first of all Jewish and German are...

PS: Yeah, Yiddish...

BL: Are a lot alike.

PS: Yeah.

BL: And I had a, in high school I had German. So I understood quite a bit. I could put the words together. And they said, "No, no. American planes. American prisoners, they stay here." So those poor guards had to stay outside with us. And we laid in the curb while they bombed. They bombed the railroads, you know, the tracks. That's where they were going, for the railroad. And, all right, after it was all over, after we were scared to death again, they put us back in the train and we took off. Then we got to a place--and I can't remember where that was--but they put us in a Volkswagen. Five of us plus the driver in the Volkswagen. And two guards had to lay on the fender. And they took us, and I remember the--our P-38's came. And we, they saw us. They saw the planes. So right away they pulled off the road and we ran into a farm, a barn, until they left. And they came down and they strafed the road. I don't know what they were shooting at, because I don't know, I don't think they saw that little Volkswagen there. It was under the trees. But, and eventually we got back to, we got to the, to Moosburg, to the camp. That's where I was, I stayed. That's where...

PS: And this, the camp was, what was the name, Mr. Lobe?

BL: Moosburg.

PS: Moosburg.

BL: Moosburg.

PS: Do you know roughly where in Germany?

BL: That was just north of Munich.

PS: Oh, oh, you did say, yeah.

BL: It's on the, I don't, here, I should have bought one years ago. They have maps produced every once in a while in the magazines.

PS: Yeah.

BL: They have like maps of where the camps were and they give you a history of the camp. I got a--I got something else I can show you. You want to shut this for a minute? [tape off then on]

PS: Bernie, while you were held a prisoner of war near Munich, were you aware at all of the proximity of the Dachau concentration camp?

BL: No, at that time...

PS: Which also was just a few miles...

BL: I know, I know, it's...

PS: ...north of Munich.

BL: I didn't, at the time I did not.

PS: Now there again, were you segregated from the general run of POWs?

BL: No. No, I was not.

PS: Because of your religion do you think there was any kind of treatment that was, that you experienced, over and above cruelty to the other, to the non-Jews?

BL: I don't think so. I really don't think so. We were all living in you know, in, with the fleas and the...

PS: Yeah.

BL: Bugs and everything. And...

PS: In other words none of you had it good. It was all bad.

BL: Oh, yeah, well, I'd rather have been home. Let me put it that way.

PS: Yes.

BL: But as far as being Jewish and being, no, I don't, at that point I don't think so. But I did after a while--and this was quite a few months later--I'd gotten wind of, because the Russians, they had Russian prisoners down, a few barracks down. And they, one day they refused to come out to work. So the Germans just got their police dogs and sent them in and they came running out in a hurry. And I heard that they were gonna segregate the Jews--rumor, strictly a rumor. But it hit me right away. I says, "Uh oh." And there was a fellow in charge of the barracks, you know, a GI. And I asked him if I couldn't be put outside to work on a farm or something, you know, some kind of work out of the camp. And I don't remember whether I had a bribe or what. I just do not remember. I'm sure I had to give something. But I didn't have nothing to give but maybe a few cigarettes, whatever I had left. And they moved me. They moved eighteen of us out to a farm, out, below Munich now. The camp was, I think was north of Munich. And here they moved us...

PS: Yeah, Dachau...

BL: South of Munich. And we worked on a farm, but we didn't do farm work. We did, we tried to straighten out a stream that was eroding the farmer's property there. Now, during the evening they put us in a, like a, a slaughterhouse with a fence around it. And we must have had maybe four or six guards. And these guards were all men who had been on the front. And one lost his whole family in a bombing raid in Berlin. And he himself, his, he had one arm was mangled from the front where he got banged up. I don't know what hit him. And we called him, "Berlin." And he was fairly nice. He was a human being at least. And, but during the day when we went to work, sixteen of us, they would march us down the road to the brook, to the stream, and then turn us over to a little farmer, who looked like Hitler with a little mustache. And all he had on him was a little pistol.

