

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

WILLIAM F. MCCOOL

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Marcia Goldberg

Date: October 17, 2002

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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WM- William F. McCool [interviewee]

MG - Marcia Goldberg [interviewer]

Date: October 17, 2002

Tape one, side one:

WM: ...during the service I had a lot of Mac, pertaining to McCool; they'd say, "How are you Mac?" You know, "Mac, will you do this?"

MG: But what is your official name?

WM: William Francis McCool.

MG: Where and when were you born?

WM: I was born in Philadelphia 12-12-25. We moved to Rockledge and my whole life was there.

MG: And where is Rockledge?

WM: Rockledge is north of Fox Chase, Philadelphia.

MG: What schools did you attend?

WM: I attended the Rockledge Public School and Lower Moreland High School in Huntingdon Valley.

MG: And who were your friends in school?

WM: My friends were very small, limited in amount because of the size of our town Rockledge. We had Al Herschel, Dave and Bob Homequest, Fred Sickel and Earl Longstreth were my closest friends.

MG: What was their backgrounds?

WM: Their background basically in terms of--they were all servicemen in 1944. They all were drafted like I was because of us living in Rockledge, and Rockledge was in the quota basis like any other town in the Montgomery County, and their backgrounds were from families just like myself that had gone through Depression in the late thirties, but we all were good school buddies.

MG: What was your religion?

WM: My religion was Catholic.

MG: And what was theirs?

WM: Where?

MG: What was their religion, your friends?

WM: Oh, I'm sorry. Their religion was basically Protestant except for Al Herschel. He was Catholic.

MG: Did you belong to any clubs or organizations while you were growing up?

WM: Not while we were growing up, I didn't. Just a general, basketball games and things that were pertaining to the school itself, but no special--in other words, for example, no boy scouts or like that.

MG: Could you describe for me your childhood?

WM: My childhood was a very good childhood. I had a sister and brother. There were a few years between us, in fact, it was 12 years between me and my brother, but our whole status of life was very strongly knitted; although my mother was from a background of a Protestant denomination there was never any problems there. Our schooling was done as I said earlier with Rockledge School and then Lower Moreland. My dad always participated with things that were necessary for parents to have.

MG: What were your interests?

WM: My interests in school--shop. I like making furniture and things like that.

MG: What about outside of school, what were you...?

WM: Our hobbies? Because of our parents going through again, the Depression, money was very limited. It created a lot of hobbies that we did with each other's friends to do the hobbies and help with the hobbies that they had, and mine was trains. I had a full basement of trains.

MG: What kind?

WM: American Flyer trains and the whole build up of such went into my married life and then into my own children, and right now my youngest son has them.

MG: You said your mother was Protestant.

WM: Yes.

MG: What was her name?

WM: Alberta Clegg, maiden name.

MG: Did she work?

WM: Yes, she did during the Depression because of my dad being out of work, and what she did was, she used to make aprons, doilies, bedspreads, and things and then she used to sell them by way of the Fellow 5 and 10 cents store in Fox Chase.

MG: What about your father?

WM: My dad, he would--he tried to get jobs, most of them were driving jobs for Gerber's Lumber Yard and we had different small lumber yards throughout the area, Jenkintown, Abington, and he worked for them, and then when Roosevelt became president he was working with the W.P.A. and the N.R.A. doing highway jobs.

MG: What was your father's name?

WM: John Joseph McCool.

MG: And what was his religion?

WM: His religion was Catholic.

MG: All right, may I ask you, why did you become a Catholic?

WM: There was a choice where I used to go from one church to the other, one Sunday to St. Cecilia's in Fox Chase, the other Sunday across the street to the Baptist Church. My decision was made solely on my own personal liking, not pushed or pressured by anybody in our family.

MG: How would you describe yourself as a student?

WM: Average, I was not top A's all the time but I was average.

MG: What was your favorite subject?

WM: My favorite subject in terms of the schooling was mathematics.

MG: Did you work while you went to school?

WM: Yes I did, I worked for a small Unity and Frankford store right next to where we lived at Fox and Borbeck Streets, and I used to deliver orders.

MG: Did you participate in any sports after school or in school?

WM: Sports after school and in school was totally track and basketball.

MG: What did you want to do with your life as far as a career?

WM: At the time I had an uncle that was a streetcar conductor and he had the route between Fox Chase and Germantown. Riding with him, many times, I thought boy, I would like to be this, and involved with trains and things like that it sort of set me off to that opinion.

MG: Did you try to pursue that in any way?

WM: No I didn't, for reasons that when I came out of the service and having known my future wife, I decided to go into sales.

MG: So how would you describe your family economic status?

WM: I would say, depending on the time element, the early stages they were very limited, I mean they were lower middle-class because of Dad out of work, but as progress went on and years went on we sort of maybe made a step higher because we were buying that house.

MG: You mentioned your siblings, what is your sister's name?

WM: My sister's name is Helen Dimatteo, and she lives in New Jersey, and she's...

MG: How...

WM: ...and she's taught at Camden County College.

MG: Is she older than you?

WM: No, she's younger.

MG: How much younger?

WM: Helen's about six years I think it is, six years.

MG: Is she a practicing Catholic as well?

WM: No, she's a Protestant.

MG: Is she married?

WM: Yes, Pete Dimatteo.

MG: And your brother?

WM: My brother is 12 years younger than me. My brother and I had an unusual relationship because he was so much younger. He sort of looked up to me about different subjects that may exist or come across on him. In fact when I left for the service in 1944 he was very saddened, and still to this day, he still calls me that I'm his hero.

MG: What is his name?

WM: David Joseph McCool.

MG: What does he do?

WM: He is now sort of semi-retired in Daytona Beach, Florida.

MG: What type of work did he do?

WM: At the time he was more in the accounting and banking business.

MG: How much education did he have?

WM: He had high school and then he had two years of night school in college.

MG: Is he married?

WM: Yes.

MG: Then he was not in the service?

WM: He was in the service for about three years, Air Force, but never pursued it as far as a future or anything like that.

MG: So was he in the military during any...?

WM: Not really...

MG: ...wars or [unclear]

WM: ...no, no.

MG: Was your father in the military?

WM: Yes, he was in the First World War. He sort of--well he sort of lied about his age and he was taken, much to his shock to his father, but he served overseas in France. In fact he was involved with the Supply Department of the 28th Division of Pennsylvania.

MG: How about your grandparents, were any of your grandfathers in the service?

WM: No, they were not.

MG: What happened when the war broke out, the Second World War?

WM: Well at the age of 16, I bring up 16 because that's when Pearl Harbor was struck by the Japanese, I found myself thinking and seeing myself no part of it because of my age. As we grew with my friends, like, that I already spoke of, we found ourselves getting closer and closer and the war not getting specifically finished. I mean in other words [tape paused]

MG: What do you remember about December 7th when you heard about the attack?

WM: What I remember was very clear. We were in Roder's Drug Store--Soda Fountain, right there on Oxford Avenue in Fox Chase having a soda and a coke and I think a couple goodies, when Mr. Dr. Roder came out and said, "Well, we've been hit by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor." With that in mind and wondering what was going on, we decided to go home and join our parents as they did with the radio.

MG: What went through your mind?

WM: Thoughts went through our mind. My mind and their mind was that there were uncles that I have and what effect will it be on them, and they're married, some had children, and discussion was as such when we heard this.

MG: So you continued your schooling?

WM: Yes.

MG: When were you drafted?

WM: I was--got notice of to be drafted was in January of '44 and then in March I left from school. We were taken out of school because of quotas which later in the years I made up, but it was in March again in '44 that I was physical--went to Willow Grove where our, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania where our draft board was, and then we boarded a train to New Cumberland, Pennsylvania.

MG: Oh, when would you have graduated from High School?

WM: June of '44.

MG: And they wouldn't let you finish?

WM: No.

MG: Where were you sent for your basic training?

WM: From New Cumberland, Pennsylvania where we got our shots and our uniforms and supplies that were necessary for us to have, we boarded a train and traveled to Camp Wheeler, Georgia which is outside of Macon, Georgia about 20 miles.

MG: And how long were you there?

WM: 17 weeks of basic training.

MG: And was there anything different about the training or was it the routine?

WM: The difference in the training was that I was one that sort of had a fear of guns, and to think that I had to learn all the weapons that there existed was a trying thing to me physically and mentally. Now I say physically, I mean to think that I had to lay down and hide myself and aim a gun and all that, but I had made up my mind mentally that I had to do it if I wanted to exist and live when it came to the fighting part.

MG: Were any of your friends with you?

WM: No, we all were in different branches of service, Navy, Air Force and Al Herschel was in, the only Marine.

MG: How was your group that, in your basic training?

WM: My group in basic training consisted of an awful lot of married men with children, married men, and a good proportion of it was single fellows also, but basically the heavy amount of fellows that were at our basic training were married men with children.

MG: Were most of them older than you?

WM: Oh yes, yes, I was only 18.

MG: Now, where did you go from there?

WM: From there we went to a 14 day furlough at home and then we were notified by mail that we would be reporting to Camp Butner, North Carolina which is geographically about 31 miles outside of Durham, North Carolina.

MG: So what was the training there like?

WM: The training there was naturally how to operate and live with a group of men that you're going to live with 24 hours a day and possibly 356 days a year. I mean, in other words, it was a case of a new family, you know where you got to know each other and in your work with each other, you lived with each other, you ate with each other, you

slept with the same buildings and the amount of training we got by a group as we were, was extensive.

MG: Was this ...?

WM: Basic...

MG: I'm sorry.

WM: Excuse me, basically we were trained for the specific type of fighting. In other words we had sergeants and officers that came up from Panama and taught us how to use a machete, how to live with snakes, how to live with ground formations and all that, and in the future of this stay at Camp Butner, we learned that we were designated to go to Europe because the Battle of Bulge had begun and when the Battle of Bulge begun it consisted of a lot of losses, and they needed us over there, so there's where we went. From there to Camp Butner, to Camp Miles Standish in Boston, Massachusetts.

MG: The group that you were with in Camp Butner, did you remain with this group throughout the war?

WM: Absolutely, it was at the time when Roosevelt had signed a bill that consisted that any 18-year-old men that were drafted were not to go over as replacements but were to go over as a group of a designated regiment, division or whatever.

MG: What was your serial number?

WM: 33772888.

MG: And what was your division?

WM: 89th Division, Infantry Division.

MG: And your regiment?

WM: Our regiment was 355, our battalion was the 2nd Battalion, our company was E-Company and my platoon within the E-Company was the 3rd Platoon.

