

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Martin Gaudian
February 16, 2011
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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Donna Linton, National Court Reporters Association.

MARTIN GAUDIAN

February 16, 2011

Question: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview conducted with Mr. Martin Gaudian on February 16th, 2011 conducted by Ena Nasadoskis (ph) at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. And we will begin our interview, Mr. Gaudian, first of all, by thanking you for agreeing to meet with us, for coming all this way from Milwaukee to see us today, and I would like to start it pretty much at the beginning. We're going to be talking about your service in the U.S. military, but to get to that point, I would like to know a little bit about you. So could you tell me where you were born, when you were born?

Answer: Okay.

Q: And we'll go from there.

A: I was born in Paullina, Iowa, a small town of about 900 people, on October 27th, 1922.

Q: Do you have brothers and sisters?

A: Yes. I have two brothers and one sister. Two brothers -- one brother is 90, the other one is 86 now, and my sister is 76.

Q: So she's the baby of the family?

A: Right.

Q: Okay.

A: I was 12, I think, when she was born.

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Q: So are you the second youngest?

A: I'm the second, right.

Q: Okay. And your mother and your father, what are their names?

A: My father was Albert H. Gaudian and my mother was Dora Wilhelmina Gaudian.

And he was born in Germany and he came over to the United States when he was nine years old, and when he was, I believe, 32 he was in the Army in World War I and went over to Germany, yes.

Q: And what –

A: He was a bugler in France.

Q: Do you know what part of Germany he came from?

A: It's Pomerania.

Q: Ah, yes, Pommern.

A: Right. I think that's where it was, right. My mother was born in Chicago.

Q: Uh-hum.

A: Right.

Q: So you're actually first generation American on your father's side?

A: That's right.

Q: And did he still speak German?

A: Yes, he did. In fact, we went to a German church. I also learned to speak German because he had a brother living with us who spoke German and I sort of learned as I went along.

Q: Did you?

A: And I took three years in college and it worked out very well for me, because I knew a lot of vocabulary.

Q: At home did your mother know German?

A: Yes.

Q: So did they speak German at home?

A: They did at the beginning.

Q: They did at the beginning?

A: And then, of course, when the '30s came, when the thing happened over there, they didn't like that in the United States, you know, so they cut out the German service. But originally when I went to our church, Lutheran church, they had German, they had English for a few years, right, in the 20s, I imagine.

Q: Did you see yourself as -- I mean, it may sound like a strange question but did you see yourself as German, German-American, or just an American who had some sort of roots in Germany?

A: That's what I would say, American, right, right. I don't know -- I imagine we -- he still had relatives over there, I'm sure. About nine children came over here.

Q: Wow.

A: It was a big family.

Q: And why did they do that? Why did he come over here?

A: Well, I think they just wanted to get the good life over here, I think, you know. They wanted to give -- and some of the children died of that flu that came around, I guess.

Q: Oh, in 1918?

A: Right. They didn't make it. They lost several, two or three, I'm sure. Uh-hum.

Q: And did they all settle in Iowa?

A: Yes. My father, I believe, he was a carpenter, most of his life, but his father farmed.

In fact, his father passed away when I was about three or four years old, and at that time when someone died, they had them in your parlor, in your own home, and I had never seen him.

Q: So your grandparents were also there? It wasn't just your father who had left?

A: No. My grandparents, right, and he started the farm, and then my father moved to this small town and became a carpenter, contractor. He only had about a fourth grade education, but he learned it all by himself.

Q: Was he a good carpenter?

A: Yes, he was. I worked for him for years before I went into the army after I graduated from high school for years -- for one year, I guess, and we built many farm buildings: Barns and corn cribs and hog houses.

Q: Things like that?

A: Right. Uh-hum.

Q: So you grew up in -- can you tell me the town's name again?

A: PaullinA:

Q: PaullinA:

A: P-A-U-L-L-I-N-A, right, PaullinA:

Q: PaullinA:

A: I guess it was named maybe after a Paul and a Lina, probably.

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Q: It could very well be.

A: Right.

Q: I have an aunt named PaullinA:

A: My mother's name is unusual, WilhelminA: A good German name, I guess.

Q: That's right.

A: So we both were in the war. He was in World War I. I had a picture taken with me with my uniform and him. I wish I would have brought that and showed that.

Q: How interesting. Did he talk about his service in World War I?

A: Not -- well, he mentioned that in the trenches he did get some of that experience and he was a bugler. I mean, he talked about that. He still played the bugle. When he was home, he would entertain us with that once in a while.

Q: Did he ever talk about it feeling a little strange or did it feel strange to him that, you know, he came from Germany and he was fighting on the American side against Germany?

A: You know, I never heard anything about that. I think of that now, but never, not really.

Q: Okay.

A: No. They didn't mention that at all, that they were fighting...

Q: Do you know what year he came to the United States?

A: Yes. It was -- let's see. I think it was about 19 -- 1906 maybe, somewhere right around. He came through Ellis Island.

Q: He did?

A: Right. Uh-hum.

Q: I'm sure you could find him on the ship lists up there because they have a wonderful museum.

A: Right, right. I gave them a donation once and I guess my name is there somewhere, too, now.

Q: And your mother, tell us a little bit about your mother.

A: Well, she was born in Chicago, and then she was one of these a farmer -- let's see, how was that? Her mother wasn't married at the time. I guess he left them or something and so she wanted a husband, and that's a time when they used to write letters to Iowa, and there was a man there who had accepted -- you know, wanted her to come and be his wife, and that's what she did.

Q: Her mother?

A: Her mother. And then she came with her, of course, and so she was a half sister to four other full sisters. And that was a big family, also. I think there were eight of them.

Q: Oh, my.

A: Yeah. It's a real large family.

Q: Did you know your aunts and your grandparents on her side?

A: Well, I only got to see the father, grandpA: The mother was gone. I can't remember her, no, I cannot. Then my mother went to a German school in Germantown was the name of a town where she was, but it was a farming community. Very small, but it had a church, a Lutheran church, in German. They spoke German there for a while. But then when she came to Paullina, then it switched over.

Q: And how did your parents meet? Did they ever tell you?

A: No, they didn't. Well, he had a brother, I guess, and they both found the two sisters, I guess, and that's how it happened, uh-hum.

Q: What year did your parents marry?

A: They were married -- let's see, they were married in 19 -- what was it? 1920, I think it was, or '19. Right after he came back from that. He was a little older, too. He was 32, I believe, and she was about 20 or 21. She lived to be 92. He lived to be 99 --

Q: Wow.

A: -- my father.

Q: Wow. Those are ripe old ages.

A: He had a brother who was 99 also. And the other sisters all made it into their 90s except one, I guess.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the town. Did your mother stay home? Was her job raising the kids?

A: Yes. She was a homemaker, very good cook, and she sold and had clothing clubs and that was about it, I guess, right. She was a real homemaker. She taught me how to make cakes and bread and how to make ____+. I appreciate it now, because my wife teaches piano and so once in a while I make the meals now.

Q: She must appreciate that.

A: Yeah, right. And her coffeecake was super.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the towns. You mentioned before they were small and people was it?

A: Right, about 900 to 1,000. Maybe today it might be just a shade over, but it was -- well, let's see, they had one or two grocery stores is all and then one bank, and most of them were farmers. They would come in on Saturday nights, that was a great night in a small town. You know, the band played. I played in the band in high school, and we would be on the center of the town, you know, playing, and people were walking the streets. And Saturday night was a real get-together for everybody.

Q: Could you say that you knew everybody in the town?

A: Almost everyone, right. Yes, just about. You did, yeah. And they're all gone now. Almost everyone that I knew, I think, they're all gone.

Q: So we'll keep on going. Hang on a minute. In the town were there -- was it mostly a Lutheran town? Was it mostly people who were German immigrants?

A: I would say it was very heavy on German immigrants. Very heavy, I believe. Yes, it would be, uh-hum.

Q: And were there any other denominations?

A: Although there were -- yes. There were Methodists, Presbyterian. We had Norwegian.

Q: Norwegian?

A: Uh-hum. Those four. You had Presbyterian, Norwegian, Methodist, Lutheran, uh-hum.

Q: Any Catholics?

A: No, no Catholics. Not in our town.

Q: Okay.