PS: And he was responsible?

BL: And he was responsible for us sixteen working. And we all had picks and shovels. And all we had to do was...

PS: Yeah, one swing.

BL: Hit him in the head. But, where were we gonna go?

PS: Yeah.

BL: See, that was the problem. Where could we go? Me being Jewish, I was a little more skeptical than the others. Because we always talked about, you know, doing it, and running. But...

PS: Especially in the area of Munich. You were a long way from...

BL: We, well we had no idea.

PS: Yeah.

BL: We didn't even know where the front line...

PS: Right.

BL: Whether they were going backwards or forwards.

PS: Yeah.

BL: We had no information. So, and here I stayed until the, one day I could hear, in the distance I could hear the artillery. The thundery artillery you could hear. It was far yet. And we had a woman, must have been a farm woman or something down the road. And she used to stop by almost every day on her bicycle and tell us, give us information, different bits of information. And she told us this one day that they were close. They were coming. And little by little, finally the guards came in, gave us their rifles. And they were in civilian clothes already. They had taken their uniforms off, and they were leaving. And the woman came riding up on her bike. And she says, "Don't leave." She said, "Don't go yet, because the SS troops are in the woods..."

PS: They were still...

BL: "All around here yet, so stay right here. Don't go." And we stayed until the following day or a day after. I remember she came and she says, "All right," she said, "it's clear. But stay out in the, stay, you know, close to the woods there." And we did. We

walked up and we ran into our tanks. So, that's how we got out of there. And this fellow Berlin, he followed us. He came running after with his big pack on his back. It's all he had in the world--no family or nothing any more. And he wanted me to take him back to the United States.

PS: He was still in uniform?

BL: Oh yeah. And I says, "I can't. I can't do that." And when...

PS: Do you recall the, Bernie, the approximate date of your capture?

BL: Yeah, sure. Everything is on there. [pause; papers shuffling] Okay, I was picked up on the 10th of October in '44. And the 28th of May, '45 I was, I got out.

PS: Yeah the date that you're describing now must have been around May 1st. Dachau was liberated by our American troops I think on April 29th. And I myself was in, driving one of those tanks that was just south of Munich. We bypassed Munich.

BL: Was that the 36th Division? Were you attached at that time...

PS: We were attached to the 63rd Infantry Division.

BL: 63rd or 36th? Now my...

PS: No 63rd.

BL: I thought it was the 36th, but okay. You see I don't know...

PS: And also the 101st Airborne Division. They were both right in there. And we were reconnaissance. And we were in, exactly in that position. And I can clearly recall many concentration camp people, you know, who walked, who, where the guards had fled. They were in those striped uniforms. So we must have been right there where you were.

BL: Okay now, this here, I don't know whether you want to shut this or not yet, while I show you this? [tape off then on]

PS: Again, Mr. Lobe, the name of the camp you were in was...

BL: Moosburg.

PS: Moosburg, spelled...

BL: M-O-O-S-B-U-R, or E-R, -G [Moosburg].

PS: Yeah, and that was close to Munich.

BL: It was just above Munich.

PS: Yeah. Now, we've reached the point really of your liberation, which was by troops of the American Army?

BL: Yeah, well...

PS: Do you, were you witness to anything at all that you would consider cruel and unjust? Well, let me ask first...

BL: Well...

PS: Would you consider that the Germans, with your experience, adhered reasonably well to the terms of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war?

BL: Well as far as I personally was concerned, I was so scared at the time. I--now I know that when we got--after we got back to the tanks, the commanding officer--

whether, I don't remember his rank or nothing--he was sitting in one of these scout cars. And he says, "All right, sit over there on the side of the road," he said, "and we'll get somebody to pick you up right away." And that's what we did. And they sent a truck down. And they took us back to an MP station. And here they were bringing in all the German prisoners. And I, at that point I really didn't have any animosity, although there was one fellow who was an MP. And he was from, I think New York, Brooklyn, because I was talking to him for a while. And he had lost people in Germany, because he originally was from Germany. And he was kind of savage. He would take his pistol and he would whip them. With his .45 he would whip them, for no reason. They just blinked an eye and he would whip them. Oh, he must have had a reason.