MG: Was there a squad designation?

WM: In the platoon there was a squad. We were the 2nd Squad of that platoon.

MG: And how many men were in that?

WM: 12 men, including the sergeant-in-charge and the sergeant that was the assistant.

MG: And who was the sergeant-in-charge?

WM: Sergeant in charge was Sergeant Massey and the Sergeant Assistant was Sergeant Kreider.

MG: What was your rank before you went overseas?

WM: A private.

MG: And what was your relationship among the men?

WM: My relationship among the men was actually sort of like a home idea because those fellows were older than me, and they were sort of like fathers and I was their son. It was at times hysterical but it basically the final analysis of that proven itself when we were overseas.

MG: All right, you said that you went to Camp Standish, Miles Standish.

WM: Miles Standish, yes.

MG: Tell me about that?

WM: Camp Miles Standish was strictly a lot of tents that was made up for the--be handled, you know, by a group of men that were stationed there to get us ready and tell us what to do and boarding ships.

MG: Where is that located?

WM: Right outside of Boston. We sailed from Boston.

MG: And how long were you there?

WM: We were there one week.

MG: So when did you sail?

WM: We sailed, from Boston was--I'm hesitant here because there is, the dates, we came June; it was in December of 1944, yeah.

MG: What was the ship you sailed on?

WM: SS *Bardstown* [Victory].

MG: Did you have any specialized training?

WM: Yes, I did in regards to, if we refer back to Camp Butner, I have scouting. Scouting consisted of a special type of training in regards to going forward in front of your outfit and finding out what exists in front of you.

MG: Did you do this alone?

WM: No, I did it with another fellow by the name of Arduno. He was an Indian boy from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, a very, very great help to me because he was very light on his feet, that's an Indian sort of background. They knew how to handle terrain, wooded areas and open space. I learned a lot from him.

MG: How old was he?

WM: He was older than me. He was, at the time I was 18 and he was 27.

MG: Did you get along?

WM: Yes, we did, we did get along.

MG: Where did you land?

WM: We landed, and we were supposed to go to England. The reason we were supposed to go to England was to get a little bit of about two weeks, my understanding was for two weeks of advance training because of the Battle of the Bulge as it was, it pertained to a lot of winter equipment. In other words, what we had in Camp Butner was winter equipment but not--for example we had to wear this white ski outfits for reasons of so that we wouldn't, we would be in with the terrain as such as the snow for example. But when we were on high seas they needed us so bad that was canceled. I never saw England at that time, and we went to Le Havre, France. Le Havre was so bombed out that we had to go down the side of the ships on rope ladders into smaller boats and then into Le Havre, cold as it was. We had an awful lot of frostbitten men that was pathetic; it was pathetic.

MG: Did you have any frostbite?

WM: No I didn't, I was fortunate in that. And what made it really worse was the fact that when we got to the Le Havre we proceeded by truck to go to the Rouen, France. Rouen, France was our headquarters for the division but the actual town that we stayed outside of the town, in tent village called Camp Lucky Strike. All the camps in the Le Havre area were named after cigarettes at the time.

MG: So where was this camp again?

WM: This camp that we were in, Camp Lucky Strike was near Deauville, France.

MG: How far from Le Havre was that?

WM: Approximately 35 miles.

MG: Now who was your commander at that time?

WM: My commander as far as the division was General Finley, my commander as far as the regiment was Colonel Harris, and as far as the head of the battalion we were in that was, it was, well we really had two of them at the time. There was Colonel Adams and then there was Colonel Wilson, but Colonel Adams was the one that stayed with us. As far as the company, it was Captain Lowe, as far as my platoon leader it was Cap--Lieutenant Hepp, I'm sorry, Lieutenant Hepp.

MG: Now how long did you stay in this camp?

WM: Well, in the camp as far as in France, we were there about, I, we were there exactly ten days and within ten days we had quite a bit of frostbite and we had casualties in other words, but none that were severe enough that they sent them back to England or back to the hospital.

MG: Now were these casualties inflicted from the weather or from...?

WM: I meant to tell you also, that while there, when we were on sort of a guard duty aspect of things, we happened--I happened to go amongst many other fellows and saw these down below cliffs, all these children, and we were wondering what they were down there for, and basically one of the real reasons why we didn't want them down there is because of the mines that might be still existing from D-Day. So we went down and when we got down there here they were picking up all our frozen oranges that we received in supplies for our food, they were frozen and they were useless for us and they were taking them home.

MG: You said that there were casualties, were these casualties inflicted by gunshots or was it the weather?

WM: The weather, strictly the weather.

MG: So how long did you remain there before you started to move out?

WM: Approximately six days. Strangest thing about it was on our fourth day there we finally got our heaters for our tents which was a welcome thing.

MG: Were your clothing sufficiently warm?

WM: Absolutely.

MG: Where did you go from there?

WM: From there we went to Mersch, Luxembourg by way of trucks and trains, and the trains were what we called 40 and 8. They held 40 men but they would hold only 8 cattle, but we got there safe and sound to Mersch, Luxembourg.

MG: Were you ever short of supplies?

WM: No, never.

MG: Now, when you arrived in Luxembourg, at Mersch, tell me about it?

WM: Mersch, Luxembourg was our first day of combat. When we came--the train stopped us in Mersch itself but then we boarded two and a half ton trucks. Two and a half ton trucks is a truck that can handle approximately two squads. Sometimes it can't because other equipment might be on it, but we boarded them for only about three miles and then when we got near the site of our first day of combat, which was outside of Mersch, Luxembourg, the funniest thing that I ever encountered in regards to movement by truck was the driver pulled up and he said, "Brothers, I'm not going any farther because I just don't want to get shot." So we had to get off and we walked up towards what the line of defense was, and there's where our lieutenant and our sergeant all took command and told us what we should do and what we should expect to be done, if we find out by way of myself and I do know as scouts, we came upon this one area where there was quite a few homes but considered Mersch, Luxembourg, and we encountered sniper fire. So then we went back and we told our commanding officers as such and sergeant and they took it from there that we needed artillery, and that's what we had. That night we did not sleep because of the artillery. The next morning we encountered troops, more or less face to face, some of them hidden in the steeples of churches, they were snipers, but basically as far as the field of training that we had from the States that we knew what we should do and what was expected of us to do.

MG: Would you say you were well trained?

WM: Absolutely.

MG: So how did you feel as an 18 year old and facing what you dreaded--firing?

WM: I don't want to use a curse word but I was scared as heck.

MG: How long did this continue?

WM: Well it continued to the thoughts that you mentally got the attitude, hey you want to go home, it either them or you. And I got to the point where many, many hundreds, and hundreds and thousands of fellows got. It's going to be us go home. Fighting is something I never thought I would ever encounter in my life, and fighting to me is, even to this day, an opinion of my own that it's, it's really rough, it's rough for any gentleman or any woman that encounters...

MG: So what were your objectives, you were the scout, but what was the squad's?

WM: Well the scout's objective was to find out what was basically ahead of us. In other words it...

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

MG: My name is Marcia Goldberg. I am interviewing William McCool. This is tape one, side two. Mr. McCool you were discussing the objective, your objective as a scout and the objective of the squad.

WM: The, the purpose of the scouts is to go out and try to find out exactly what the position of the enemy may be. There was times when you go through the wooded area, open fields, you crawl to maintain yourself into a position so you could see what was going on. Sometimes you drew fire, sometimes you didn't. A lot of times I drew fire then we knew that the enemy is not too far from us. The basic thing with fighting in Germany as such was that we found ourselves with a lot of villages, small, some large, cities that were giants, then you had to maintain in your scouting ability to say to them, I imagine it's about a company out there or I imagine it's about a squad. Never, ever, were you exactly right but you gave your commanding officers and sergeants the ability to know what to ask for, whether it be in the backup of tanks, whether it would be artillery, or even by air. In other words, notifying the Air Force that we think there's a heavy part of the town with a lot of Germans that were determined to stay put. But it was not really--I would call it not easy but it was consistently on your toes about it. In other words you had to make sure that you were doing the right thing yourself to find out for the rest of the people that are behind you.

MG: How long did you remain in Luxembourg?

WM: Luxembourg, we were only there about a day and a half.

MG: Where did you go from there?

WM: Into Germany.

MG: Where?

WM: Well the actual thing we encountered first was the Saale River, S-A-A-L-E River which was very easy to cross because we had no, we had no resistance from the Germans there, but when we came into the area of the Moselle River that was absolutely heavy, it was a bitter fight. I saw four of our men that were shot. I also saw where, to cross it meant either engineers to come up and build a bridge or we'd go over it, because the tide was very low, by foot. What it ended up with was we went over by foot. How did we do it? Our full body became wet as we got into the middle of the river, having snipers firing at you, having heavy artillery coming at you, we maintained our cool and we put our rifles above our head that we were trained to do, and we went forward. When we hit the other bank of the Moselle, still to this day I can remember that we just encountered the most machine gun firing that you ever want to see. I wouldn't say it was the worse that I encountered later on, but it was for the first time there, it was, it was endless. Finally we asked for air support and we asked for artillery. Our artillery was fantastic. It flattened a lot of buildings, it created a lot of things that we never really thought it could do but it did, and it made it easier for us to advance. When I say advance that's--I'm talking about squads,

the company itself, I'm talking about the regiment, we all advanced as, under the 355th regiment naturally, and we maintained and took what I called the City of Kirn, Germany. Now Kirn, Germany in itself also had a sort of a small camp which was displaced persons. They were basically the group that was there were from Belgium and Holland. I did not personally go into the camp, but our other Regiment 354 did, and they found that people were fed but they were worked night and day for the Germans.

MG: Who were these people?

WM: They were from Holland and Belgium. They weren't of Jewish background, but they were sympathizers. What I mean by sympathizers, I don't want to be too strong on saying they were totally for the Jewish people, but they, what they were was they felt that they should help all human beings, and they were taken as prisoners and they were used for work, building things.

MG: Did you have any contact with any of them?

WM: No, I, I, well I did have contact with a small group of them but that was purely by passing them on the road when they were going back to our divisional headquarters to be naturally, eventually sent home.

MG: Where did your fighting take you from there?

WM: From there we went in through all through Germany in terms of when I say all through Germany, it was from city to city, it was from background of wooded areas, it was consisted of mountain climbing, small mountings, mountains in that area, but the general fighting existed with, I would say most of it, with tanks. We had the 4th Armored Division, and they were men that would say, hop our tanks. When we had hit any open fire then that's when you disband and you create your own defense. We did that quite a bit. It was a help because sometimes we traveled as many as 15, 20 miles and now that don't sound like much but it is if you had to walk it.