A: There's one nearby, though, I guess, in Primghar, I think it was. Uh-hum, that's right. There was none, no Catholic church. No, not in our town.

Q: Any Jews?

A: What?

Q: Any Jews?

A: Maybe one or two. I think so. I don't remember. Possibly.

Q: Possibly?

A: Irish. A few Irish. But let's see. What else? Let me think. That's about it. It was strong on the German side, right, uh-hum.

Q: But I would take it that there wasn't a synagogue or a Catholic church or something like that?

A: No, no.

Q: So no larger communities there?

A: No.

Q: So mainly farmers, mainly German, not entirely, Norweigan as well?

A: Right, and small businesses like the lumberyard and painters and carpenters, whatever, several besides my father. And, well, we had a small high school. Now it's a consolidated. They took three towns and put them together, I guess. I graduated in 1941.

Q: You graduated and so you were 17, 18 years old in 1941?

A: Right. I was a little older. I was 18, I believe.

Q: You were 18?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did you do after that?

A: Well, then I worked for my father about two years carpentering and then I was drafted.

Q: When were you drafted?

A: I went in in 1943, April of '43. I spent three years and one month altogether, I think, in the Army.

Q: Can you tell me about -- you have an older brother and an older sister; is that right?

A: My older brother, he was in the Coast Guard. He rode a horse along the North Carolina shores watching for bodies that washed up when the German submarines were out close to our coast.

Q: And did he find them? Were there bodies?

A: Once in a while he would find a body coming in and he had to report things like that.

Q: Well, how about -- and explain to me more if there was a German submarine along the coast, does that mean if there was someone walking along the beach that they would shoot them?

A: Possible. It could be. Yes, he did carry a gun.

Q: He did carry a gun?

A: Yes, he did.

Q: But where did the bodies come from? From the submarine?

A: From the ships that were sunk.

Q: I see.

A: Right.

Q: I see.

A: And even when I shipped out from Boston, we had the same scare. We went out too far on a big convoy ship, they spotted a German sub even in '43 quite close, and we had cruisers going around our Liberty Ship and they did drop some depth charges later, but I don't know if they ever got the sub or not.

Q: So your brother, when he entered the Coast Guard, did he volunteer for the Coast Guard?

A: Yes, he did volunteer, right.

Q: Okay.

A: And then my other younger brother was also -- he ended up in Belgium. In fact, one time we were very close together, I guess, but didn't know it.

Q: So you had three sons [sic] in the U.S. military?

A: Right.

Q: One in the Coast Guard, two in the Army?

A: My daughter -- other daughter was in the Air Force as a nurse. So two, yeah.

Q: By three sons, I meant your father's sons.

A: All three of us boys were in the service, right.

Q: Your elder brother, though, he signed up before 1943?

A: Yes, he did. I think it was '42. He was one year ahead of me, right. He's three years older than I am.

Q: What about the other boys in your class? Were most of them drafted?

A: Yes. Two of them shipped out with me when I went in and I ended up in Kearns,

Utah, and they went on to California: So I was chosen for the Air Force first and they went to the Infantry, I guess, in California:

Q: And when you were drafted, was that the first time you left Iowa?

A: For any long it was -- for trips is all I had taken, Des Moines, the capitol, our senior class went there, and that's about it, right.

Q: Your senior class went, too, but did you go out of state someplace before?

A: Oh, yes. We went to South Dakota once. There was a radio station there that my mother liked in Yankton, South Dakota, and she used to listen to the broadcast from there and she wanted to go there.

Q: So you did?

A: Yeah, right. Never made it to Chicago, though. I didn't. That was it though, really.

Q: That was it?

A: Uh-hum.

Q: Well, you said earlier that in the '30s, when things started happening in Germany, something changed in the atmosphere and so your folks didn't speak German at home as much or --

A: Right.

Q: -- there wasn't a service in German anymore?

A: Right.

Q: Do you have any memories of how that happened, because if the town was heavily German background --

A: Well, let's see. It was just -- I guess they were afraid of what other people were

thinking. That was it. Now, some people probably were turned off by that, you know, that we still had a -- I don't think they rioted or anything or had posters on the street corners but that would have happened perhaps in a larger city.

Q: Did you have news of what was going on in Germany? How much international news did you get?

A: Well, not very much, really. Well, we had the Des Moines Register, which was a good paper but it -- oh, yes, we did have it there, yes.

Q: And were your main news sources that newspaper or other sources?

A: Yeah. The Des Moines Register, we had the Sioux City Journal, and, of course, our local, but they printed occasional articles from what the World News would say, but, you know, other than that, no.

Q: What about radio?

A: Oh, yes, radio was strong. Right. Yeah, we would sit there and listen to those programs, Andy Gump and all of those old one. Amos 'n' Andy, that was a favorite, right.

Q: I'm trying --

A: And music, we liked -- she liked the music from there. Lawrence Welk.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: In fact, he came to our town.

Q: That must have been an event.

A: He played in our town when he had about six or seven people.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: Lawrence Welk, right. In that little town of Paullina he became famous, right.

Q: I'm sure.

A: He became a millionaire, billionaire, right. And that was a Saturday, I remember that, and he was there.

Q: When you were drafted, the war had started but the United States hadn't been involved yet?

A: Right.

Q: And you were drafted before Pearl Harbor; is that right?

A: No. After.

Q: Excuse me. You were after --

A: After Pearl Harbor.

Q: You were drafted in June of '43?

A: I was probably -- I was signed up already right away. You know, we had to sign up at 18, I think it was, or whatever it was.

Q: Excuse me, so I confused it. You graduated probably before Pearl Harbor?

A: Right, so they held off two years before they called me. I'm surprised in a way that they called all three of us from one family. Today they probably wouldn't do that anymore.

Q: That's right.

A: But we were all three. And my mother had three stars on the window.

Q: She must have been pretty scared, too. Proud and scared.

A: She was, right.

Q: Can you tell me, do you remember news of Pearl Harbor?

A: Yes. I remember exactly where I was.

Q: Where were you?

A: I was coming out of a movie theater in our town, it had been a western or something, and I get to the middle of the street and someone yells out, "we've been attacked." I know exactly where I was on that street. I can put an X there.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: And so it really stuck in your memory?

A: Yes, right.

Q: In what way? What did you feel when that that happened?

A: Well, the trouble was we weren't following the news close enough what was going on. We should have almost known that something was going to happen, but in this little town I don't think many people there either got -- really got it, put it together, so it was a shock, yes, it was.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then, of course, they said, ut-oh, that means you'll probably be going soon, and people were talking.

Q: Were there -- oh, go ahead. You wanted to say something?

A: We left from a -- when I left, we left from a small town about 10 miles from our home town on a bus to Des Moines, go there early in the morning, about 4:00 or something, and we had to take a test right away.

Q: And how many people left on that bus? Was it a special bus?

A: There were about six of us going for the Army and there were other people on there just going to Des Moines.

Q: So it was a regular public bus?

A: Uh-hum. Right.

Q: So you said good bye to your folks at the bus stop?

A: Well, my father came. I said good bye to my mother, and that was something. And we got -- we stayed there about two days before they assigned us, to put us on the trains. Quite an experience for a young person, you know, leaving like that, but at that age I don't think that we gave it as much thought as we should have, you know, but...

Q: Do you remember any of your thoughts going through your mind at that time?

A: Not a whole lot, but when we left, it sort of had gotten away from me, but I know the test was early in the morning and we were tired, but I must have scored quite well because they picked me for the Air Force, and I figured --

Q: That's a pretty good place.

A: -- that's a little boost, right. I guess I had enough left. And I did graduate. I won the allegiant award for the person who was supposed to be successful in the class.

Q: So tell us a little bit about that? So you took the test in Des Moines, and then what happened after that?

A: I went to Kearns, Utah, and stopped there. We stopped along as we dropped them off all along the way, but I was the first one dropped off, I guess, at Kearns.

Q: By bus?

A: On train.

Q: By train?

A: Right. That was a train -- it was an old base that they changed into a training base for the Air Corps. And then they sent me to school in Colorado, Fort Collins. I went to a six-week school there and I worked for -- I mean, the airplane supply when I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and that's where I was stationed for two years.

Q: So let me retrace these steps. Do you remember the day you were -- not drafted but the day you left home to start your Army service? What month was that?

A: April.

Q: That was April, 1943?

A: Right.