PS: Yeah.

BL: And then the cook in this MP station, he asked us, you know, "What do you want to eat? We can make you something to eat." Well from the time I was picked up, for some reason, I dreamed of pancakes. Don't ask me why. I still like pan-, to this day I like pancakes.

PS: I would too.

BL: And each day that pile got one stack higher, one pancake higher. And when I said, "pancakes," boy he made, but I couldn't eat. I couldn't eat too much. I had a couple. But your stomach was so...

PS: Yeah.

BL: Out of whack at that point I just, I couldn't eat many. And then the MP, now I know Dachau was close by. And they took us in the Jeep--some of us, not all of us --in a Jeep. And we went to Dachau. But don't ask me what I saw. The mind just went blank. Maybe what I saw...

PS: Yeah.

BL: ...blanked me out. I don't know. But I know we went. And, but I don't remember anything. I can't remember one thing. For a while I didn't even think it was Dachau. I thought maybe it was a different camp. But that was the only camp around there really, the only concentration camp.

PS: At that point, having seen Dachau, were you at all aware then of what later became known as the Holocaust?

BL: Well...

PS: The gas chambers, the crematoria, the...

BL: I don't think at that time I knew.

PS: Okay.

BL: I really, I knew that they were, you know, they were savage to the Jew, naturally. That's why I was a little hesitant with the "H" on the dog tags there. But I didn't really, I don't think I realized at the time exactly what the extent was, you know, what they were doing. Hey, I don't know if many people in the world did.

PS: No, they didn't, at that point.

BL: You know, that was half the problem I think, that most people didn't know or they didn't want to know. Even the politicians.

PS: They, people knew, didn't care.

BL: Didn't care. Didn't care.

PS: Didn't care and...

BL: It wasn't happening to them and...

PS: Yeah.

BL: Well maybe that was my feeling, I don't know.

PS: Yeah. Now during those months that you spent as a captive of the German Army, were you witness to any kind of treatment that was more severe than your experience, other prisoners who were not fortunate to escape any kind of cruelty?

BL: Well, I just, I don't remember really.

PS: Were there other...

BL: There were other Jews. Is that what you were gonna say, other Jews?

PS: Yeah.

BL: Yeah, there were other Jews there. In fact, two stories: We went to work one day in Munich. Now I was--my fear was dying of disease. So I tried--well I guess my mother's training it was--I tried to keep myself as clean as possible. Difficult, very difficult, but I tried.

Tape one, side two:

PS: Phil Solomon on tape one, side two, interviewing Mr. Bernard Lobe for the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College. Mr. Lobe, when the side one ended you were speaking of your desire to keep as clean as possible to avoid disease, and you were describing the process. And would you care to continue?

BL: Well sure, why not? And I went, like I say, I went, ice water, it didn't make any difference. I did what I had to do and I don't like cold water. But one day--and I always looked fairly decent I guess, you know as clean as we could be with what clothing we had--and we went to work in Munich. And I can remember they put us up on a top of a building of some sort that had been bombed out the day before. And some of the freight cars that were down below the day before now were up on the roof. And our job was to take it and dismantle it and shove it off or whatever--the best way we could get it down. And as we're working, a German officer came up and walked around just to see if we were working, I guess. And he looked at me and he looked at me and he walked away. And he came back, he looked at me again and he came over and he says to me, "Are you Jewish?" Now, now I was in shock. Now I, what do I do now? Is he gonna throw me off the roof? What is he gonna do here? So, again with the dog tags, it has the "H." You, there's no lying here. And I told him, I says, "Yes I am." He says, "I thought so." Again in decent English. Or he had a little bit of a, like a brogue, you know, the German. I says, "Yes I am." He said, "I thought so, because you look clean." Now, I didn't know what he was talking about that I look clean. And then after it dawned on me. So, and he said to me, he says, "You know," he says, "Hitler's one big mistake,"--because the war wasn't going good already for him--he says, "Hitler's one big mistake was killing off the Jews instead of taking them into his organization." He says, "He could have had the world probably." He says, "Now," he said, "it's not going so good." Now maybe he just said this trying to, knowing that it wasn't going good, looking for a little--okay, now, one more thing. All right...