MG: Was there any time that any of you could sleep?

WM: Yes, in terms of when you took a town, basically the reason we took the town was naturally to clear it of the Germans but also we wanted to make sure that we had somewhere to go that night, because I'll tell you why we did that. As GI's we didn't want to have to build our own foxholes, so it's either take that town for, and clear it out and you go into a house and you use it as your night's sleep. Night's sleep was not always a full 8 hours, but night's sleep was different when you were able to lay on a soft bed rather than your own sleeping bag in a foxhole. We maintained that idea geographically because we felt that every town that we took, which was numerous towns, but our way of doing it was, we had it pretty packed down, that's the way we wanted to fight. Now we did use and I would say this strongly, we did use the 4th Armored Division in a lot of cases, we even used the, well naturally we used the Artillery but there was occasions when we knew there was a motorcade coming of Germans for the backup of the troops that were already stationed there and we had the Air Force shoot at them, eliminate the actual convoy.

MG: Were any of the men in your squad killed?

WM: Two of them, they were good buddies, two of them.

MG: Were others wounded...?

WM: But our replacements were great too.

MG: Were there others that were wounded?

WM: Yes, and most of the wounds, thank goodness, came back with our group again. So it made you feel good that they were all right. As far as the actual area of the Moselle as I spoke about earlier, the Moselle in itself was a fighting area that I felt that was really, gave you more insight of what to do in the future of what you might have to be asked to do, and I felt that--I drew a strong, strong, not the strongest but a strong hatred for the Germans, the way they fought and the way they killed, and that just made me bitter, and I just was a better soldier at it.

MG: Why?

WM: Because I was better in terms of knowing how to handle and what to do when you came face to face with them?

MG: Why did you feel that you grew to hate them because [unclear]...?

WM: Because of what they did and what they were doing to my fellow buddies. I mean that, at that time it was that. Later on in our conversation here you could understand why I was really bitter when...

MG: Why, how did they fight differently than the Americans did?

WM: They were more or less in a situation where they could handle any given person coming towards them. They were there for, that was their life. They were in that steeple of that church or in that building that was on the edge of the town. They had the best equipment in the, not better than our equipment but they had the best equipment to themselves to fight us before we could see them. That was a lot of cases like that. Figure it out, they were there for maybe years, I mean the exact number of days or years I couldn't really pinpoint to you unless you interviewed them, which I never did or never found out. But it was a case of where they had the advantage of someone that's approaching them, that's going to try and take their place, but we, we reached, we succeeded, we did it, and I just feel that I was drafted, I was sent overseas to do a job and if I want to go home I better do that job right.

MG: Did your group ever take any prisoners?

WM: Oh yes. That part there is very prevalent. I mean in other words, everything, I would say averagely per day without being over exaggerating here, we would take prisoners approximately five to sometimes 105. I use that as a figure because I'm thinking of what the first time we ever had that.

MG: What did you do with them?

WM: We'd go back to the divisional headquarters and from there they'd take care of them. In other words, where the camps were for prisoners of war.

MG: What...?

WM: Most of them were in France by then.

MG: Were there special personnel who took them back to camp?

WM: Special troops, special troops.

MG: Did you deal with any of the prisoners?

WM: No, no, not at all.

MG: Ok.

WM: Later on in our conversation I do have my own personal three days and two nights as prisoner but that's what we encountered the...

MG: So what happened after you crossed the river?

WM: The Moselle River in itself was a fight of, I say by then daily fighting was positively--you couldn't believe what you had to do, in other words to maintain the scale of life. In other words, to give you a little bit of the type of fighting we had, by noon five infantry battalions had crossed the Moselle and were consolidating. In other words we were getting ready to move on, and when I say the other battalions it was battalions also from our, still from our 355, but then 354 and 353 which were on our flanks, and on your flanks were also other divisions, the 87th division was on our other side. So in other words we all were coordinated to fight geographically the same time and move on. When one got ahead of the other we would hold back, and when you held back from figh--city to city it found that your personal time was there that you could write letters home; otherwise, you didn't have that chance.

MG: Did you receive any mail?

WM: Yes, I did receive mail. Mail for, to me as an American GI, I found our mail was pretty much in regularity. In other words it was coming to us when we were able to stay back for one day or even when we were on the line we used to have a mail fellow come up and say, "McCool, mail," and it was good to get it too. I mean, really.

MG: And then from there?

WM: From there...

MG: How did you proceed?

WM: ...we, from the Moselle, the actual Moselle in itself was--the next step was naturally again was fighting different sections and different areas, we were headed towards Worms and that was on the River of the Rhine. Now that in itself was, I would call the worst I ever encountered as far as fighting, and above all, to me personally, it was encountering as a scout things that I never thought would happen to me. The actual Rhine crossing was done mostly by boat, and when I say boat they were like LST'S, in other words they were landing ship types of things that you put so many men into each one, and we were crouched down in them and we were going across the Rhine. We were under heavy fire. The Rhine River was at St. Goar and Lorsch, now I mention those two towns because those were the two towns that we were personally, our outfit, our squad, our company was involved with, St. Goar and Lorsch. When we went over there we encountered a mountainside of nothing but grape vineyards. Our fighting in those vineyards was fierce because they had a well trenched-in, dug-in perfect site from their buildings, what building

were on the edge of these vineyards. For example small type college--excuse me, castles, not giant castles but what the Rhine is known for, and they were embedded in there as far as fighting. I mean they were really ready for us. So what happened was, for myself personally was, we had to go in through these vineyards. When we got to the top our Sergeant Massey said to us, Arduno and myself, "I want you two to go out ahead and see what we can find." What we did was we went out and we seeked the open ground above this small mount. The open ground itself, I remember to this day, was a very moonlit--the moon was fully bright--and it was very lit on a terrain of such which made it good for us to see, but yet not good for us to be saw or seen, excuse me, seen by the enemy. Consequently we're open fired on and what happened there was Arduno said, "Look you take the radio. I'm going to go back." He left me there with the radio which in a period of approximately a half hour there that I remember, the radio just did not pick up anybody, and I kept hollering, you know, that I needed help up here, I needed help up here, but I later found out that Arduno did get back. But when he got back the enemy had our outfit, and when I say outfit I mean our battalion pinned down. But they decided to move up so we went from St. Goar to Lorsch and we did, they did the Battle of Lorsch, but at the same time with the radio out on my part, they weren't able to get a hold of me to tell me to come. Now, in having that done to me, the next thing that I knew as daybreak came, I was surrounded by German troops. That's my experience that I encountered. They took myself, and also another scout, but not from my outfit but under the same circumstances, they were from 3-5-4, name I don't remember, but they took us into this little village. The village which was more or less I would call the suburbia of Lorsch but it was, they put us into a barn. They held us at the barn, took our rifles, but what I thought was quite funny in not terms of comedy, but why are they putting our rifles not too far from us? I mean what is--are they aiming to have us go for them and then shoot us, or are they aiming to do anything else with them? Which we found out in the next morning when the very fluid German that I spoke, that they were putting them there because they thought that, as we realized, they were Hitler's Youth. They were a small company of Hitler's Youth, same age as me, same ideas obviously with schools and all that which I never found out, but I'm thinking this and they thought us as part of the age-wise same as them. True, they fed us water, I did have oranges--I found out they were from Turkey by the way, but we had bread. Also we had within ourselves, we had in our backpack, we had K-rations. So in other words, that part of the three days and two nights, we did eat. The morning of the third day we got up and we looked out the crack of the barn, and then a few minutes later we went to a door, found nobody around us, came back into the building itself and found our rifles still there, which drew, as far as a GI and the training, why would they even leave them there? Why wouldn't they just take them and then we didn't have nothing. But within your own mind I didn't question that to an extent that I thought, you know, they're doing wrong but it was to my liking that we had our rifles. So we took ourselves out, we prepared ourselves for whatever might be encountered in front of us, and went down to the highway right at the

Rhine River. Fortunately, we obviously knew when we saw 89th Division on our trucks that we had come to the area where we were safe. A driver picked us up in a jeep and took us to his headquarters which happened to be 3-5-4 Infantry Headquarters. The Lieutenant that met us there was Lieutenant Bain, B-A-I-N and he took us and said that you want to go back to your own outfit and we said yes, we did. The gentleman that was with me from 3-5-4 it was very simple for him, but with me they had to find out exactly where we were situated with 3-5-5. To make a long story short, that evening, I did get back to my outfit, and the following morning I was back with my squad of my platoon.

MG: During the time you were detained, did they ever, did the Germans ever interrogate you in any way?

WM: They certainly did, but all they got was name, rank and serial number.

MG: Were they forceful in any way?

WM: And all I got was, "You *Dummkopf*, Welche Sprache sprechen Sie?" [Stupid person, what language do you speak?]

MG: Was there any violence used, any...?

WM: No.

MG: ...hitting, any beating...?

WM: No.

MG: ...anything? You said...

WM: No. Although in a personal way I found out approximately a month later that my mother and father got a telegram that I was missing in action, and that was a very hard thing for them at home.

MG: You mentioned that you spoke German?

WM: I said in German, *Dummkopf* means dummy.

MG: Where did you learn German?

WM: German I learned by my own way. In other words, they handed us, they handed us a book like this, and it would tell you what phrases that would be common, what you really should only use, other than you know name, rank, and serial number. French I could never get on. I could say to you, "*Parlez vous Francais?*" which means and such, but I never got on to that; German I did. "*Warum nisch units sprechen Sie?*" In other words, "Why don't you speak to me?" In, in other words, I got phrases that helped me.

MG: When you returned, where was this now?

WM: It was in, in, in Germany itself but it in the terms of the--actually it was in Worms, Germany where I really got to the, in fact. I was, well I guess I was there about two days. In other words, they were in the backup. In other words, they were being relieved by another outfit. See there were certain things that I don't know if you knew about the function of an army, but when an outfit had a certain amount of casualties or a certain amount of days of fighting, then they were relieved. In other words, you got R&R, relaxation and recreation. I mean that, that existed; it happened when I was returning to the

outfit, which they were very glad I was there, and at the time the village that they had, that we were staying at, was a piano and they knew I played, so we had a jam session.

MG: How much time did they give you for this for this R&R?

WM: Oh, we were just there for about a day.

MG: Now all of this was part of the Battle of the Bulge, is that correct?

WM: Well, most of--no, I would say to you in all sincerity, that part of the Battle of Bulge was when we were in Mersch, Luxembourg and crossing the Moselle. In other words, that was the break-off that was the break that Patton needed to get back to moving through Germany.