Q: And so you're in Des Moines for two days and then you're in Kearns, Utah?

A: Kearns, Utah.

Q: And stayed for how long?

A: Probably six weeks, eight weeks.

Q: How large was Kearns, Utah? How large was the base?

A: Oh, it was a big base. I would imagine there was over 20,000 there probably. It was quite large. And each of us was assigned a drill master, you know, for a group in our barracks.

Q: Did people already assume that the U.S. is going to go to war with Germany in Europe, or were you thinking more or less you would be shipped out somewhere in the Pacific?

A: Yeah, I think so. I think the Pacific was more in the minds of people. I think it was Being (?marry?) and all in that part, but then sometimes they would ship you from California to go the other way, from the other direction to go that way, that was hard to figure out sometimes.

Q: You're in the Army now?

A: Right. And then when the bombs came -- I don't know if you want me to tell you about it now.

Q: Oh, I do, but I'm going to get there.

A: Oh, okay.

Q: I'm going to get there. I want to get a sense of -- I want to get a sense of what various stops you were on in your Army service, on your military service. So we're starting with the Air Force and you went from Kearns, Utah --

A: To Fort Collins, Colorado, by train again, and had about a two-month course there.

Q: On what?

A: An Army course for the Air Corps.

Q: For the Air Corps?

A: For working in a maintenance area where you supplied the supplies for B-17s. Yes, it was a B-17 base, and then I worked there two years. I got my promotions in one month, three months in row. It starts out PFC and then corporal and sergeant, right up the ladder.

Q: Well, pretty fast?

A: It was quick.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then I went over there.

Q: So you went from Fort Collins then you go to Fort Dix?

A: No. Fort Collins -- yes, yes, that's right. First I went to Mitchel Field up in Long Island.

Q: What's that?

A: That was an air base there.

Q: Okay.

A: But then I was only there a few days. They needed someone in Fort Dix, New Jersey, so they shipped me back down there, but I did get to go up there and see -- long train ride up to Long Island.

Q: And at Fort Dix, that was still Air Force?

A: Yes, that was an Air Force base for B-17.

Q: For B-17s?

A: It also had Army there, too, I guess. It was divided sort of half and half. They had this big airfield there.

Q: So if you were there for two years, how did you spend your time? What was a typical day like?

A: Well, it was a lot of drilling we did at times. We had to keep our physical -- keep in shape. And then I worked in the supply center it was. We had to organize all of the equipment, and when a plane came in and needed a part, we had to get it and deliver it to them. So that was mainly what I was doing, the technical supplies.

Q: And that was two years?

A: Yes, two years about. Maybe a little short of two but -- because I spent a little over a year in Germany.

Q: So it was from April of '43, April '44, and then was it from Fort Dix that you left for Germany, that you left for Europe?

A: No. Then I went to Texas. They gave me another six-week refresher on more like infantry training, you know, in case we would have to join the infantry.

Q: But you were still Air Force at that point?

A: Right. More or less, right. Uh-hum. Right. And then they assigned me -- well, when the (?bomb?) came, then they assigned me to the engineer battalion, 15th Engineer Battalion, right.

Q: So that's where the switch came from Air Force to Army?

A: Right.

Q: Okay, and that's when you were in Texas?

A: Right.

Q: Okay, and then what happened?

A: You see then -- well, then I get the order, I guess, I get to go home on a little vacation, or furlough they call it, and then it's over to Boston, I guess, and we shipped out on Liberty Ship.

Q: Was that the first time you were in a big city?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: What kind of --

A: Trenton. Trenton was, I guess, yeah, would have been the biggest one. I went there every weekend. Oh, and the fortunate thing, there the minister of our church there, Lutheran church, he was a classmate of my brother in our high school, so I stayed with them once in a while on weekends.

Q: In Trenton?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: That was nice. Imagine having someone from your hometown, you know, right there. Oh, and I had another experience. Walking the street -- this is unusual. Walking the street one Saturday night I passed the tavern and out of the tavern comes this man. I'm walking by, I'm going to his house, the pastor's house, and he says, "Hello, Marty," a man from my hometown, and he's being shipped over to Germany real fast. They had to leave immediately. They all came out of that tavern and he said, "We've gotta go, we're leaving," and he ended up getting burned -- he was a cook, and he got burned all over his face and his arms.

Q: Did he survive?

A: He carried the scars with him. Right, uh-hum, yes, in PaullinA: He worked in the grocery store. But just seeing him, that was unusual. That was one in a thousand maybe.

Q: And this was still in Trenton?

A: Yes.

Q: This was still in Trenton?

A: Right.

Q: So from Texas you get shipped -- you know that you're going over to Europe?

A: Right.

Q: You have a furlough to say good bye. Do you remember what that was like, being at home?

A: That was just -- oh, guess what? I had to walk home. It was in December. I had to walk home in the middle of a snowstorm, and I started walking from where I ended up on a train in a small town or something and here I'm walking in this cold weather and here comes a snowplow, and he recognized me from Paullina, so he picked me up on the snowplow and brought me home, and that was wonderful.

Q: And your brother wasn't there?

A: No.

Q: Your older brother --

A: No. Brothers were gone. You know, he was in Carolina and the other boy was -- the other boy probably hadn't quite gone yet. He left after -- he was younger, so he probably went in the next year, maybe after I did so... Let's see, where are we? Okay, then --

Q: We're at your parents and you're at home and it's before you leave for Europe, and do you have any memory of that good-bye trip?

A: Well, I remember my mother made me my special banana pie. It was very touching. I mean, they took it quite well, I guess. They said, "Well, the Lord will take care of things," you know, so -- right. Then I went to Boston, I told you, that's where we shipped out on the Liberty Ship. We actually loaded at night and when we woke up the next morning, here we are out in the Atlantic Ocean with a hundred ships, I would guess,

around us, Liberty Ships, all kinds of ships, a big armada -- what do they call it?

Q: Armada?

A: Armada of ships, yes, and then all of these cruisers going around, and then we knew there was some problem, and then our captain told us, yes, they had sighted a submarine and they're making sure that everything is secure. So we could have been hit I suppose.

Q: Now, in Boston, you were there for just --

A: Just -- right. It was so quick. At night we loaded --

Q: And then you were gone?

A: -- and then we were gone. We were out.

Q: And do you remember the first time you saw European soil?

A: Yes. It was -- here again I was sleeping, and when I woke up after the end of the journey, here we are in the middle of the English Channel and the bells they have out in the water was ringing, and that was the most beautiful sound even though the war was not over yet, you know, not quite, and here we are sitting there and waiting to go ashore.

Q: Where did you land?

A: Lahar. They put us on a truck and then we went to this first stopping point, some little town. I remember we ended up there in a train -- first we took a train across French -- that's right. A___+.

Q: So when did you -- do you remember the date you landed?

A: Yeah. I've got it on my records, but let's see. Oh, boy. I think it was -- I think it was April again, somewhere around that time, April.

Q: April '45?

A: Yeah. Well –

Q: Or was it --

A: I think it was April '45, yes.

Q: Because --

A: It was very close. I was close to it, but it was over when I got over there, right.

Q: So April of '45 you take a train across?

A: We were crossing France.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Then they put us on a truck, an Army truck at some point, and then we went to this small town in Germany first, but we didn't stay there very long. Then we went to another little town for a while, Furstenfeldbruck or something and then we ended up going to Dachau.

Q: You were going to tell me something about Battle of the Bulge.

A: Well, that's when they -- that's when I actually went, was drafted, you know. Like, it switched over to the Army from the Air Corps.

Q: Because of that battle?

A: Because of the Bulge.

Q: Because of the Bulge?

A: That's why. They needed extra reserves just in case because that was a serious point, so they were building up the forces to make sure that...

Q: Did it matter to you?

A: Not so much, no. I just took instructions -- I guess I was young enough to take it in

stride. Now I think about it, you should have been a little bit afraid maybe. Not really.

Well, that's a normal thought, isn't it?

Q: Yes, it's very normal.

A: And I knew that a lot of my friends already -- one of my -- the fullback on my football team had been killed over in Germany. He started out in Alaska, but he wanted to get into the fighting, so they switched him over to Germany, and he died there in the Bulge, I believe.

Q: Can you tell me, do you know how many boys from Paullina were drafted in the end, how many served in the army during World War II?

A: How many?