PS: Yeah. Bernie, while a prisoner, were you granted the privilege of receiving any mail from home? Were you able to write to your family?

BL: I wrote almost, I would say almost every day.

PS: They were aware that you were alive...

BL: And a prisoner. At this point, yes.

PS: And a prisoner.

BL: Because originally my mother got the first telegram was Missing in Action, naturally.

PS: Yeah.

BL: And then they got the second one that said I was--which, all these telegrams my daughter still has--said we were--I was a POW, alive and a POW. And then the third

one naturally was that I was liberated. So, my mother, my mother went through the war with me. I got news for you.

PS: When your family received word that you were alive and a prisoner of war, about how long a period were they not aware that you had been captured, feeling that possibly you were dead?

BL: Well now, that must have been a good, I would say at least a month. I don't remember off hand. I wasn't here. So...

PS: Now, you wrote to them and they received your, you had reason to believe that they received...

BL: Some, some, some letters they got. Yes, we had--now what day was it, the V-E mail? Now wait a minute. I remember what we wrote in the camp--no, no, the German stationery. The Germans did give us some stationery we could write on. And it was all censored. My daughter's got this too. And we wrote that. But they didn't get it all. In fact my mother used to ship me packages--salami and all that--and I never got a one.

PS: How about the Red Cross, Bernie? Did you receive...

BL: I never saw the Red Cross. Never. The only place I saw the Red Cross was when I was getting on the ship in New York here. They were on the dock, on the pier, going, going.

PS: Yeah, when you were shipping over.

BL: Right. They, giving out...

PS: Donuts.

BL: Donuts and coffee, you know? And I wanted another donut. And I went and I asked her for a donut. Well, they didn't give it to me because I suppose they were short.

PS: Yeah.

BL: They didn't get enough for everybody. But that's all I remember.

PS: And did any Red Cross personnel come in to inspect the conditions...

BL: Not that I can remember.

PS: Of the camp?

BL: Well, I wasn't in the camp all the time. But they might have come during the day...

PS: Yeah.

BL: When I was in Munich, you know, working.

PS: Then how long was it before you were in actual voice contact with your family?

BL: Not till I got home.

PS: No, right.

BL: In fact if I remember right, my ship--like I say the German, the war in Germany was over already. But there were subs that had been out in the Atlantic that were going back. In fact our ship picked up survivors from some ship that had been sunk. Now

this was, the war had just ended. And they were just going back in, they were, to surrender the submarines.

PS: Yeah.

BL: And our ship, on the convoy, all of a sudden, I was up on the deck, and it started belching big black smoke. And I said, "Well, why are they doing that?" I couldn't understand why are they gi--that's already a, to any sub in the area that spots the smoke, they'll see the ship. And sure enough we stopped in the middle. Now we were in convoy. And the ships, the others, they--a destroyer, they kept on going. A destroyer came and circled us a little bit. And they were signaling back and forth, whatever. And then they left us. Now here we were sitting in the middle of the ocean--nobody, nobody around. And I was laying in the bunk that was up against the bulkhead like. And I tell ya, every night I would go to sleep and look out. And I pictured a torpedo...

PS: Yeah.

BL: ...coming through that wall. And the whole convoy came to New York. And I was dreaming of coming and seeing that Statue of Liberty again.