MG: So what was your objective now?

WM: Our objective now was to go through Germany and get this war over. So consequently, when we did that it encountered quite a few, again more villages, more towns, and I would go into a list of towns, but it's the same type of fighting. In other words, the same method of fighting. There was one town that--near Augsburg, Germany that we were out on, I was out on patrol, and we came through this few houses on this one street, and I have to mention it to you because it was one of those personal things that happened to me. I was there and John DeLissio, my buddy from Connecticut and Tony Fasti, we were all sort of on guard duty, and we heard this massive noise of screaming. Naturally we were taught, and I would say myself personally, I never encountered to have to do anything bad in regards to women and children. Most of the time they were hidden, they were in cellars, they were in caves that were made through the town. Like what we had in the city is air raid buildings for safety and all that, they had as such too. But of the screening, screaming, excuse me, we decided we would investigate. Under which we got orders from our Lieutenant Hepp to proceed. It was the first time I ever delivered a baby, and the women was--our Sergeant Walker, our medic, he came in and took over.

MG: This was a German woman?

WM: German woman, yes, it was a German woman, but the experience was different, and when we got back then we were moving onto other towns and villages and what have you. These--hesitation here is that I'm trying to find pictures that I might be able to show you, but in regards to further going to fighting, we were automatically informed by our superior officers that the Battle of Germany is not near over and that they have found out that there's a lot of cases where there's still a lot of heavy SS troopers that were determined that possibly they could even maintain another Battle of the Bulge, but to succeed that way they didn't succeed. And we also found out that we were going to approach this town of Gotha, Germany which was very, very much fortified. In the approach of Gotha, Germany which was done by many of our troops including our particular regiment. We found ourselves that we did, without even scouting, encountered a lot of heavy fire.

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

MG: This is tape two of an interview with Bill McCool. You were telling me Mr. McCool about your approach to Gotha.

WM: Yeah, we were given orders to, to take Gotha because the division wanted to maintain a line of defense in case there was any counter attack. We took Gotha, it was about approximately a day that took us to do this, with the help of our other regiments which was 3-5-4 and 3-5-3. When we did this, we found ourselves in line for approaching other small towns outside of Gotha, Arnstadt was one of them which we took and pretty much flattened, but when we came--the night before, approximately the second night in Gotha, we were given orders to proceed for the next objective. What happened there was that when Lieutenant Hepp and Sergeant Massey told us that we're going to have to scout out and see what's ahead of us. Now we were encountering real strong heavy wooded area and when you came--if anyone knows anything about Germany, the Black Forest of Germany are really thick. We did encounter a lot of sniper firing, but at the same time we were able to apprehend lots of prisoners--basically I would say when I look back at it now, that those prisoners were older gentleman who thought this is it, we're not going to win. I mean this is my own interpretation of what I thought about them, and some of it was true. When we hit the edge of a little town that we knew only as Ohrdruf; Ohrdruf was a night of nothing but heavy rains. After the rains in Black Forest of Germany in the area of Ohrdruf that we encountered we found ourselves heavy with a low foggy type mist of rain. We were asked to scout out and see if we'd encounter anything, which we did, but in the same token many of us, including myself, encountered an oddest odor of what we thought was an animal slaughterhouse or a meat packing house. That's only opinions of what most of us in talking to each other, "What is this ungodly smell?"

MG: Why were you sent out to scout Ohrdruf, what did they feel that...?

WM: The ma--they felt the amount of troops that might still be existing around the area. In other words, there was still pockets, what we called pockets of troops that would not give up, and primarily those pockets were SS Troopers. Prisoner-wise most of them were regular German Army fellows, but this SS Troops maintained a defense that was heavy. When we were approaching, Arduno and myself were approaching the area where we were encountering small arms fire. Basically, in a distance that they thought there were troops there and perhaps the Germans thought there weren't, but they wanted to find out if we would, we'd fire back at them, but we didn't because we wanted to find exactly what was existing. All right, in the terms of the odor, as we went back we told them and as they knew already because they encountered the same smell. We decided by early morning, this was later in the morning but it was still early--I would say approximately about 7 o'clock, German time, we all made the forward march of encountering the enemy. We had the 4th Armored Division with us. With the 4th Armored Division it also enabled us to ride the tank. Then when we encountered small fire, we decided that's it, we'd get off. The armored

took over and flattened the buildings that were necessary in Ohrdruf. Then we were told to go to our right flank at the time. I remember that as if it was yesterday, believe me. When we went to the right flank, we encountered in the distance barbed wire fencing. When we did that and seeing that we decided that this is where we're going to approach. We did approach it. Now Company E of the 355th Infantry and which included ourselves, we moved forward. As we moved forward, we were getting spotty but heavy firing machine gun wise. Again the 4th Armored brought a tank in and they fired on it and eliminated it. Then as we got further into the terrain into that given area we realized we were in a, near a camp. But what we didn't know right there and then, what kind of a camp. Until we hit the gate area. Now when I say we hit the gate area, we were still under fire, but we fired back and we won. I say that strongly. When we got to the gates of the camp, it was there that we encountered SS Troopers. We encountered those that were diehards and kept firing and we shot them. I'm being blunt but we shot them.

MG: About how many were there?

WM: There was four of them. Then we noticed that there was others to their right, but we found out after we got into the gates of that camp, believe me, when we got into the gates of that camp, they had the living guts to take off their SS uniforms and put on the prisoners' outfits.

MG: How did you get through the gates?

WM: By fighting, we fought those four fellows and we did. I'm talking to you the actual nitty-gritty of our squad, of our platoon fighting. We had 3rd squad over here, we had the 1st squad over here. There's many stories, I believe some of them are on the computer now, but we approached it simultaneously, and we did what we had to do to get into the camp.

MG: Did you have any idea what kind of camp it was?

WM: Not at all, prior to getting to the gate of the camp. We assumed that it was a DP camp, or perhaps maybe one of their own camps; you know German alpha [phonetic] camp. When we got inside and saw what we saw, no human being including myself would ever believe that it existed. The 4th Armored and ourselves, the 4th Armored fellows from the tanks, ready to fire if anybody gave us any problems, got out of their tanks, and we all approached the camp and went into the camp. Immediately as far as me, myself, Bill McCool, I personally radioed back that we are now entering something that you're not going to believe, a camp of human beings laying in piles, lice, starvation. I, I strongly want to emphasize what we saw, but within the seeing of this had already, and I say that very respectfully of my fellow men, had become ill over it, just couldn't believe this. Well it got back to Division Headquarters, and when it got back to Division Headquarters, General Finley, I understand from the records of the 89th Division, he notified General Eisenhower and General Eisenhower--General Patton, excuse me, and then Eisenhower, I beg my pardon, and they came forward and then they came--in other words, it was actually I would say approximately 12 hours later that they were able to come motorcade-wise to see all

this, but let's go back to the actual camp in itself. When we went in there, I, myself, and Tony Fasti, and I say these fellows because they were right with me at the time, and our Lieutenant, we were a group of 12 fellows, we went in there, we had replacements naturally, when we lost those other two fellows in the past, Ed Harris, we went in there and we saw--and what I had encountered myself personally was this, that I never had someone crawl on their knees and crave for something to eat. Food in my backpack meant nothing to me, and I gave it to them, excuse me a minute, and all the other fellows gave them food. To find out a day later that they had passed on because their stomach couldn't take the food, my Milky Ways bye, bye but I loved to give it to them and they took them. I mean that's one example. Then we went and saw the pits. The pits were, first of all the encountered figures I'm giving you is what I knew from myself, the figures themselves I never knew anybody to question them because it was primarily what we encountered as individuals, as a division, that is now some of it, is on, respectively so, a computer. We had approximately, we felt 35,000 were in there at one time or another.

MG: 35,000 prisoners?

WM: Prisoners. Of that 35,000 we do know in figures which I've always kept here, I'm making these figures the way as we knew it, 24 of them were Lutheran background. In other words, they were sympathizers of the Jewish businessmen, Jewish families that lived near them, and they were actually taken as, I would say myself personally my own idea, they were Hitler, Hitler haters, so they were in that camp also.

MG: How did you find this out?

WM: I found out after we were there a few hours. In other words, those that were survived were able to talk and interview. Now all the interviews, I can't say that I was personally there for the complete interviews because it was done by what we called the Division of our Division, 89th Division. They sat down and talked with what prisoners they could talk to, and all that. Meanwhile even headquarters of Eisenhower, General Patton, even General Bradley was there. I mean these are fellows that I personally have a picture of that I can show you where I stood, but what I'm getting at with these figures is that in, the first grave that I hit, the first pit was 9,000. Picture 9,000 people...

MG: And that number was confirmed?

WM: Absolutely, you can go to the Holocaust Museum in Washington and get the same figures. Also within that complex was four American flyers. They were used as slave labor in there but the SS at the gate, that I also found out later, the ones that we killed, were the ones that took those four American flyers plus approximately 15 Jewish prisoners, put them on their knees, tied their hands, and shot in the head.

MG: Who told you this?

WM: This is what we saw after it was done. We saw this.

MG: And who told you that they had done this?

WM: Oh, the other prisoners that were survivors, naturally. Of that, only one American flyer lived.

MG: Did he confirm this story?

WM: He was shot over the right part of the head, here.

MG: Was he able to confirm this?

WM: Yes, yes. You know, in this interview I'm having here I would have loved to have known what his name was, where he lived and it just wasn't feasible and the time element to go into that nitty-gritty type of information, but what was really hard for me, and as I said earlier in our interview, it gave me an even bitter mentally attitude. I'm not trying to be dramatic but it did, was when I saw those thousands of prisoners plus three of our American fellows that lived to be liberated by us, and then they shot them.

MG: Were they aware of this?

WM: That was cold-blooded murder for all of them, all of them.

MG: Were they wearing their uniforms?

WM: Yes.

MG: Their American uniform? Now...

WM: After that, Sergeant Massey said, "You saw enough, let's go back into that area of the camp where the SS lived."

MG: Excuse me a moment, in the pit they were all corpses, they were all dead?

WM: Yes, they were.

MG: What were they wearing?

WM: Nothing, absolutely nothing.

MG: Was this an open pit? Was this all an open pit?

WM: Open pit, absolutely open pit.

MG: Were there any other pits you encountered there?

WM: There were but they had covered them, and the other thing, the only other thing I would say that I encountered was one barracks where I found four, three, and four; four, three, and four in the one bunk that were starvation.

MG: They were dead?