Q: Uh-hum.

A: From my class or --

Q: From the town.

A: Oh, boy, let's see. I would bet there would be -- there were a lot of them. I would say 20 or more. 20 or 30 probably, right, yes.

Q: That's quite a lot for a small town?

A: Right, it was a lot. Because I see the names now, you know, on the list that died, the Veterans, and there's a lot of them.

Q: And was he the only one you know of who didn't survive?

A: Well, let's see now. Yeah. All the others were either killed in the war or they're gone. In fact, you won't believe this, on my football team, I'm the only one left.

Q: Oh, my. Oh, my.

A: And I was a center for the team, and everybody's gone.

Q: Well, tell me a little bit about some of the others that were killed in the war.

A: Well, this one was a fullback on our team. His father ran a grocery store in the town. And the other one was one of my best friends that played with us when we were children.

Q: What was his name?

A: He was in the infantry. He was killed over there, too, somewhere. I don't know exactly where.

Q: What was his name?

A: Wayne Poreman. And then --well, there was another one, Martin Poreman, another one, same thing, but he died later, though. He survived the war.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay.

Q: I'm looking at those who died in battle or died in the war.

A: There's another one on our team -- no, he didn't die in the battle. I would say there were just two that I remember, actually.

Q: Okay.

A: The rest, they made it back. My brother made it back, too. My younger brother from Belgium, he made it back.

Q: When you had landed in France, do you remember your first impressions of what you were seeing?

A: Gee. Well, I remember when we were on the train we were going along and this one must have been a farmer, somebody, he waved at us and there, the people along the way

were waving at us. We had the big door open, you know, so we could look out. And then the big experience is when we came through Munich. And I think I mentioned in my letter that it had bombed, the railroad station there, and there were hundreds of mailbags - - did I tell you that -- on the ground?

Q: Tell me now.

A: Hundreds of mailbags, you know, the huge -- and the letters were strewn all over. I wish I had brought some of those letters with me, but maybe that wouldn't have been the right thing to do, either. But I did look at a few that were torn open. It was from German mothers sending pictures of their children to their husbands out on the Russian front.

Q: So you could read German and you could know what they were saying?

A: A little. I got a few things out of there, right, that I could understand, that they were expressing their thoughts.

Q: What did you feel when you saw those?

A: That made a very -- not a hateful feeling and yet, you know, in between there that, yes, these are mothers that are -- they may not have had anything to do with this mess here, you know, of Hitler and his...but that --

Q: What did you know about Adolph Hitler, because I'm trying to get a sense of how much people knew in the United States, how much the guys in the Army knew?

A: Well, you know, they would always talk about it and they would say a joke about it. They would say, "Go get that guy." And they gave him a name. I can't remember what it was. It wasn't a good name. "Go get him," that's what they would say. That's about all I can remember. People will tell you, they didn't follow it close enough either, you know,

that it was going to happen. I don't think anyone really –

Q: Did you see during the time -- if you went over in April of '45 and you're going through France and you end up in one small German town and another and then eventually through, did you see any battle? Did you see any corpses, did you see any --

A: When we went by this one bridge there, there were bodies hanging over the railing.

Q: Was this in Munich?

A: As we passed through Munich going on, there were bodies hanging over, and I saw one man standing on the bridge, and he must have had convulsions or something because just imagine from that distance I could see how he was coughing and spitting up blood or something, and it was just -- I remember that. That must have made an impression on me seeing him there, but these bodies are –

Q: Were those the first bodies that you saw?

A: Yes, those are the first ones there --

Q: Okay.

A: -- hanging over. And then -- but those mailbags, though, that hangs with you. You don't forget that, because, ooh, I wonder whatever happened to those, if they picked them up and...

Q: If they ever got delivered?

A: That's what I wonder. It would have been nice to have a couple of them, really, I could have given them to here.

Q: So you were passing through Munich?

A: Right.

Q: And then where did you go?

A: All of these little towns. First Wasserburg was another one, Furstenfeldbruck, and then we were in a wooded area somewhere, I don't know where that -- that was in Bavaria somewhere. And then one of the singers from America came over to entertain, one of the famous singers from the band, when they had the bands, and I remember that. But then there was this little town. I was -- at night I had to go to this little office and make the roll call for the morning and things.

Q: That was going to be my next question. What was your job when you --

A: That's what I did. I was the morning clerk, more or less, because there was no engineering work to do yet, so they kept me over there. And one night I was going there walking on the sidewalk and a big flowerpot fell about that far ahead of me, and I don't know if it was an accident, but they did check it out the next day and they never found out anything about it. But otherwise I noticed this one young girl that lived across the street from where we were staying and she'd always look out the window at us, you know, and she was kind of -- one day I saw her walking on the street, and I just said, "Hello Fräulein." We weren't associated with them, but she was so scared. She just walked by real fast. And they were afraid to come out in a way in the daytime even though we wouldn't have done anything.

Q: So you felt a certain kind of distrust, a fear of you?

A: Right. At times, right. Otherwise the older folks many times, they'd just ____, but we didn't see too many of them, either. They didn't usually -- not that many of them.

Q: So --

A: Then I got to go see King Lutheran's Castle one weekend. That was a nice trip we took.

Q: In all of this, when do you eventually get to Dachau?

A: That was probably after Wasserburg and we loaded up, and 20 of us, I think, were on this truck. Or two trucks. I think there were five in each side.

Q: Do you know what you were supposed to do?

A: No.

Q: You were just told to --

A: They didn't tell us anything, really. And here -- I think back on it now, here I am going in this peaceful countryside of Bavaria and suddenly I'm going to be dropped off at a place where the most inhumane things happened.

Q: Tell us what happened. Tell us what you saw when you went there. You're in these two trucks, about 20 guys.

A: Yeah. Okay, we pull in there, at first I don't see -- it looks like a peaceful city, you know. Here we are on the ground area and I get out -- we get out to stretch our legs, but the minute I turn, I'm facing that way and I see this boy, eight to ten years old, and he's talking to a soldier, and he has something in his hand, and I go -- naturally I wanted to see what's going on there, and so I go over there and I see the furnace immediately with the door open.

Q: So you're inside the camp already?

A: Yes, and this was up by the building where we were finally housed. And he's showing these pictures, and he had them all -- in all stages of being gassed and piled

bodies and being brought to the furnace.

Q: So they were photographs of people?

A: Actual photographs.

Q: I wonder where he got them.

A: And where he got those -- I wish he had -- and that boy disappeared that very day, I don't know -- when we were called to go check in for our baggage and our housing, he was gone and never found him.

Q: Do you remember what he looked like, how he was dressed? What --

A: He just had on regular pants and a shirt and he was about -- and that soldier bought these from him, the pictures. I wonder where he got them. I think about it so many times, where did he get those pictures, but they were --

Q: Did he look like he was a local boy from the town who had come there?

A: That's what I'm -- I'm thinking he was either from Dachau or he was from that thing that I called the hospital. Now, I'm not sure if that was the hospital back there, because on the map that I was sent, it showed the hospital in a more area where there were all buildings around it, but that wasn't the case where I landed there.

Q: Well, tell me --

A: Oh, by the way, that furnace door was open and I could see hair all over. It was just filled. Big clumps.

Q: Did you -- so this was the first time you see what was going on in Dachau, and what did you think?

A: Oh...I had read about it and heard, you know. I said, well, here, look, I'm looking at

where it actually happened here, you know, here it is. I could see ashes in the furnace.

Q: Do you remember the hair color?

A: What?

Q: Do you remember the color of the hair?

A: Gray. Lots of gray hair. And some were kind of black, you know, but they were big, and the door was open. And then I turned around the other way and there was the water tower, and it wasn't a typical water tower where you would get drinking water from. I'm sure it wasn't. I'm sure it was a collecting tower for water where they could perform those experiments that I read about, you know.

Q: Well, tell me what you had read, because I was trying to get a sense of how much you knew what you were going to see, and it seems that you didn't know that there were some things that were going on.

A: Yes.

Q: So when was the first time you heard of what might have been going on there?

A: That was months before I read in the paper and people talked about it.

Q: In the United States?

A: Yes. We got -- well, we just heard about it over there even. We knew that it was going on, right. And that water tower, it had no top on it, either. That made me think, oh, this is where they performed those -- you know what they did, right?