PS: Oh boy.

BL: But being our ship had trouble we had a short, to make a shorter route. We went to Boston. We got out in Boston. And we went into Camp Miles Standish. And I think it was there, if I remember right, that I called home. And that was the first time I had contact.

PS: Bernie, at this time, could you describe your general physical and mental condition as a result of your months of captivity?

BL: Well naturally we had nothing, you know, nothing substantial to eat. The soup that they gave us in the morning--tea, I shouldn't say soup, tea--it was impossible to drink. I used to shave with it if I could. And, but that was one thing and that's why I liked to go to work every day. Because, according to the Germans, wherever you worked, if you worked for the railroad, or you worked for a building of some kind, whoever owned that, or whoever was in charge, they had to feed you. Now if we worked for the railroad, the railroad had a good bowl of soup at least--it had something in it--with a piece of bread. Because actually we had nothing, at night we had a piece of bread with a little bloodwurst or something. I don't know if they made it out of sawdust or something. But we, listen, at that point I ate. I didn't care what it was. I ate whatever they gave me. But I was, when I went in I was very skinny. I was very thin when I first went into the service. And when I came home I was bloated from malnutrition. Now they just came out with a new presumptive here where it's possible I had beriberi. You know, this is, but I didn't care. I didn't want no stops. I want home! I'm...

PS: Yeah, it was over and you were out and...

BL: I had two teeth were broken, that I lost in the camp there, you know, broke in camp. And they wanted to fix them. And I says, "We'll fix them later," I said. "But right

now I want home.” And I went to my own dentist here. I didn’t want no part of the army no more. I wanted to get out.

PS: Yeah. Then, the approximate date that you arrived in Boston? Are you aware? Do you remember that?

BL: Oh my.

PS: Well, it really isn’t too important.

BL: Well it was at the beginning of June I think.

PS: It probably would have been around there.

BL: The beginning of June. Well, the way I’m figuring because, well all right, because when they took us, we got out of Miles Standish, then they trained us to Fort Dix.

PS: Oh.

BL: And I went right past my house.

PS: Oh.

BL: At the time I lived down in...

PS: Yeah.

BL: I didn’t live with my mother in Newark, but my wife.

PS: Fort Dix, New Jersey.

BL: Yeah.

PS: Do you think, do you harbor any resentment against the Germans for treatment, personal...

BL: Not really. Not really.

PS: You don’t think you have any...

BL: I was in the same position they probably were in. I didn’t want to be there as much as they didn’t want me there I guess.

PS: Yeah.

BL: I mean I understood why we were there. But I, there was, I didn’t want to be there. Like anybody else, I just did not want to be there.

PS: Yeah. And consider that you recovered fairly rapidly, your health problem, your mental attitude?

BL: Well, my mental attitude was always good. I had the nature. I, that’s, but that’s not everybody.

PS: No, no.

BL: You know. And I was only there what, seven months plus a little bit. And, listen, there were POWs like for seven years, you know from, in Japan and China and all over. They must have really suff-, I mean I suffered. I’m not saying I didn’t suffer. But listen, they took me away from my mother.

PS: Yeah.

BL: You know, at that time I was a kid. I was only twenty-some-odd years old, 21? And...

PS: Bernie, for a number of years after the war there were television programs such as *Hogan's Heroes* that pictured the German prison guards as bungling, blubbing idiots and the American POWs as leading a great life.

BL: Not true.

PS: No. But what was your...

BL: Not true.

PS: What was your reac-, did you hold resentment? Do you think a lot of people really believed this? Did you res-, what was your feeling...

BL: I don't think anybody who didn't go through it knows any, you know?

PS: I think...

BL: Like anything else. I mean, you have no concern. You didn't go through it. You know, who cares? Who cares?

PS: Yeah.