WM: They were dead, they were dead. This you can rub out, Mrs. Goldberg, but it was something that I will never forget. I don't care whether you're Jewish, Gentile or Muslim, whatever you were, but I mean to do this, senseless, senseless.

MG: When you...?

WM: I couldn't talk about it for years, for years. My dad tried, but it is sad that in this case of this Ohrdruf, we were told to go back and--we went to this village where the SS were at, in other words, the guards for the camp and what have you. This was a mystery to us that--how could they live in such luxury within these four buildings that were in the camp? I found, I really found and I'll be honest with you, you almost felt like if it wasn't the circumstances as it was, you'd almost welcome the fact that, boy look at this silver, look at these dishes. I mean I'm not trying to be dramatic here, but the living conditions for them were like, you and I or anybody staying at the Four Seasons Hotel. I mean, in other words it, in the terms of their billets they were top notch. Their kitchens were spotless but

they, to think that this was around them, how could they live like that? How could they live like that? You, go into the historians and you'll find that they lived in luxury and it was, it was, I couldn't believe it. I really couldn't believe it.

MG: Did you go in the barracks of the prisoners?

WM: Yes, oh yeah that's where I encountered that four, three, and four in starvation, in these bunks.

MG: Well can you describe the physical layout of the camp?

WM: The physical layout is nothing but two by threes with a wooden place to live on the two by--you know, attached to the two by threes like your bunk beds. Picture your bunk beds in your children's bedroom, and just a floor, just the wood, just wood. I mean there was nothing, you could see, there was actually, there was, there was one area there in that barracks where I found, where you know, where our group of men found, was that you could, you found yourself with, at one time or another they must have took their own clothes just to have something to lay under their bodies with the, with the sores and the injuries and the--there was one, there was one body there that I couldn't believe that not only was it starvation, but the backs of shovels that a, one that survived explained to us, what is the reason--I mean there were questions that asked by all of us, all of us when we heard these survivors explaining to the heads of our outfits, our sergeants, our me--you know, our brass, I call them the brass. They were beat over their backs with shovels because they weren't digging fast enough, and when I use that word digging, we found out in the town of Ohrdruf that underneath, apparently the history of which I do not know in details, I'm only giving you what I had heard, was that they were building these tunnels. And what the tunnels were for, we think that I could probably try and find out what they thought they were being built for in our history part of our division that exists, but it was unbelievable as far as the... [tape paused] We found out and what we found out was that apparently that at one time or another if the Germans had won they probably were going to make that part of an underground headquarters or something like that. I'm not exactly in detail, I couldn't explain what it was about or, but there is a reason for it, because I've seen it in different transcripts that other fellows had written about.

MG: Did any of the inmates explain to you what kind of a camp this was supposed to be?

WM: The actual camp itself, what I understand, was again for these here, building this underground idea that they had. For what, I don't know. In fact, they only did what they were told to do. In other words, I would say that the communication between them and the authorities of the German SS in particular, they just, they didn't tell them what they were building. I, I could be wrong on that, but historians probably could...

MG: Was there any evidence that they were, that there was any factory on the premises or that they were taken to any factory to work?

WM: No, I never, never encountered that. The only thing I did encounter after that, finding out about how they lived, the SS troops was our squad, our actual whole

platoon was asked by the authorities, the American authorities to go into the town and-- well prior to that, jump in the story here. Prior to that, they sent the one regiment into town to bring the mayor and his wife and people of the town in to the, and they all denied that the camp existed; they didn't know nothing about it.

MG: How many of the townspeople came?

WM: I think at the time, what I remember one of the fellows talking about when we had one of our reunions was approximately they had about 70 people came in. But what I, what really did enc--I encountered was, was that we were ordered, our particular squad was ordered to go into the town, and again get the mayor and his wife because of the brass that was coming from our army, you know, army, 3rd Army and Eisenhower headquarters back into the camp, and when we did, we found them hung.

MG: Do you know who hung them?

WM: No, I never found that out.

MG: Ok, how far was the town from the camp?

WM: Approximately, to my recollection, what I recall was about, about ten miles I think it was, maybe less.

MG: When you were approaching the camp and the smell was so distinctive, would they have been able to detect that there was an odor coming from this area?

WM: Absolutely, absolutely, that odor, it had to be all around them, it had to be around them. Unless they were informed, I'm just saying this was an example, unless they were informed that it was a meat packing house or something, but come one let's not be silly about this, because if it was they'd be hiring them people to work there.

MG: The inmates that you encountered, the ones that were still alive, what were they wearing?

WM: Basically drag-ragged clothes.

MG: Were they uniforms?

WM: Supposed to have been, yeah, the striped type of uniform.

MG: What type of facilities were there other than the sleeping quarters?

WM: There was what I would call the latrines, but they were the most filthiest, crummy--I'm trying to think of every word about it--that I ever seen.

MG: Was there a kitchen?

WM: There was kitchens but they were manned by the SS, you know, the kitchen detail which they very, very, very seldom used. I was understand, I truthfully was told by Sergeant Kreider that the kitchens themselves, after seeing what he saw with the SS kitchen, that their kitchens were non-existing as far as usage.

MG: So there was no dining room as well?

WM: There was a big hall, that's all, with a bunch of chairs and benchy type of, like you and I know as a picnic sort of thing.

MG: Did you speak directly to any of the inmates?

WM: Only the ones that called to us.

MG: That you gave food to?

WM: Right, that's the only ones that I had any words with as far as...

MG: Was there anything else that you remembered at that time when you first came in?

WM: One of the things that I remembered seeing but not talking to, and I believe--I'm trying to think, Mrs. Goldberg, had the name probably on the screen or maybe you had seen it, that one of the rabbis that was a survivor, have you...?

MG: Yes.

WM: Well that's the only gentleman that I saw. I did not talk to him. I did not have any contact personally.

MG: What language was, did they speak?

WM: As far as the inmates?

MG: Yes.

WM: Believe it or not the one crawling prisoner spoke English.

MG: Do you know where he is from?

WM: Never found out, no.

MG: What language did most of them speak?

WM: I would imagine they would, I'm just guessing at this, I would assume they spoke their own language as well as the German, because how would they communicate, I mean...

MG: I was going to ask you, how did your men communicate with them?

WM: Oh as far as, what we, well we had interpreters, we had interpreters, really we did from Division Headquarters. They were there right away, well they, they were with the Division actually. But when General Finley came in he always had interpreters with him, not that he couldn't speak German if he had to, he was a very well educated man, but I, I would 100% say to you that it was interpreted.

MG: Now you were there and this was--what happened the first day you were there other than walking around?

WM: Basically that's what we were doing and then also the fact is that we were trying to maintain what our next step would be as far as proceeding after once the camp was taken over by Special Services. In other words the hospital, medical, well medical, and interviewers, educators, there's a numerous, they call them different classes of the Division Headquarters.

MG: How soon did the medical help get in there?

WM: Immediately. That was one thing, Sergeant Walker was a, Sergeant Walker was the medic that we had with our particular platoon and, he was a man that was--I would say if he took up to be doctor, he would be a great one. I really mean that. I unfortunately know that he's passed on, but the thing of it is, it was unbelievable how these trucks with the Red Cross on them were in the place immediately. I mean it was, the timing was perfect. I have high praise for that division of the Division.

MG: What about the people who would come in to clean up?

WM: That we didn't, we didn't see that. We don't see that.

MG: Or bringing in water supply or food?

WM: Water was there. We had what they called water tanks, in trucks, tank trucks.

MG: What was the condition of most of the inmates that you saw?

WM: Absolutely pathetic, pathetic in starvation, pathetic in being cruelly handled and then to see--some of the things that I saw, I almost, it's hard to describe to you, I mean it's, what they did to some of the woman is unbelievable.

MG: I was going to ask you, were these men, women?

WM: There were [unclear]

MG: So you saw women there as well?

WM: Yeah, what I saw personally and what I encountered, as I said somewhat earlier in the interview here, that, was the men...

[Tape two, side one ended.]

Tape two, side two:

MG: This is tape two, side two of an interview on October 16--17th, 2002 with William McCool. Mr. McCool you were describing that you saw in the camp and that you encountered women as well as men.

WM: The one thing I failed to mention to you, of the Lutherans that we saw, they were women amongst them--3 that I remember definitely. They sort of--I don't want to, I may be phrasing this wrong, I'm not familiar with the actual, they were what they called the Luth--German, Lutheran German nuns and that's the way it was told to us that they were, but I did not interview them. Naturally all of this was, again repeating myself, but that was all done by Special Services.

MG: How long was it before anyone came into to take charge and start bringing in facilities and cleanup?

WM: Approximately two hours at the most, and that was due to travel, you know, I mean motorcade, especially with General Eisenhower.

MG: Now you were there for 12 hours before, as you said, the top brass...

WM: Right.

MG: ...came in...

WM: Exactly.

MG: ...and what did you and your men do within that 12 hours?

WM: Well we went all about the camp and see--you know, took care of mostly the, what we thought we were able to be medically treated, made them comfortable. In other words, we used literally hundreds of blankets and things like that. It was just comfort on their part to get the items, you know, within them.

MG: Were there any German soldiers still there?

WM: No, no. What was there was fled, others took themselves--made themselves as prisoners and basically no, as far as the SS, no, we cleared them out.

MG: Did you see any crematoriums, any gas chambers?

WM: I saw the one gas chamber.¹ What it was, it's a long building and within the building is these, this piping system, piping type of, like you and I would know of as like sprinklers, and that's the way they did it.

MG: How did you...?

WM: The ovens were path--the ovens were pathetic, the ovens were pathetic. The ovens were like taking a pizza and putting it in there, waiting for it to cook.

MG: How many were there?

WM: In the ovens? The total amount I have no idea?

MG: I mean how many ovens were there?

¹ This was very likely a disinfecting chamber. In addition to serving as a slave labor camp, "Ohrdruf " was a holding facility for over 11,000 prisoners on their way to the gas chambers and crematoria at Buchenwald. [<http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org>]

WM: There was four of them that we saw. There is, like four with a chimney like.

MG: When did you know what had happened in those chambers?

WM: Well immediately we were informed, I mean we were told by the ones that were--in fact one of the fellows that was calling to us, in other words, to one of the other fellows it was given them some clue that we had, told us that the ovens existed and then that's what made us go to these other buildings, and like I said to you before, it's, it procedure was that we were going to find out all this that existed, all that went on within the camps, and how it went on, and why it went on, and naturally, when we did our job, then we moved on to fighting.

MG: Did you get an idea of how many people had been--gassed?

WM: No, I never did, no. I know I could probably find out.

MG: Were there any Jewish soldiers in your group?