Q: Well, I want you to tell me.

A: Okay.

Q: I would like for you to tell me what --

A: I read where they actually took them, the bodies, and put them in there alive to test how long they could survive in the cold water.

Q: And how high was that water tower?

A: It wasn't -- well, it was probably -- the stands were probably about 8 feet and then it was maybe 10 feet tall, I would guess.

Q: So it wasn't one of those water towers that's way up high?

A: No. No. It was one where there's plenty of water in there that would freeze and collect water from the rain and everything else, and I'm just sure that -- and I could visualize this area was perfect for this set up, because when I went to the big -- then the other building that was there, the huge warehouse, I wish I knew the whole history of that thing there, but when I first went there, there's this entryway, and the first thing I see is these shelves filled with the jars, you know, with all the human parts of the body. And I said --

Q: Were they labeled?

A: What? No, but I could tell what they were.

Q: You could tell what they were?

A: You want me to name them?

Q: Yes.

A: Hands, complete hand, fingers, ears, eyes, breast, a penis, liver, kidneys, intestines -- everything. It sticks. You're not going to forget that.

Q: Of course not.

A: I saw that and then I knew -- I says right away, well, this would be the spot maybe

where -- this house where we're going to be staying, maybe there were doctors in there, you know, with a few SS troops because they had the angora hutches there, two hutches with rabbits. And I also read that they used that fur for the colors for their uniforms in there. And I don't know who fed those rabbits. I never saw anyone feed them.

Q: And there were still live rabbits there?

A: Yes, there were rabbits in them. And then the big -- that building was so huge. I think it was longer than a football field.

Q: Which building was this?

A: As you went through the entryway into a big warehouse behind it. There was a big opening door and you go in there and that's where the tables were with all of these instruments that were manufactured, and I believe --

Q: What kind of -- I'm sorry, did I interrupt you?

A: I think the Holocaust victims might have made those. But I saw no machinery in there at the time because we didn't get to stay there long enough. We only saw the first table, but I'll bet there were a hundred tables in there.

Q: But tell me what kind of instruments are you talking about?

A: Oh, there was compasses, pliers. Excuse me.

Q: That's okay.

A: Pliers, compasses, wrenches, all kinds of drafting material. Beautiful, beautiful things they were. And I wish I could have gone in -- and you know what happened the next day? We never went in there again, so I think the thing was locked up.

Q: Well, tell me -- let's step back a little bit.

A: All right.

Q: What was the name of the town that you were in before -- Wasser something?

A: I think it was Wasserburg.

Q: Wasserburg, okay. So when you're going from Wasserburg and you're on a truck and you're being told you're going to go someplace but you're not being told where?

A: Not really.

Q: Not really?

A: Uh-hum.

Q: Okay, and you're not told why, either --

A: No.

Q: -- what you're going to be doing?

A: No.

Q: And so your first impression is when you see this little boy and he's showing these photographs?

A: Right.

Q: And when he shows the photographs, by that point do you know that you're in Dachau Concentration Camp?

A: Oh, definitely, yes. We knew that. Right.

Q: And that's inside the camp. So your truck must have gone into some kind of fenced enclosure?

A: Yes. It was -- well, it wasn't. Then did I tell you about the women in that stockade that I mentioned.

Q: I would like -- let's bring that -- we'll get to that, but I would like to get a sense of what you saw when you got into the camp and you're on the road and then all of a sudden you're somewhere else, and what was it that -- you know what did you see?

A: Well, first the boy, you know.

Q: Were there walls?

A: Oh, there, okay. We were fenced in. We got the building there and then there are trees. All around us there's trees, so you don't see much other than the building that I mentioned and the water tower. We're hemmed in. And the Danube was right behind our building.

Q: So, in other words, you've driven into an enclosure? The trucks have gone into an enclosed area?

A: More or less with the trees, if you count the trees. There was no fences.

Q: There were no fences?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: I wish I could spot it on that map, but I just can't find the location.

Q: That's okay. That's okay. And you get off of the truck and you see that there is this kid talking to one of the soldiers and the soldier buys the photos from him?

A: Right.

Q: And then when you look around, you see -- what else do you see?

A: The tower. I start tying everything together, and then that building with the annex to it with the shelves and all of the --

Q: There's no sign that says Dachau Concentration Camp?

A: No, no.

Q: By that point does somebody come to you and say why you're there? Do you figure out why you're supposed to be there?

A: Not even yet, no. It took a few days and then finally one morning the lieutenant said we're going to dig out here. He put me in charge and we started digging some holes for the posts.

Q: For posts?

A: Posts for a little stockade, I guess, we were going to build. For whom I don't know. They didn't tell us that, either.

Q: So you're digging and there are 20 of you?

A: Right, about 20.

Q: And you're the one who is responsible for them to make sure that they dig properly?

A: Right, I was supposed to make sure that they did the digging. I did some of the digging and the lieutenant said, "You don't have to do that, you're in charge of this," but I kept digging anyway. I like to work. But then about two or three days later is when I saw that stockade in the other direction, and then all of a sudden all of these women appear looking through the fence, but you can't see many buildings because of the trees again. But then on this side you could see a little part of a building there, so maybe they were in that building the day before.

Q: Do you know who they were?

A: No.

Q: Were they prisoners?

A: They were prisoners. They were all dressed in these brown skirts and brown blouses.

Q: Did they look well fed?

A: Not real well, no. They looked a little haggard, but they had been fed, I'm sure, yes.

They weren't -- nothing like the Holocaust victims, I'm sure. I bet they were political prisoners or something.

Q: So they still had been prisoners of the Germans?

A: Yes.

Q: It wasn't Germans who became prisoners?

A: No. Evidently they were from different countries because they looked a little different, not all alike.

Q: I see.

A: I wish I knew who they were, but then we lost track of them. They were gone again after a while. Maybe they left at night or something. That camp was weird in a way that there were ghosts there. There was no traffic in or out after we came. I can't remember a single truck or anything coming in. And the people at that hospital, that I call a hospital, about a hundred yards down the line from our building, all I saw there -- we weren't supposed to go there either -- were nurses evidently because they had the white uniforms on, and I felt, well, maybe they're nursing some of these Holocaust victims who couldn't move or be transferred.

Q: Did you see -- but you saw -- you saw -- you saw former concentration camp inmates as well?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where did you see those, those people?

A: No. They were down there. Sometimes you would see one come out, I think. I'm sure they were because we couldn't tell from a distance, but I assumed they were.

Q: I guess part of me is a little confused because I always pictured that Dachau as a concentration camp had to be enclosed because otherwise people would escape.

A: Oh. Hum.

Q: But that's not what you saw?

A: Not our area, no.

Q: Okay.

A: Unless the Army removed it, you know, but I doubt that. But they had removed all of the bed and things, I'm sure, from all the trains and everything. We didn't see any of that.

Q: What date was it that you entered?

A: This was a little later. I think we came there in June and then we stayed into July. So it was over a month after they had been cleared. But that's what I figured was going on down there at that hospital, that they were treating survivors.

Q: They were treating survivors?

A: Yeah, and that would fit in perfectly there.

Q: Now, had you -- but you didn't meet any survivors? You didn't --

A: No. No.

Q: No?

A: No. You didn't see anybody except we were the only ones there. No German, nothing. It was weird in a way. That boy, that's about the only one.

Q: What did he look like? Was he blonde? Was he --

A: He was sort of brown, a mix in a little blondish, if I can remember correctly. And I did know a little German, so I think I said, "Vater and Mutter," and then he been pointed, you know, I think, is how I got that message that he -- but I wonder what happened to him.

Q: Did he --

A: Well, they wanted us to get organized in our place where we were going to stay, so they took us away. And the same thing happened from the big building. We didn't go back there again, either. That was locked up. Maybe they didn't want us to see in there anymore.

Q: What was the place where you stayed? What was that?

A: It was a brick building.

Q: It was a brick building?

A: With individual rooms, with a cafeteria. A: You know, I don't even remember eating a meal there, but look at all I remember about the first day.

Q: Of course.

A: I don't remember eating a single meal there.

Q: But you had to have eaten?

A: I can't remember sitting down to eat. Nothing. It's all gone, but that first day is right there 100 percent. And even the second and third day. Well, that one weekend we went

to the Danube, wading and swimming in the water. These girls -- I told you about that.

Q: Tell me again.