BL: I went through it and it's in my mind. I think about it almost every day. You know, something comes back into my mind. In fact now, it comes this time of the year. We had a prisoner who was in the same barrack I was who was a, he must have been a church choir, something in the choir in Connecticut. That's all I can remember. And he wanted to go sing Christmas carols. He wanted to get some people together to sing Christmas carols and go Christmas Eve, to go around the barracks. So he put out a feeler, you know, who wanted, who wanted. He couldn't get anybody to go. It was dangerous. First of all, we were not allowed out of the barracks at night. Otherwise they could shoot you. That was the rule. No, after lights, you know, no out. Now here he wanted to go into the certain barracks. So he asked for volunteers. Now, there were seven of us again. Seven was my number I guess. I was one Jew, and there was another fellow was another Jew, out of the seven. And he taught us harmony. And to this day when they, when I hear certain carols and I start to sing with them--because I like music--I start to sing harmony that he had, it comes, most of the time it comes back, sometimes not. [unclear] And it came Christmas Eve. We went, first we went in to one barrack, and as you walked in, everybody, first of all you everybody hears noise at the doors. You're frightened right away. Now we look and here these GIs were all laying in their bunks, up, you know, you can see. And it's partially dark. And they looked in and they got that look in their eye of fear. And then we started to sing and tears. I mean everybody in the barracks was crying. Everybody in the barracks, including me. I cry when I talk about it. And, we went from one barracks to the other. In fact the guards who were outside, they hollered at us, but not a one took their rifle off the shoulder. Christmas Eve, and I guess, listen, they must have been religious people also.

PS: Was there ever, Bernie, any attempt for the Jewish boys to conduct some sort of a religious Jewish service?

BL: No, no, I don't think they would have...

PS: No.

BL: I don't think they would have done, not under those circumstances.

PS: No, I guess not.

BL: We were trying to, listen, you know, you were trying to hide your being Jewish I guess as much as possible to survive.

PS: Yeah. At that point I guess you felt fairly secure not being singled out as, did any, were there any fellow prisoners or German guards who showed antisemitism toward you?

BL: Well, not in prison, no. It was here in the States.

PS: Oh.

BL: Down in South Carolina. I buddied around with an Italian fellow, and I can't remember his name anymore. You know, you always buddy around with somebody. And we happened to be walking around Columbia, South Carolina. We were down at Fort Jackson. And we walked past a synagogue. And he made a comment. And I stopped and I looked at him. I says--whatever his name was--I says, "You know, did you know that I was Jewish?" Well his mouth opened, and he just walked away from me. And within maybe two, three days he had a transfer, out of our company anyway. He went to another company. But I don't remember his name. He, but he was in Patterson. He lived in Patterson I can remember.

PS: Is there anything, well I've covered with you, Bernie, just about everything that, the information. You know, we were anxious and is there anything at this moment you can think of that was not covered that you would like to mention at this time, at the end of our interview?

BL: Well, there's a million stories, you know...

PS: Yeah, yeah.

BL: And I could tell...

PS: I guess. Anything that stands out?

BL: If you wanted more in relation to my Jewishness with the army, with the prison?

PS: Well, or...

BL: Not really. I really, what I say, sometimes it's attitude.

PS: Yeah.

BL: And I happen to have a very open mind and a, I have a, you know a positive attitude about everything.

PS: Well, that's good.

BL: I was frightened. No sense in kidding. I was frightened. And, but everything turned out I guess for the better.

PS: Oh good. Bernie, it's, you certainly have contributed a valuable testimony to our Holocaust Oral History Archive at Gratz College. And on behalf of the personnel at our Archive I want to thank you very, very much for the privilege of this interview. And this tape and your testimony will become a part of the history of World War II and the Holocaust. And again, thank you very, very much.

BL: No problem. I'm glad to do it. [tape off then on]

PS: This is Phil Solomon again. After terminating the interview I happened to notice on Bernard Lobe's wall a Purple Heart metal and ribbon and I would like Mr. Lobe just to add a bit of, some telling us about his Purple Heart, the medal for having sustained injury in combat.