WM: My immediate group, no; within the company, yes. There was--last reunion we had, we were discussing that by the way, and it was funny, it was more or less in the term of, gee I wonder how--we got on the subject, I wonder how many Italians, how many [unclear] Irish did we have, you know, through our friendship and all that. A couple guys would pop up and say, what difference does it make, we all got along. But no, there was one fellow that I knew that I had K.P. one time with, in other words, Kitchen Patrol and his name was Cooperstein; I know he was Jewish.

MG: Do you know what their reactions were when they saw this?

WM: The reactions I heard from other fellows before our reunion in Camp Durham, North Carolina was that he totally took--he was sick, he just couldn't--you know General Patton walked away.

MG: Well, what happened...

WM: Did you know that?

MG: What happened when the Generals arrived?

WM: Oh they were stunned, they, they demanded...

MG: Now describe to me, who was there and what happened?

WM: Well General Bradley, General Eisenhower and General Patton were there. General Finley was there. There was...

MG: Excuse me, did they all come together?

WM: Well basically yes, because they all met in one particular place and were, actually they had what they called closed discussion about what I understand from past history as well as the museum to fit--coordinate everybody together so we wouldn't have one day this, next day this, coordination and the actual doing of whatever had to be done especially for the news people, but unfortunately the news didn't get back too quick because that's when Roosevelt died, and that was the headlines.

MG: Now, let me get back to this time frame...

WM: Excuse me, being the first concentration camp taken by American troops as we were...

MG: What's the time frame? You arrived, the Generals arrived 12 hours later?

WM: Yes.

MG: When did Roosevelt die?

WM: He died before they got there; that I'm almost doubly, doubly sure about. Because there was the news media, was there to take what they were taking, in regards to the conditions, the prisoners, the reactions, but what was known in the States as well as Europe that our President died, and that was like, I don't want to say--oh yes it was, it was the headline.

MG: Well, what happened when the Generals arrived? Describe that.

WM: Well they, they took, they came in to camp itself though, that was very strongly, you know, personnel. A lot of people there, I can't give you a figure, I really can't because I'd be guessing at it but the picture that I have and the pictures that you've seen describe the amount of personnel that was there, but through the General Patton he insisted that the ones that were involved in taking this camp, the troops that were involved in entering the camp be there for these pictures, which is what I have on record in terms of our history book as well as other pictures. That was very, I didn't have a camera but I understand a lot of individual fellows did, and then there's a magazine that I have here maintained pictures of other camps, Dachau, Auschwitz, and what have you.

MG: Ok so General Patton did that, what else happened? What did General Eisenhower say?

WM: General Eisenhower and General Bradley were more in the terms, what I would call, firm about seeing what they saw and wanted to see what they saw. General Patton was a, I have nothing against General Patton but he just couldn't take that, couldn't see it, couldn't look at it, he couldn't believe it. He kept saying over and over, "I can't believe this. I can't believe this."

MG: So what did he do?

WM: Well they, he just want back where his jeep is and stuff like that. That I did see. I'm not being a star witness here but I just saw what he did.

MG: And the other two?

WM: Understandable because there was other fellows there. There was others even in my own group, I mean it was just unexplainable what we saw.

MG: And General Bradley and General Eisenhower?

WM: They were there.

MG: Did they walk through the camp?

WM: Oh yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

MG: Did they talk to the inmates?

WM: They, I understand afterwards that they did, yes. In other words, when I say afterwards, in other words when they did the tour they went back to wherever the designated areas were for them to talk to somebody about it. They wanted to find out, but at the same token they made sure that the news people were with them and heard everything

that was said. They didn't want some clown that I already know about, not personally but heard about in the 1950's, that said that was all something that never happened.

MG: Did the news media take pictures?

WM: Oh yeah, sure, sure. That's how we got all these here. Well, you saw them.

MG: Now was there any burial of the dead?

WM: I understand there was, sure, I don't know, I wasn't there to see it. I was reeling while we were fighting towards Arnstadt and Zwickau and when we were there, we just picked up excerpts of fellows that went back for the mail and they say, "Oh, by the way we saw this, we saw that". In other words, all this was coordinated so it could be put into the history of the 4th floor of the Museum.

MG: So in other words, you didn't see any of the burials?

WM: No, I did not, no.

MG: Had you heard about the townspeople and...?

WM: Yes, and I saw them, they were hung?

MG: But I mean the people that they brought in to...?

WM: The denial, the denial was there, yes I heard that.

MG: Were they charged with the burials? Did they have to bury the people?

WM: They used the townspeople to do it.

MG: But that was just something you heard about?

WM: Yes, absolutely. I never, you know, I never witnessed them coming into the camp to be...

MG: How long did you stay there?

WM: The total whole--the whole thing totally was about two and a half days, into the third day almost, but we had to move on.

MG: And what did you do the second day or where did you sleep?

WM: Oh, we billeted in the houses around the town there, I mean in other words, we took the town.

MG: So you stayed in the town?

WM: Ohrdruf was taken by the 4th Armored Division and 89th--89th Division. Yes, we billeted ourselves within the camp. Let it be clear, that whenever we billeted in any town, regardless of where it was, we were setup, we, as an outfit under our training, you always setup a guard, you always had guards. You were like on four, off two. Then we moved out, as I say, to these other towns of fighting. I don't want to jump on the subject but...

MG: Let me just ask you. When you left, your squad left and you went on your order to continue, what was the reaction of the men?

WM: The reaction of the men was in a weird way of explaining it to you, we just all took a deep breath and said, "Let's get this job done. It's got to be new, it gotta be soon, it's gotta be soon."

MG: Did anyone, any officers, anybody explain to you what this was all about, and the treatment of the Jews or what had [unclear]?

WM: Well the actual, the actual, I'm gonna use the word the actual history of why it was done was absolutely known to us by the Information and Education Division of our Division. In other words, when we had any backup of hours or anything like that, in other words I went to Oberhof, I went to Oberhof, Germany, not Ohrdruf now, Oberhof Germany...

MG: Afterward?

WM: After this camp.

MG: Yes.

WM: You know, after Ohrdruf and we were there and they gave us, and they asked us if we wanted to hear what was the bringing on reason for this killing of the Jewish people, and closing their businesses down, and burning them. No, I didn't get home and learn about it, they told us there about it.

MG: So they did, they held seminars and orientations to this?

WM: Absolutely, absolutely, that's, no ifs or buts, at least I'm talking to you on behalf of the 89th Division, but I know it was done in other Divisions of those that took Dachau or any of the other camps as the time went on. It's just the fact is that I go on like this because we were the first.

MG: So you didn't know, none of you knew anything about this until...

WM: No.

MG: ...you hit there?

WM: No.

MG: And it was afterwards that they oriented you?

WM: Right, exactly. It was afterwards, still within the German country. In other words we weren't home, or going home and then they come and tell us about it.

MG: Ok.

WM: No, we learned about that there.

MG: So what happened after you left there, you went on to?

WM: We went onto Arnstadt.

MG: Ok.

WM: I may be pronouncing this wrong, and we took that town very heavily fought. The last of the remnants of the Germans that were there, and then we went from there to Zwickau and incidentally Zwickau is a town that was known for it's spas and fancy, you know, swim clubs and all that, so it was more or less like getting back to, "Wow, that's a decent shower I had," you know.

MG: And from there?

WM: From there we were supposed to go in to Austria and fight with the 3rd Army, but because of the circumstances of the Division within itself and what it accomplished, they decided to put us into the 8th Corp, 8th Corp of the 3rd Army under

Patton. But Patton proceeded with other divisions and went into Salzburg, Austria and when they were approaching Salzburg like we were approaching Zwickau, May the 8th came and the war was over.

MG: Is that when you heard that the war was...

WM: Yes.

MG: ...officially over?

WM: Yes, in Zwickau, Germany.

MG: What...?

WM: That's right near the Chesa--Czechoslovakia border.

MG: What month was that?

WM: That was in May.

MG: Well, what happened then?

WM: From there because of our system of going home by way of different points, in other words a father with two children, three children, and then down to the married men only, and then down to the single guys that were in combat longer than us, if they were replacements for our division, they went. There's numerous ways of getting home. I had 36 points, so I didn't get home. So what did I do, from that particular time, from May the 8th till the time I came home, I was doing occupational duty. Occupational duty was basically and only of displaced persons, getting them back to their home in Hungary, Poland, a lot of Polish, Netherlands, Holland, in other words, Belgium and lots and lots of French people that were prisoners when Germany took over France. We had to take them back and it was, it consisted of trucks and trains, and then there was a period of time where, as I say earlier--I believe I mentioned earlier, if not on the tape here, but I had one week in Nuremberg during the trials...

MG: Excuse me, I just want to go back for a moment. Something I forgot to ask you at the camp. Were there any children?

WM: No, no.

MG: Did you meet any German civilians the whole time that you were...?

WM: The only, the only time I had that one incident with the birth of a baby. But as far as German civilians the only thing that I, we encountered hundred and hundreds of them but in different cities as we fought for those cities or villages, to tell them to get them in a group and put them in either a schoolhouse or church. In other words, it was really basically, personally it was for us to be able to billet down for an evening, a night's sleep. But there was no physical or mental handling of those people. In other words you weren't--it was part of the International, you know, Red Cross.

MG: Now the DP camps that you were...

WM: Yes...

MG: ...involved in moving...

WM: ...Displaced Persons.

MG: ...the people, were any of these Jewish refugees?

WM: If they were, it wasn't known. In other words, I have heard many times after that, and I say that strongly because of handling these people, that there were some that really were not just Polish, but they did have either a sister--not a sister, maybe a grandfather or grandmother that might have been Jewish background. In other words, I never really encountered, person to person, of a person that would say that to you, in other words...

MG: Well the people in the, in these different camps, do you remember the name of some of these camps?

WM: No, I don't, because of reason of movement. I was, we took them and the military government come in and we move on. In other words, it wasn't our job to handle those people in regards to the camp as you took it, but what it was our job there was either to take those guards as prisoners or in self defense, kill them. But at the same time I will say that, unfortunately, not known to the American troops that there was some camps that were unfortunate, and even you know as I do, prisoners of war with our troops that existed in Germany that were hit by their own fire because we did not know they were there.

MG: Do you know why these people were in camps?

WM: As far as the DP, the displaced person, slave labor. They built things, they worked kitchens, they worked--well with the officers they did their bedding and all that. When you see these movies that you've seen in the past, that you see what the German had their particular maids that they had and etc., etc. They were used for that a lot, a lot.

MG: Were the, what condition were they in?