A: They came from Dachau, I think, and at the time I guess they were 17, 18 years old, so I -- they would put on their bathing suits and stand there and kind of wave at us, but all of a sudden we would wave or something and then they would go back and have their coats on quick. They did that two or three times. They would switch back and forth and then they were gone, and we just wadded in the water there. It was kind of -- cool off in July.

Q: It was hot.

A: But I assumed that before Hitler that that was their place where they could come on the weekend and go in the water.

Q: So you think these were local town girls?

A: Yes.

Q: From the town of Dachau?

A: From Dachau.

Q: From Dachau town?

A: I'm sure there were about eight of them, I think. They hid behind the brush. There were narrow bushes there and they sort of --

Q: So it sounds kind of isolated. Like you 20 guys were kind of isolated there.

A: We were. Yes, we were. Well, we were setting up home there for a while. It was weird. It really was.

Q: And somebody told you to go dig those holes.

A: Right.

Q: So did you meet other U.S. military people in the camp at the time?

A: No. We were the only ones.

Q: Who was it that told you to dig this stuff?

A: The lieutenant, our lieutenant.

Q: Who had come with you on the trucks?

A: Right. He's in charge. He was in charge of setting everything up. The cook was there and we had the cook, and it was really something. But those ladies, too, on the camp, I don't know what happened to them. They took them out at night and they moved them because we never saw them again, but it was like ghosts were there in a way.

Q: How did you feel that?

A: What?

Q: In what way did you feel like it was ghosts?

A: Well, that's why I think I buried those tools, by the way.

Q: Tell me about the tools that you found.

A: Yeah. I found those and there were about four of them, pliers and compass and a few other things.

Q: Excuse me that I'm interrupting, but where did you find them? Tell us.

A: They were out on the ground. They were sort of laying in a rag thing in plastic, and I picked them up, and I don't know why I didn't -- when I was a kid, I always buried things. And I do it now with our kids. We buried the box in our garden. We still haven't dug it up again. So I think that's why I did it, was to sort of put this whole thing to rest, as if I'm

burying what happened here. I think I did that maybe. And if I could be there, I possibly could find it. I don't know, though. Those trees were awful large then already, and I didn't bury very deep. About that deep.

Q: Where do you remember having buried them? Was it under a tree?

A: Yes, it was by the tree. About that far away from the tree. And the ground was a little hard, but I got them covered up about that high maybe.

Q: By "that high," you're talking about how many? About a foot, about 8 inches?

A: Yeah, about 8 inches probably.

Q: About 8 inches.

A: And I leveled it off sort of nice. I don't think any of the other guys knew that I buried them.

Q: Did other guys find things?

A: I don't know. One man -- I don't think they did. No, I don't think they did, because none of them ever told me anything about that.

Q: Did you guys talk amongst one another about what you saw?

A: Not much of that either, no.

Q: Really?

A: No. Well, I mean, this one man, when I went up there, we talked about -- we were shaking our heads and we were getting nervous and we couldn't believe this boy, that young boy there, but that was terrible, but then we were told not to go -- oh, yeah, not to go over to those ladies over there. One guy wanted to go over there and go and talk to them, oh, no, no, you better not, you'll get in trouble. I don't know why we couldn't go to

that hospital down there.

Q: So you were just told to stay away from things?

A: Uh-hum.

Q: And the building where you went where you found the jars with all the human parts, did you go there again?

A: I would have. I would have loved to go way in deep there, but it was closed evidently because we never went in there again, and I know I would have gone in, and I don't remember -- because I know we couldn't go in there again.

Q: Who would have closed it? Your lieutenant?

A: Probably the lieutenant maybe got orders or someone from the other area there at the hospital maybe was in charge or something. I don't know. I wonder where all of those tools ended up. That just bothers me something terrible. What happened to that? Why -- and who was feeding the rabbits? It was just a puzzle.

Q: And you never saw any corpses?

A: No.

Q: By that time in June there were no more corpses or --

A: No. Everything was -- but that furnace showed me enough, though, about what happened there. And why there was only one furnace, that would be perfect, though, for experimentation, wouldn't it? They only needed one because they would take an individual -- they even inoculated some of them with bad diseases and then they disposed of the bodies, I would imagine, right there.

Q: When you had read this stuff back still in the states that there were things like this

going on, do you remember how you reacted? Was it kind of like disbelief or was it –

A: I think it was more disbelief than anything. Who could do that, you know? I mean, you start hearing about enough of it, you know, and you say, well, how can our people be doing that? Here we have the ancestry sort of and, you know, how can...

Q: You asked yourselves these kinds of questions?

A: What?

Q: Did you ask yourselves those kind of questions?

A: Sort of, yes. And then, you know, the people they say there in Daubner, they said they didn't know this was going on, but that's impossible. They had to know this was going on. The smoke was in the...

Q: Did it smell funny when you were there?

A: No. That seemed to be quite gone, but I'm just sure -- I read about that also, how the smoke was drifting terrible. I'm sure it's in all those places. But I can say that there was no fence around us but these trees hemmed us in. We were hemmed in and we just never -- and why we were given a pass to get out of there, I don't think that anybody ever left the camp other than the Danube River there a little bit. Where would you go?

Q: Exactly.

A: Where would I go? I don't want to go to Dachau. Who knows? There might be a sniper there.

Q: I turned it off because I sneezed. You're saying it was weird, huh.

A: That really was. We didn't really go -- want to go anywhere. I don't know where you would go.

Q: It is strange. So you're there, you're isolated, and you're there for how long?

A: I would guess it's probably three weeks at least. I think so.

Q: And your job was to build a stockade?

A: Yeah, right. And then all of a sudden after we just leave it unfinished, too. I remember that: It wasn't finished.

Q: Well, what did it look like? How much had you built?

A: We just had some posts in there. And the holes took a long time to dig, you know, because it was all by hand and shovel. We didn't have the equipment, you know. That's all we did. I think we had about three or four of those holes dug, and, oh, we're going.

Q: And that was it?

A: That was it. On that map, though, it has to be one of the corners up in that map there, I think is where it is, where the river goes along, and that has to be the spot.

Q: Tell me how did that -- did it change? Did you feel like it changed you when you saw this stuff?

A: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I can't imagine people doing -- it's just -- I mean, you pray to the Lord about it, you know, how could this happen.

Q: And did you while you were there?

A: Oh, yes, a lot. I pray today that it never happen again. Humanity to man, it's something -- even though I was young, I mean, you had that -- it's even more now. Now you realize, you know, what it was really. It builds on you. It builds up the older you get.

Q: Do you think having seen something firsthand it brought it home to you in a way that if you'd only read about it, it would have been different?

A: I think so, oh, yes. When I saw that furnace, you know, and that door open with that hair, and that boy, those pictures, then you knew what you knew, that that was Dachau. I mean, that was -- I think that's why during that -- the more I think about it now, I'm glad I did that. I sort of buried the inhumane things I did there in that hole. That's the feeling that I have.

Q: Those instruments that you buried, you said there were four pieces?

A: About four. Four or five.

Q: Do you remember what they were?

A: Yeah. Well, I told you. One was a compass sort of --

Q: Oh, that's right.

A: -- a protractor and a wrench, I think, and pliers maybe and...

Q: And do you think those were things that prisoners might have made or --

A: I really do. I think so. I mean, I think they were made by -- I'm sure they would unless this was a staging area where they brought all the tools. But why would they bring them there and then ship them out or -- I don't know. It just doesn't seem right, but it was a huge warehouse so it could be used for something like that.

Q: So instead of the first day when you saw the warehouse and it had all kinds of tables and tools on it and items and things like that, it was similar to what you saw in that warehouse, those four things that you buried?

A: Yes, yes, oh, yes, plus a lot of others probably if I could have gone in there and looked at the other hundred tables. Oh, there was -- you could see all the shiny -- you know, every table was filled, just filled. And that was -- it was as long as a football field

I know.

Q: Did you meet anybody Jewish while you were in Munich or in Dachau?

A: Let's see. I think in that one town, maybe, one little town where we were up in a room and there is a boy -- a couple of boys that always came down, I think they were Jewish. They always came down.

Q: What time was this?

A: Oh, gosh, I don't know. Furstenfeldbruck maybe or one of those. He'd come up to -- this one man had met them before we got there, and the boys would come up there and I would ask them about school and things, and he spoke a little English, too. They talked in English, I guess, a lot of them. That's the only time, though, that I think that I really came in contact.