BL: Well, the night in question, not in question, the night we're talking about, it was, I remember it was raining and I was in the foxhole with my...

PS: Now this is the night of your capture.

BL: Of the capture, the night of the capture. And somebody crawled over to the foxhole and says, "Lobe, up to the CP." That's the Command Post. So, we went up to the CP, no helmets, just a minimum of equipment. And they told us we were going on a patrol to see if we could find out where the enemy exactly was. Now I knew where they were because they were shooting the whole night. I don't know how come they didn't know. But anyway, the lieutenant took us and he told us just exactly what was gonna happen. We were gonna cross a little bit of a stream and just, you know, what to do. And when we started to walk, and I say it was raining and nasty, and all of a sudden we hear water. And to me it didn't sound like a stream. It sounded like a waterfall. And that lieutenant stopped and he hid under his raincoat to look at the map with the flashlight, a little bit of a light he had. And he says, "Okay, we're going right." And the next thing I knew we were in the water up to our chin. And we got on the other side and we stopped again. Now I couldn't see. I couldn't see the man in front of me. But we could feel. Now we stopped and the lieutenant looked at his map again. And he says, "All right, we're going this way." And as we started to walk, the water in our shoes, because it was fairly quiet, but the water in our shoes started to slosh and it sounded like we were walking in a swamp of some kind. And the next thing we know we hear, "Halt! Who is there?" Now, this didn't sound good to me. So we all got down. And again, "Halt! Who is there?" And the next thing I know they started to open up with machine guns and flares, and anything else they had in their hand. And we ran. The lieutenant says, "Let's get the hell out of here," and we ran. Now I didn't know where I was running. So I ran and ran and ran and I outran all the bullets until we got to where I couldn't run anymore. I was just so exhausted. I fell down on the ground and I turned around. I still had my rifle. I turned around and I was watching. Because the only way I could see anything was if I laid on the ground and looked up into the sky, I could see a silhouette. And this fellow who was chasing me is lucky to this day because I recognized his run. I palled around with him a little bit in training. And I recognized his trot. And I grabbed him by the ankle. And he came over and he says, "Where's the lieutenant?" And I laughed. I says, "I have no idea." So the two of us, we crawled the whole night amongst the fire. And they came out looking for us. The Germans walked around and they almost stepped on us a couple of times looking for us. And we kept on crawling and crawling. I wouldn't stand up. And we followed the artillery. Because their artillery and ours have different sounds. So when we heard the thud and the whine of the shell we said, "Uh oh,

it's over this way." So we crawled in that direction. The next shell came over came from the other direction. So the whole night we were back and forth and back and forth. We probably transversed the same area a hundred times. Finally I said, "That's enough." I said, "We can't, we'll have to wait till it gets light." It got light, and the next thing I see is standing out in the field is about three, four men, Germans, and they're having a conversation like there was no war going on. So we decided we would try--because we had the rapid fire rifles--we would try and shoot them and then run for the woods. That was the only chance we had. So we both aimed our rifles. And before we could pull a trigger I hear, "*Hände Hoch!*" [Hands up!] And standing behind us was a big German soldier with a hand grenade. They use a different type hand grenade than we have. And he was standing there and he had it all cocked and ready to throw it. And that was the end. Now when we got to the, they took us to this SS--I can remember it like it was today--it was a house in a mountain. It was built into the mountain, in the back of the mountain. I never saw it, as we walked. I never saw it until we got around the other side. And we got in and here I took a look and my arm was bleeding. And the German, whoever, it was an SS now. Now I figured for sure this was gonna be my finish. And they took it and bandaged the arm. And they gave me some bread and jelly of some kind, and hot tea. And that was the last we ate till we really got to that castle I was telling you about.

PS: Again, Bernie, thank you for everything.