WM: They were, there were some that were what I would call, you know needed nourishment, you know what I mean, but I wouldn't say they were starving, no, I would not say that. In fact, we never encountered any. That one in Kirn, Germany, there was no starvation there. In other words, it was a prison camp, like our own GI's encountered, Stalag 17, and what have you, you know, you've heard the movies.

MG: So how long were you in this occupation?

WM: In occupation duty? I was there until June of '46.

MG: The war was over in '45...

WM: Five, right.

MG: ...and you stayed...

WM: Yeah, I spent a few Christmases over there.

MG: So after that, when were you assigned to Nuremburg?

WM: That was in Gallspach, Austria. I was then--see the 89th Division went home, and when it did go home, the troops that I explained earlier about married men and what have you. But also they encountered other divisions. For example, the 83rd, their married men went home with the 89th. But the 83rd Headquarters and 83rd Division that we were put into as people that didn't go home. That's what we went to, the 83rd Division in Linz, Austria. But I was in a town called Gallspach, Austria which I visited since, but anyway the job there was, naturally most of it was, again displaced persons and what have

you, and some of the camps, the unusual things it did for, out of gratitude for the way we gave them supplies in regards to candy, the goodies not the general food, but they made, I have, I have them in my own home here but not displayed. They made like jewel boxes out of orange crates. Picture orange crates, they made these different things for us and our insignia on them, the rolling W. But the 83rd Division primarily was told also to encounter knowingly, believe it or not, to the fact that we saw Ohrdruf and also, again been talked to us what created it, these leaders, Goebbels, Hess, you know I have a list here of all the ones that they decided that'd they'd take different divisions and what was left of the fellows of that division that encountered Dachau and all the different death camps and give them a chance to see or be part of the Nuremberg Trials. That was more or less a--I would use the word simply a setup that they thought would be good for us. And I, I, I lik--I didn't, wouldn't want a, you know, day after day after day but for one week I, I rather not, I don't want to say the word enjoyed, I just was gratified that I could see that the...

MG: Saw justice.

WM: ...no good bums were being tried.

MG: So what was your duty? What was your detail?

WM: Guard, just a guard...

MG: Where?

WM: At the door of the...

MG: Inside the court?

WM: In the court itself, yes, and then there was times I was a guard at the motor pool. In other words, where all the jeeps came in, trucks whatever, I had that for a couple days. It was different guard duty in a different way. In other words, out in the motor pool, you didn't hear what was going on, but when you're inside which was that one door, in other words they were--anybody that entered there, they were given ID cards and that's what we would just, "May we see your ID card?" Most of them wore it I would say [unclear]. Then there was the other time where we were given only one day, we sat in the court itself and listened to the back and forth, you know.

MG: Tell me who you saw, anyone notable and what you heard?

WM: In, in the...?

MG: In the trials, in the courtroom.

WM: In the trial itself? In the trial itself was--there was that one--it was the day, the day before I went back to my unit and they announced that Hess was, committed suicide, and that there was, went through the court quite heavy because he was a bum. I mean he was behind a lot of this.

MG: So who did you see and what did you hear?

WM: Basically I had written down here the ones that--to give you an idea on the interview here that the head of the interrogation was John Harlan, he was a Colonel with the U.S. and Francis Biddle was the Attorney General for the American Justice of the court. I don't know if you ever heard of these...

MG: Yes.

WM: ...names or not. So in other words, I was really basically, and then they--this here Leonardo Conti was the first SS doctor to commit suicide in prison. That was that particular week also.

MG: Did you see him?

WM: No, I never saw him, I never saw him. And the, actually the one thing--these here notes here are my own in regards to what I got out of it. In other words, when I was in there and found out about the Göring situation, they also said there was a Tex Wheelis, W-H-E-E-L-I-S* that befriended the Nazi Göring, and had something to do with the suicide, but that I understand in the library there's a book on that.

MG: But was there any others that you saw actually being prosecuted?

WM: No, I saw I must say to you that in addition to these here names that we discussed, we saw like SS generals that were on trial, that were the ones involved in these camps.

MG: What was the atmosphere in the court like?

WM: Silent, shhh, silence. Really that's the first time I ever encountered a courtroom--I don't want to say courtrooms are noisy but there was just--you could hear a pin drop when nobody was speaking and all the sudden there, you know the different lawyers and what have you. It was interesting, really it was interesting. I wish I had more knowledge and more time to it that I could explain to you what basically day to day operation was on that thing.

MG: Were, who were the observers in the courtroom?

WM: Mostly GIs. I would say basically and my own thoughts on it and yet my own thoughts amongst other fellows of my outfit that happen to be involved with it, as far as when I say involvement, were also on guard duty not necessarily the same time as I was, but we got, we found that it was, on behalf of the different divisions that were involved with the different camps as they were taken, sent their troops that were available and yet not hold anybody from going home, to Nuremberg. I mean it was very spread out. It wasn't just 89th Division, 87th Division. It was really...

MG: Were there German citizens that were involved [unclear]?

WM: If it was I wasn't aware of them.

MG: I see.

WM: In other words there were people there with civilian clothes on, but I, I was under the impression that maybe they were legal people, maybe they were news people, maybe they were--there was no cameras, you know, flashing around or anything like that.

MG: Where did you go after Nuremberg?

WM: I went back to Gallsbach. Incidentally we lived in a hotel in Gallsbach. In fact we stayed at that hotel when we went over in 1976. [cough] Excuse me, and we, from

* Papers regarding this at Lt. Jack G. Wheelis Collection; Eugene C. Barker Texas History Collection; Austin Texas.

there I was, basically our whole time element there was doing nothing but trans--excuse me, transportation work. In other words, a truckload of displaced persons back to Holland. In other words, we really did what I would call--that's what encountered me to be able to see Holland, Belgium, northern part of France because I was taking these people sightseeing tour.

[Tape two, side two ended.]

Tape three, side one:

MG: ...with William McCool. This is October 2002. Mr. McCool, how long, how much later did you remain in Germany?

WM: I remained in Germany until June, and then, of 1946. From Gallsbach, Austria I went to Bremerhaven, Germany, that's a seaport in the northern part of Germany, boarded a ship, a troop ship it was, and came back to the United States by way of New York City. When we came into New York City, from there we went to Camp Kilmer. In Camp Kilmer we were processed and given different shots and medical attention and all. Which I failed to do was--during the service because of the extensive firing and bombing and artillery, I lost my hearing, not totally but partially. Which I failed to do because of the anxiety on my part to want to get home and see everybody and even my future wife, I failed to go to this one particular time at the hospital there and report all this. I learned since then that now I have to wear two hearing aids but regardless of that I was glad to get back to Camp Kilmer. From Camp Kilmer, after they processed us there we went down to Camp, Fort Dix and that's where we were discharged.

MG: When were you discharged?

WM: I was discharged in June; the exact date was June the 10th of 1940--yeah, June 10th of 1946.

MG: What was your rank?

WM: Sergeant, sergeant which I made in crossing the Rhine. After I came back to my outfit after my brief three days, two nights of prisoner I, our sergeant had been wounded and they asked me if I would take it because of my scouting position, which I did, I used that for the rest of my service in Germany, as well as coming home.

MG: And then you came home from Fort Dix?

WM: Yes.

MG: To Rockledge?

WM: Rockledge, Pennsylvania.

MG: You mentioned that your future wife, when did you meet your future wife?

WM: I met my future wife before I went in the service. As I said I worked for a corner Unity and Frankford store but also my grandfather was an executive for John Wanamaker's and he had arranged that I could work Wednesday nights and Saturdays. And I worked in the clothing, men's clothing division, who incidentally gave me one beautiful going away party when I went into the service. But in view of that, the fact that I worked those two days, there was a service desk that handled returns and things like that and there was a woman there by the name of Elsie Banger and Elsie was my wife's cousin, excuse me, aunt. One day my future wife came in and she saw me and we got talking and we made a date. Then she was still a senior in high school, but still I made that date and then it took off from there.

MG: So when did you get married?

WM: We got married in 1948, and that was on November the 25th which happened to be Thanksgiving Day because of the business that my father-in-law was in was a meat business in the corner store and that was the day they were closed, so we got married that day.

MG: What is your wife's name?

WM: Margaret Banger, affectionately known as Nikki.

MG: Did you go back to school?

WM: Yes, we, what it was there, they had a courses that they sent to us by way of mail through the high school, or you could go up there and get them, and I took those and then that's the way we retained our high school education, me and seven other fellows.

MG: And did, what type of work did you do after you...?

WM: When I came out of the service I was actually full time at Wanamaker's. I became an assistant buyer. I did go to New York occasionally, and we were, with the buyer who happened to be Ann Movey but we, that was my job and I went with her, then I found that circumstances in terms of wages, that I would, my next door neighbor that I would go into working for the Kaiser Metal Division in Bristol, Pennsylvania which I did. I enjoyed that work, it was into the accounting division, I was learning things when suddenly it became out of business, and being out of work I decided, I had to find something, so I went down to, through my father-in-law and got me a job with Phelan's Meat Company and I worked there for a short time because then I found a job that I walked--I was walking on Chestnut Street and I saw a William Penn Shop, they had a big sign out, "We Are Hiring". So I thought what do I have to lose, so I went in there and filed an application and was hired for the supermarket business of Penn Food Company. I spent 27 years of it, with them 17 as a manager, and then after that went bankrupt, I went into the bank, I would say bank business, but I maintained a courier service between the Corporate Trust Security Clearance and New York City. Then from there I retired.

MG: How long ago?

WM: You lose track of time here. I, I've been out of there now since--well I'm 76, I was 62 years old when I left there.

MG: What do you do now?

WM: Retired and love it.

MG: How many children do you have?

WM: Children, I have four children. I have two girls the oldest and two boys, Margaret, Patty-Patricia, William Jr. and Michael.

MG: Are they married?

WM: They're all married and except for Patty and Margie they went in the medical profession.

MG: What do your sons do?

WM: My one daughter is a housewife, still is, and my other daughter is a teacher of Special Education in Haverford Township school system.

MG: And your sons?

WM: My son William Jr. is a teacher down at the University of Penn in midwifery.

MG: How many grandchildren do you have?

WM: I have 11 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.

MG: Remember everybody's name? [chuckle]

WM: Well, we'll start with Margie, that's Thomas, Chris, Matthew, and Elizabeth. With Patty it's Allison and Emily. With Bill, it's Benjamin, Lucas, and Shannon, and with Michael it's Kaisal and Alex. My great grandchildren are Alexis and Gregory.