Q: So when you guys were taken out from there, you still didn't talk about it much with one another, those --

A: No. I can't remember. I'll bet we did. I just can't remember. I'm just sure we did, or unless we tried to put it all out of our minds, but I don't think so. I think we talked about it, yeah. I'm sure we did, yeah.

Q: Where did you go from there?

A: Then I ended up in another wooded area, I think it was, where we had just barracks. There was no real headquarters or anything. It was just in the woods, because I remember spending a lot of days just sitting on a log in the woods and I remember thinking, well, where am I going to be 50 years from now.

Q: Really?

A: I remember I thought that, saying here I am in Germany, the war is over now and I wonder what's going to happen now, what my life will be, you know.

Q: Can you tell me where -- do you remember the moment you heard that the war had ended?

A: Well, let's see. Oh, yes, yes. Where were we? Oh, boy, that was -- we were counting -- I'll tell you, I can't exactly. It's unbelievable.

Q: But when you landed in France, the war wasn't over yet, was it?

A: No. Well, we must have heard. It must have been the real happy moment right then. It had to be, but I don't know. I just can't put my finger right on it exactly.

Q: Did you ever -- from the time you landed in Europe, the bells that you heard in the water and then in Le Havre where you landed, did you ever feel like you were in danger?

A: Yes, I did. When we were on the train there even we heard some sniper shots, rifle shots coming over, and we can still --

Q: Okay, so the war wasn't over then?

A: No. No. They said, "Oh, boy, there's snipers out there, you keep moving." So we kind of got inside the car a little more, you know. I was even a little scared in Munich when I got out of there on the tracks there, you know.

Q: And you saw ____+.

A: Right. A little bit. Well, it's an 18-, 20-year-old fear, I guess. I guess we're a little brave at that time, in some ways we are, but you do have a feeling. And then I think back now when I walked in some of those woods there, what if they hadn't cleared all the mines up? I never thought about them but now I do.

Q: Exactly.

A: You know, and even at Dachau. And I often think with Dachau, I wonder if I'm standing on ground where people spent the last moment of their lives.

Q: Very possibly.

A: That's what I was -- that bothers me a lot. I'm thinking my feet stood right there where someone maybe was spending their last five minutes on this earth. And I was even thinking when we were digging there what if they had been buried there, but no sign of anything.

Q: Did any of your superior officers engage in conversations or explanations as to what Dachau was? Anybody from U.S. military afterwards or during talk with all of you guys who were there?

A: Not really. No, they didn't. They didn't express any -- too much -- a lot of this -- you know, it's gone. I don't want to say that they didn't because that would be very important. I'm sure we did.

Q: But it sounds like so much of what was going on and from the memories, it was a vacuum of information.

A: It was. Well, they don't tell you a whole lot, that's true. We did not know what we were going to do there for a while, no. And they didn't tell us about -- well, I guess they assume we all knew what happened, but he didn't warn us or anything, you know, to be careful. I can't remember him telling us to be careful. But those things bother me. I wish I could have even have gone to that hospital there, you know, talked to people there.

There I bet I would have met some survivors. I'm sure.

End of File One

Beginning of File Two

A: And they didn't tell them about -- I guess we assumed we all knew what happened, but he didn't warn us or anything, you know, to be careful. I can't remember him telling us to be careful. But those things bother me. I wish I could have even have gone to that hospital there, you know, talked to people there. There I bet I would have met some survivors.

Q: Yes.

A: I'm sure. But we just never got the opportunity to do that. And going in the big warehouse again, I would have loved to have gone in there and see if there were any machines in there, the back part of it, where they could have been working, you know, to produce those, because I'm sure they did use a lot of the Holocaust people to -- you know, they did work, made them work.

Q: Were you -- afterwards, in kind of retrospect, were you surprised that you were sent to Dachau?

A: Yeah, I mean, it was -- right, it hit me right away, you know, and I knew what had happened there, yes, right, and we really didn't do a whole lot there, did we?

Q: A couple of posts?

A: But look what we saw. Enough to make you get the full impact. I almost got the full impact of what happened. I can visualize now what was going on in the rest of the camp, you know, where they really had all of those -- one place they said they had a hundred rabbit hutches, I guess. They must have gone --

Q: Do you remember about how many rabbits there were in there?

A: Here at my place is about four is all, but inside on the map it showed these hutches.

Man, they had them all built together or they must have had a lot going on with them.

And that's where most of the people were, I guess, the victims, weren't they, in the barracks and a huge section in the middle, and parts there were no barracks around our area either other than that one I showed you. You know, that's all we could see is part of it, and there may have been some beyond that but the trees hid everything.

Q: Well, the brick building that you were staying in, do you know what that was used for before during the time there was a concentration camp?

A: I assumed it might have been used even by the SS or the doctors. It was a perfect setup for that.

Q: For medical experiments?

A: Right, I would say so. There were separate rooms, you know, where they had -- where they put them. And then the cafeteria, there was a little place for an eating area. I would say it was a perfect setup, everything, and with the water tower and the display on the end, everything tied in together.

Q: When you went back -- skipping ahead here a little bit, when you went back to Paullina, did you tell people about what you saw?

A: You know, I didn't say too much. Now I'm telling more, and now they're all asking me when they found out, you know, that I went on that Honor Flight, now they're saying, "You mean you were there," but they say most people don't talk -- they didn't talk about their World War II experience. That's why they're doing these other __, I guess, people are

opening up a little more now.

Q: Tell us about your Honor Flight because I think people wouldn't know about it. Tell us what that is.

A: Well, they want to get everyone there before they're gone, you know, and passing away. What is it, a thousand a day or more?

Q: You mean –

A: The World War II Veterans.

Q: Who wants to -- and what are the Honor Flights? What are they?

A: It's a group -- one man -- actually, the radio station announcer, he got people to give money for this and someone organized it is the president of the group now, and he gets the money, collects it, and when they have enough, they send another group, and they're almost through in our area now.

Q: And they send them where?

A: To Washington here.

Q: To Washington?

A: To see the monument, mainly the World War II and the other monuments, all of them, right.

Q: So little by little all World War II vets can come to Washington to be able to see --

A: You know what they should include in that is this museum right here. I wish they would do that.

Q: So when you were on the trip here, you started telling some of the people you were with about Dachau?

A: Oh, yes, a lot. In our congregation, I brought it up at Sunday school. At Bible class meeting I brought it up and told them. Yes, I mentioned it. Another friend of mine, he wants to get together with me, he wants me to tell him.

Q: What about your folks, your parents, your brothers, your sister; did you talk about it when you got home?

A: My brother said, too, "I didn't know all that," he says, "Why didn't you tell?" But they just say we haven't talked about enough things, even what happened in the war, you know. Right, that's why we're doing these Honor Flights. I mean, you're getting people to open up. And they even asked these questions there when we were in Washington in May. You know, "Where were you, what did you do"? Now they're starting to open up more, and that's what we need, isn't it?

Q: Of course.

A: But how anyone can deny it is beyond me. Like Iran, is that one of them denying it?

Q: Yes, that's right.

A: Unbelievable. So I'll be doing a lot of talking now, I think. I'm going to tell my pastor about it and get him to express it to the people. I know he mentioned it in his sermon already, too, about what the nation has gone through.

Q: Tell me, after you had left Dachau, what were -- how much longer were you in Germany?

A: Well, let's see, after Dachau, okay, let's see. Okay, July -- man, I was there another five, six, seven -- about seven months after that.

Q: In one place or --

A: A couple of different places. Like those wooded -- where we would just shift from one to another there sort of.

Q: And what were the things -- what did you do?

A: There wasn't a whole lot to do, believe me. It was kind of a bad time. You know, you were waiting for your points to pile up so you could go home, you know.

Q: What does points mean?

A: It went on the point system. You had to have 35 I think -- you got so many for each month in the service.

Q: Okay.

A: And that all entered in. When you went in, you had to have three years, I think, so I hit that mark, and then when I went over it, I guess then they put me up -- as we were going -- going home, another one was coming the other way, occupation forces, they passed us. But when we were going to France, too, another one went the other way, they were coming home already. Even though the war wasn't over, they were going back.

Q: I see.