MG: We don't want to leave anyone out. Now seriously let me ask you, when you came back and you married, did you share your experiences with anyone?

WM: No unfortunately, I say that unfortunately because it's better to do it, but I didn't do it and I didn't let it interfere with my personal life by way of threatening or being upset about what I did, and I just went on with my life and it was a great life as far as the family and all that, but there was a time there that I regret in this standpoint. My father was a First World War veteran and there were several times before I was married and even after I was married which was very cut short very much so by my father dying at the age of 51 years old. He was gassed during the First World War and it went through his body and he just didn't live that, but 51 years old is when he passed on, and I wish now in looking back on it as many times as he would say to me, "Would you want to talk about it son, you see 'cause I was in there and over there and you were and that's the way we communicated with our letters." In other words, I would just say in my letter as I said to him, "Dad, I'm near a certain town where you had the truck overturn on you." He knew then that I was on the border of France and Luxembourg. In other words there was different things that we communicated that way, but yes to answer the question I do regret that I didn't talk about it, but then in later time as years went on my oldest granddaughter, Allison, in 7th grade at the Haverford Middle School, they were having a class where they were bringing in different grandfathers and fathers of Vietnam or Korea to speak on the history aspect of the program that they were given, and they asked me if I would, she asked me if I would speak. I was unprepared, I'm not a speaker, I never went to speech therapy or anything like that, but I put my notes together and gave them what I thought was the right way to present it, and it's been going over now into my 5th year.

MG: How did they receive it?

WM: Tremendously received it in the standpoint that I was thanked by the teachers themselves in lovely notes as well as in person, and above all things that thrilled me was the fact that all these here children whether it was 60, or if it was 50, or if it was 70, and I still have the letters, taking up space in my apartment here, but they wrote to me and thanked me for speaking to their class and claimed that they learned a lot about the little nitty-gritty of things that's not in the history books.

MG: How did your grandchildren react to it, when you talk to them about it?

WM: My grandchildren acted very well. In other words, I say that in this standpoint, that after speaking while they were actually in the classes and many, well last four years the different classes I spoke to where they weren't involved, still it was, they in themselves ask me questions that they remembered I said, and they wanted a little more detail in respect to what I found or the circumstances or how I felt about the circumstances, but in a very constructive way. In other words, it was interesting to them and it was interesting that I could tell it to them.

MG: How about when you shared it with your wife and your children, how did they react?

WM: Actually my wife has never heard me talk. I talk around the house but she's never really been to any of the...

MG: Have you ever told her about your experiences?

WM: Oh yeah, different things that many times that we've been, especially when we went to the trip with the part of the family to Washington and we went to the Holocaust Museum and the other time was a lot of over the table gab that we talked about. Different things that the children reacted that I went with the classes to the Museum and I, one of the tour guide women. I'm trying to think of her name, forgive me, but she went with me and we went in to this one room and we did an answering question session, and I found that very rewarding because I was actually talking to the class I went with and my daughter went with me too, the one with Special Ed and but it was other schools that were asking questions.

MG: When you reflect back on all your experiences, how do you feel?

WM: I, I don't mean this to be in a political standpoint or in a standpoint of being veritably opposed to it by way of radio or television, but I am not for guns. I have a strong feeling on that because I know what they can do, I've seen what they've done, and I know what the future would be with a lot of these new weapons. I just don't see it. I, my reaction that way is strong, but the other factor is too that I find that in the standpoint of our elected officials which I have a lot of respect for a lot of them, and I am totally very much strongly because of what I've been through, a supporter of the men individually that are doing the job of what their government wants them to do. An example such as in Korea where my brother-in-law was in it, Vietnam when some of my nephews were in it...

MG: Were your children in the service?

WM: No, they were not because of the age category, but I found that I supported them for doing their job of what they have to do under the circumstances. But I feel very strong that a lot of the conflicts that we're facing today and knowing what nuclear can do and what other chemicals things can do to people, I feel strongly about diplomacy, and I fully am openly, even if people approach me which no one has done in all truth I'm saying this, that I support the living conditions and the unbelievable circumstances that the people are going through in the state of Israel. I just think that's terrible, I just think that's sad. I really mean that, not because of the people that's in my own friendship, my own cousin

married into a Jewish family and it just, it wasn't that that changed me or made me that way, but I just felt news-wise and what I've learned about it. It's sad, it really is sad, I'm strong about it, even in my faith I'm strong that, pray that G-d will put an end to this stuff.

MG: Do you think that your experience changed you or helped you in developing your values?

WM: Oh absolutely, even to this day of my age. I really mean it. When I go along the road or highway, when I'm driving and see these road rages. There was a time I used to think, "Oh, this guy ain't going to beat me," but I stopped being that way through the help of my wife, she changed me a lot. What they do, let them do if they want to ruin their life, although they don't, they ruin someone else's most of the time.

MG: Did you ever go back to France and Germany?

WM: Oh yes, in 1976. I don't know if I mentioned this to you on the tape before, but my son-in-law was stationed over there and I wanted to go over and see my grandson and we did, we spent a good portion of a month over there. I got time off at work and they were very nice about it, and we went and we had a good time there.

MG: How did you feel about going?

WM: There was a funny, there was a...

MG: Did you go to some of the...

WM: The funny experiences with each town was, that I found myself very much saying to my son-in-law, who is very well speaking in German, I definitely find that the--I was saying to him, like for example, just a quick example here, in Lorsch I say, "Would you think that I was in that town and in that hill up there laying on my butt, you know, waiting for something to happen and then I'd get caught," you know, and stuff like that. We go back to places that they--I said, I can't believe this. Fulda, Germany, Fulda, Germany--there is not one home, and incidentally there was nothing but single homes. I have pictures in my books here of it, and that was flattened by our air bombing and all that because of the strong head that they made with the German armies in that town, in that area, and to go back and see it rebuilt, Coblenz rebuilt, Zwickau rebuilt, I mean from what I remembered. My son-in-law did a, very graciously I say this about him, but he took me back the whole trip from Mersch, Luxembourg, back to every stop, but then when we hit the East, that's when the state was, you know, divided.

MG: East Germany.

WM: We hit East Germany the guards wouldn't let us in there even though my son-in-law had ID for you know, Naval, and they said, no we could let you in but we couldn't let your father-in-law in. So what we did was geographically on a map we went to Hof, Germany and then we swung down into Austria, because Austria was part of my life too, you know in...

MG: What about Ohrdruf?

WM: Ohrdruf no, no, that was in East Germany. I would have liked to have gone back there, I really would.

MG: How do you...?

WM: Now we were four years ago we had a whole group that went back and, and it was quite a ceremony. I have a book here and pictures of what they did and where they went?

MG: Who? You said a whole group from?

WM: From the 89th Division.

MG: Ok, so that has be...

WM: But I was not able to go due to weddings and other things that were in my...

MG: Tell me about your regiment and what they have been doing?

WM: Now, the--our Division meets regimental-wise, which is very few of us anymore, every two years. We just had one this past September in Indianapolis, Indiana. I was unable to go, and respectively, and I'm not saying this critically, but my wife's health, I just--I would not want to go by myself, so anyway, we did not meet and I hope and if everything goes well to go to the next one. And why I say that so strongly is because it's in Washington, D.C. I would like to get to see that. When we go back there, not to prolong this conversation on it, we talk about things that were our past but we also talk a lot more about our current activities.

MG: What about the book that they published?

WM: The history book itself? That's, that's still available, it's, this was given to us by the historian part of the division, and it was made up, and we received it in--it was late 1947 that we received them. But it's the whole thing.

MG: Does that have testimonies of anyone at Ohrdruf?

WM: No, no, it's just the history of our movement, our battles, and what we encountered, but no, what you're referring to in regards to the stories, true stories out of the whole conflict, especially about Ohrdruf, a lot of it is being put in individually as well as the division of the officers onto the computer. As a matter of fact, when we're done here I'll show you two tapes that I have.

MG: Did, in all of your experiences in the service and everything that happened, did you ever experience any acts of antisemitism or discrimination in the service?

WM: In our units?

MG: Well, with any of your contacts in the service?

WM: No, no, well I'm not including Ohrdruf what we encountered there, but or even at displaced persons camp, we went in under, you know in Kirn, Germany, but no, no, within the division or within our social life, our trips to Switzerland, England, Ireland, France many times, no we never had what I would call that type of thing.

MG: How do you or the regiment with this history and books being published regard the experiences at Ohrdruf in relation with the whole total experience of the battles?

WM: That was number one in terms of, in memory on my part, and what effect it had on me in seeing that, that stands out, that stands out. I can't put anything else, not even my social life I could put above that. I mean it's as simple as that. It had a lot of effect on

all of us.

MG: I wonder...

WM: Especially when you were, like if you took like, for example, some other division that was your rear echelon, in other words, they would relieve you when you were on R&R. They saw it, and perhaps most of it was done by way of news people. In other words, I don't want to say that everybody in the whole wide Second World War saw these camps, no not everybody did, but there's a lot of people out there that saw each individual ones. I mean I never saw another one, but I saw that one and that was enough. And so it's basically, it's the number one item.

MG: Well I want to thank you for doing this.

WM: Well I hope I did something that will help you.

MG: I think it will help all of humanity to realize the history.

WM: And I do think it was a pleasure meeting you and getting to know you as far as the circumstances here, but you could actually, if you start looking through your books and if you look through your maps, you could say, "Oh wow," you know, something else to tell you, something else to tell you. Whether it would be silly or not. I mean people say to me, "You saw what?" Yeah, I saw a baby born. I didn't even watch my own children being born. [chuckle]

MG: Is there anything else you would like to add?

WM: The whole, I thoroughly enjoyed doing this, and I didn't find it tiring or anything like that, but I find that there is so many things that I realize that I kept that reflect back to what I just said, I mean I have maps here that, like when we hit this gas station I took this one here and I put it out and I just decided this is ridiculous, I want to be able to tell people this is where I was. I just took a pen and I marked everything I went through, every town, every nook and cranny. You know what I mean, things like that, you know. I showed the kids in school, these are old maps from Germany.

MG: Well, I want to thank you and I hope you continue your speaking to the schools.

WM: Yeah, I'll tell you, I'm due for one, I don't know if she said March or what, March or April.

MG: [unclear]

WM: That was in Washington Township.

MG: Oh.

WM: Turnersville.

MG: Yeah.

WM: Where my daughter lived, yeah.

MG: Ok.

WM: Yeah, Elizabeth's going in--she's in seventh grade now.

MG: Well thank you.

WM: I don't know why they--well thank you for having me. [Tape three, side

one ended; interview ended.]