A: They may have been wounded, you know, wounded soldier.

Q: So did you stay around southern Germany?

A: It was all Bavaria, right, and I shipped off from Bremerhaven.

Q: Which is pretty far north?

A: Right, way up north, on a South American ship they borrowed from South America:

Q: Did you have any kind of contact with the Germans while you were there?

A: I tried to talk to one of them once, but he couldn't understand my German. I said,

"Wie heist dieser stadt."

Q: That sounds pretty clear.

A: Not too bad, was it?

Q: That's right.

A: Okay, and he didn't know -- by the way, that's a time when we were staying in a little house. I didn't mention that. We were in some German house. We took over someone's house, I guess. I don't know where they were, they weren't there. A little plane landed, a Piper cub landed right in the field behind their house, and they came -- I don't know who that was, either, but that's the house where I was outside on the ground, I found this nice picture of that SS that you have, I found that laying there, so I picked that up.

Q: And you sent us a picture of --

A: You got one of those, yes. It's a beauty. I hate to say it -- well, it's a clear picture of the SS sniper, I think it was. It's in there. I think you have it.

Q: All right.

A: It's a sniper, I believe.

Q: Well, I'll take a look later. I don't recall if it --

A: Oh, there's a map.

Q: There's a map.

A: Let me see. I had the corner spotted, I think. Let's see. Where was that river now? Let's see. I sure had it spotted one -- let's see. This? No. This isn't the river up here, is it?

Q: I don't think so.

A: No.

Q: It looks too straight a line to me.

A: No. Let's see. Beng -- no, that wouldn't be it, either, then. But I know it was on one of the corners, I'm sure. It was on one of the corners. It was on one of the corners, I know. I would say somewhere up in that area. A: You see all this here?

Q: Yes, that looks --

A: We weren't anywhere near this. We had trees, trees.

Q: So when you talk about Dachau, do you mean the town of Dachau or do you mean --

A: The camp.

Q: -- the camp? You mean the camp?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Even if it's still trees?

A: It's the camp, right. Uh-hum. Yup. We were right on -- uh-hum, on the corner. I don't know how big the town of Dachau is. I don't know exactly. It's not huge. It's not large. It's just a little...

Q: It's now a suburb of Munich. Munich has in the decades after the war grew enough that it may not be exactly part of the city, but it's so close to it, considered so close to it.

A: Didn't they make all the people go to Dachau to see? I think they went along to pass through there, I think.

Q: I know Boekenbon had that.

A: I think I heard something about that, that they did that.

Q: So after that you stayed in southern Germany and when did you ship out?

A: I think it was April.

Q: April '46?

A: '46, and then I ended up in New Jersey again somewhere, and then train to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, where we're living now in Wisconsin. I didn't think we would be living there, but we moved from Iowa, and then I got discharged there in probably about a week and...

Q: And you went home?

A: Discharged home, right. I took the train and they picked me up about 20 miles from home. I could only get within 20 miles because our train didn't run anymore in our little town.

Q: I see.

A: I used to deliver papers from there, from the train, but they closed it up.

Q: So your folks came to pick you up?

A: Right, came to pick me up, and that was a joyous moment there.

Q: I can imagine.

A: We all made it home, all three of us.

Q: And your parents, did they ask you about your impressions of Germany?

A: Yeah. They said, "Well, where were you?" you know. They hadn't had the education that we had, you know, so they were a little behind on that, but they knew enough about it. And my father says, "Well, I was way up there and you didn't get up there," he said, and I said, "Yeah, but I shipped out from Bremerhaven," and he knew about that.

Q: He knew where Bremerhaven was?

A: Yes. And he had all his brothers came from there. You know, two -- oh, one of his brothers was even a soldier in -- who was it that Germany had before Hitler? Was it king, was it?

Q: Oh, no, it was a chancellor.

A: Chancellor, yeah. He was in his army. He had his whole uniform with that point on the top.

Q: Oh, really?

A: With that old, blue uniform. He was in that army, I guess.

Q: Well, the Prussian king, Kaiser Wilhelm.

A: That's it I'll bet. It was Wilhelm, yeah. He was in that uniform, but he didn't -- well, he was older. He didn't go into World War II then. My father...

Q: In general, in what way do you think your Army experience -- did it change you?

Did it shape you in some way?

A: Well, in a way I always say to myself it was a great experience for me, in a way it was, to grow up, you know.

Q: You felt like you grew up in the Army?

A: More about the world, right, what people are like. Read, write. I often say, well, it was kind of tough at times, but I wouldn't want to give it up. It was a valuable thing. It really was. Learning to live under certain conditions and the way you had to eat sometimes and training was even dangerous at night. When it rained and poured in Texas, then our tent blew over, our pop-up tent blew away, and we didn't know what

would happen. We got soaked, you know. Wake up in the morning and they served you some oatmeal and it's raining and, I'll tell you, it was -- and then you had to crawl under the wire fence during the machine gun shooting over you.

Q: Is this during training?

A: Yes, during training. The only mission -- well, they were pretty close. They tried to make it realistic and you had to keep low, keep your head down. Well, I really hope I answered a lot of your things.

Q: I think so. I think so. I appreciate --

A: There's a lot of things that I wish I just knew more about, you know, like what happened to that boy --

Q: That's right.

A: -- where he came from, and those tools, what happened to all that and who made them, and why didn't we finish that what we started.

Q: A lot of unanswered questions.

A: Right, and what happened to those women over there in that prison, why didn't we see them stockade -- or when did they come, why didn't we know more about that? Huh.

Q: I think those are terrific questions. I mean, it's sort of like you see something and it stays a mystery until you have an answer for it.

A: Right.

Q: And here you were in a place for about six or seven weeks and there was no one who answered all of these mysterious --

A: Right. But I've put it all together myself now and I'm so sure that's what was going

on there. It was a perfect setup for that.

Q: For the medical experiments?

A: Right. When I looked at those jars, you don't have parts like that on display if you're just a hospital or something. I wonder why they left them there. I was surprised at that.

Q: Were there like hundreds of jars?

A: Oh, there were at least 20 or more, 30. I would say at least three shelves. I can just see them as if I'm looking at them right now. And you wouldn't have that on display unless it was something unusual, like, why did they leave them there? Maybe that's why they locked the building. Maybe somebody came through. I don't know. I wonder if this area where I was if it even is a visitor's place now. I wonder if it is.

Q: Have you ever been back?

A: No.

Q: You've never been back to Dachau?

A: No. Never went back. That would be sort of interesting, but my age and my health isn't quite up to that anymore. I would start digging if I was there.

Q: Maybe you would recognize where you were in relationship to the camp?

A: Right. I think if the furnace was still there, I can spot the place, I believe. I know just about where I went from there.

Q: It sounds like Dachau was one of those moments that stays in your memory like where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

A: Right. Well, it did, because I told you I don't remember what I ate. I can't picture a single meal. I don't know when I went to bed, how I slept. It's all gone. And most of the

days are just a blank, but that first day and that other day when I saw that other thing, the wire enclosure, those things stuck. And then the girls at the river, you know, because the first time I saw any humans other than us. But I think there were only about 20 of us, that was it.

Q: Have you kept in touch with any of those others who were with you?

A: No. We never got addresses. We should have done that. A lot of groups get together. They do. They're probably all gone now, though. If they were a year older, they might have -- I shouldn't laugh about that -- I didn't laugh, but there aren't many of them around anymore. I don't think so.

Q: Well, I appreciate that you have shared your thoughts and your memories with us today. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

A: Well, I think I've covered it pretty well, I think. I just wish we could have talked with more people though, you know --

Q: I can imagine.

A: -- the victims. Never got to. Never did. The ones that survived were gone from us. They were gone, taken care of evidently. And I didn't know about that march, either, that they had from Dachau where they took -- we never heard about that, anything like that.

Q: It sounds like there was -- that there was very little information that you got while you were in Germany.

A: Right. The officers didn't tell us much about anything like that, never. Nope. They should have maybe, shouldn't they? But my guess -- yeah, but someday if I ever find out where I was, I'll have to write you and tell you. I've got the maps at home yet, so I'll try

to spot it. I'll try to.

Q: Thank you. Thank you. In that case, I will say thank you for your time, for your memories, and this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Martin Gaudian on February 16th, 2011.

A: Thank you for listening to me.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview