United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Eddie Willner
July 12 and 13, 2000
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Eddie Willner, conducted by Arwin Donohue on July 12 and 13, 2000 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Falls Church, Virginia and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Eddie Willner, conducted by Arwin Donohue, on July the 12th, 2000, at his home in Falls Church, Virginia. This is a follow up to a USHMM video interview that was conducted with Mr. Willner, on May 25th, 1989. And this is tape number one, side A. Okay, one thing that I wanted to ask you about Mr. Willner, is that in the first interview that the Holocaust Museum did with you, there -- we didn't discuss your -- your childhood at all, before Kristallnacht. And I wondered if you would say something about your -- your father, and your mother, and your -- your school experience.

Answer: Okay, I said before, I was born in Munchinglapba, which is in the Rhineland, near Cologne, between Cologne and Dusseldorf. And I am a fairly good rec -- recol -- recollection. My mother already is born in that city, and my father was born about 20 miles from there. And my father got to know my mother because of World War One. He was in the German army, in the front line, and just like today when we have a war, on -- World War Two, families send packages to their sons, who are soldiers, or -- or communities do that to the sons of the community who are fighting wars. And so in my father's case, he received, while he was in Russia, so-called care packages, and -- from

the Winter family. We had a Willners, and the Winter family had two daughters and one son.

Q: The Winter family is your mother's family?

A: My mother's family. And so when the war was over, my father went to this home, and -- to thank her for the two years of cookies, or baked stuff they sent him to Russia. And then they both -- the girl that sent these to him, my aunt, and my mother were not married, but -- and he -- my father, of course, is not, and he was looking around to see if he could find a wife, or something. And he did not get interested in the girl that send him the cookies, baked the cookies, but in her sister, younger sister, which became -- who became my mother.

Q: What was your mother's name?

A: My mother's name was Augusta Willner -- or Winter, as -- here. And they got married in 1924, and two years later I arrived. The period in Germany, in that time, was bad, just like in the United States. We had the collapse of the stock market, [indecipherable] by World War One, and there were many people without jobs, and many upheavals. Communists and others. And so I -- I assumed that they knew each other since the end of the war, since that's when he went there first, but they got married 1924. And so six years later, and I arrived another two years later, I was the only child of -- and I also think I know is shu -- that's reason my parents had only one child, because the situation -- the economic situation in Germany was very bad, complete collapse. And my father did have a job, and so we -- apparently, they had no problems, but they decided just to have one

child. And then Hitler came on the scene, and then su-sure enough, a lot of Jews didn't have a -- had less children, and in my father's case, he lived, like I said, 20 miles from where I was born, and his father lived in that same house in the country, til 1941, and he was -- then they took him out of his house, they took the house away from him, and sold it, the Nazi party, and they gave it to a Nazi, was -- and -- and so in -- in that house were all the belongings of the Willner family, which were demolished on the Crystal night. And I have to tell a story about my father, because it was different in many cases, in this case, it was -- it turned out pretty good. When my -- when Crystal night happened, they burned the synagogues, and they demolished Jewish homes, stores, and wrote Jew on buildings belonging to Jews. My fa-father went -- left the -- he knew there was something going on against the Jews, and he went to look after his father, lived by himself, almost 80 years old, and -- but pretty fit, but he want to see then he's okay, so he l -- went there, and when he came to the house -- like I tell you, is a small community in the country, maybe about 500 people living there. And he had a tha -- I think the house must have been built just before World War One.[indecipherable] and he walked in, and he knew that something going on inside. As he walked in, he saw Na-Nazis in -- in uniform, the Brown shirts, smashing everything in the place. My grandfather standing by and, watching, not saying anything. So my father walked in, he knew that he -- he shouldn't have come, maybe, except for his father. And the chief of police of the little town of Klaifaht was there. The chief of police was not a Nazi, he was in uniform, police uniform. And my father walked in, he says, "Siegfried," which was his name, "what are you doing

here?" The connection between him and the chief of police was that when they were little children, or boys, they sat together on a -- on a school bench for several years. And they knew each other very -- very well. So he couldn't, in front of other people, Germans, say, "Disappear, get out of here -- here." He said, "Well, I don't know why you came here." He said, "Well [indecipherable] look after my father." "Well," he said, "[indecipherable] I'm looking after your father, nothing happens to him. But see, I cannot stop these guys, too, what they're doing." They came from another city. They always sent in German, they didn't use the same people from the same city, always from the next city, or so. And he -- "I cannot prevent any smashing of materials, but I will see to it that fath -- your father isn't hurt. And by the way," he said, "you know your brother is in prison here." "I know." This was the son, the younger brother, who was li-living in the house with ma -- my grandfather, but had moved out [indecipherable] he got married. He was married to a Christian woman, whose brothers were Nazis, and asked her to divorce him under the Nuremberg laws. And she refused. She said that in the good days she was with him, he's -- in the bad days were -- make a long story short, they went to -- with the help of a Catholic organization to Holland, which was, at that time, this was in -- this was in 1938 -- 30 -- '39, beginning of '39. They went to a place in Holland, like a camp, but a Catholic organization was taking care of them, too. Moved them maybe to Brazil, or someplace in South America. And --

Q: Will you tell me where you were during Kristallnacht, and what happened to you?

A: I was at home, and nothing happened to me. I -- nobody came to our house. I went to my school, I had to leave German school, because Jewish children could not be in the classroom with the German children. And so I went to then, the new school, Jewish school, one they installed in the back room of a synagogue, which was a Conservative synagogue. And then I wanted to go to school, and see what happens, and somebody said, "Your s -- your school is burning." Well, it was synagogue that was burnt, but the school was in the synagogue. I wanted to take a look. Nobody bother me, some um -- most people, I mean, didn't know I was Jewish, you know. And the incident there was interesting. The Nazis put the thing -- this is a -- a [indecipherable] fire. And the -- the fire department showed up to put out the fire. And the -- not what the Nazis wanted, they wanted us to burn down, but they endangered, in many cases, the houses next to them, which were not Jewish houses. But -- and people protested, and so the fire department standing by, in our case, had the water ready, and -- in case the flames would go out to the side, to the other houses. And the police came, or was already there, in [indecipherable] and they said, "We want you to stop the burning, you endanger other people's lives." And they said no, they going to burn down to the ground. So a policeman trying to stop them, but they -- they couldn't, and the one policeman then went to a fire hose, which wa -- were -- were -- that were not in use, because they -- they want to burn down, not put the fire -- and they only had them down for protection on the other homes. So policeman took the hose, and started directing towards the synagogue. And one of the Nazis, the Brown shirt came by, and with a dagger, cut the hose, so there wouldn't be no

water coming out, they quit. So that was my knowledge of the hol -- Crystal night. I didn't --

Q: Did you see that happening from where you were?

A: I heard the discussion.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I -- later on they told me what -- people that I knew, what happened, they were ta -- all talking about there were conflict with the police and the Brown shirt. Yes, I -- I did -- I didn't see the actual cutting, but I saw the argument between the SA and the police. And the police was pretty decent, our town. I have other example on that. And so they told me to go home, which I did. And I passed several Jewish homes, and they were all the windows smashed in, the furniture on the sidewalk, nothing ta -- I didn't see anybody get hurt or anything, but some people did get hurt, but in general, in our town, nobody got hurt.

Q: Were you -- were you home with your mother that night? Mm-hm.

A: And my father, like I said, he -- he left early in the morning to look after his father. So we didn't know any -- was -- this was all about, and we could -- we could guess what this all about, but we didn't expect that. My father told us to stay home, just stay where we are. My grandparents were, on my mother's side, were also in the same town, about half a mile away. Nothing happened to them.

Q: Was your family religious at all?

A: Not my parents. My grandparents were. Not Orthodox, they were -- they had kosher at home, but they didn't go to synagogue every [indecipherable] Saturday morning or Friday night. And my grandfather looked like a real Germanic type. He was blonde, had -- the hair he had left, had a big moustache, and he looked like a German peasant, maybe. And so he had a lot of friends who were not Jewish, and we had no -- no -- none in particular [indecipherable] my family. There were other families who got beaten up, many of them. Some of them because they [indecipherable] alone and they was enable, took advantage of it, beat up a Jew, or smash his window. And in our place, the -- like I said, the police was pretty good. My uncle, my mother's brother, Neil, had been arrested Crystal night, and sent to Dachau concentration camp. He was also a decorated war veteran, he had the Iron Cross. He had -- he brought home from the war, his saber, which he was allowed to, because of his rank, and he had the Iron Cross. So before i -- Cr-Crystal night, two policemen came to the -- to my grandparents home where he lived, he was not married, and they said, "We have orders to pick up your saber, and your medals." He questioned that. He said, "We are police, we are not Nazi party members. We have an order we have to carry out." Ma -- they were excusing the action. They didn't even want to do it, but they -- policemen had to do it. So my uncle said, "Okay." He had a medal, he took the medals, threw them on the floor, and, "You can also have the saber." And he threw the saber and broke the -- the blade. And he threw that on the floor to them. And they were very apologetic about it, and, "We're just carrying out orders. We are sorry. It's not our doing, but is our order." And they took -- and they took my great-grandfather,

whom I also knew. He got to be 96. He was also in the house, and he used to be a public school teacher, and he had received for his work what they call the Hohnsellon medal. Hohnsellon was the German Kaiser, of the Hohnsellon family. And he gave awards, and medals out to people who are deserving, who did something for the state, or for the country. And he had that framed on the wall, the medal and certificate. And they said, "By the way, we have to take that, too." My uncle [indecipherable] military, but every Jew -- Jews don't have the right to have medals any more. So, he took -- they took that, too. But they did no harm. So, to continue the story for my father. The police just took him back to the police building, and the jail was attached to it, it was just a couple of cells. And the police chief said to my father, "Want to see your brother?" And they opened the door, and there are five Jews in there, men, his brother included. And they had a -- they were playing cards. They had food in there, and they were -- you know what, they were being nice to bi -- and he said -- he was [indecipherable], "Say good-bye to your brother, because frankly I don't know when you're going to see him again," this police chief said. Well, they didn't think about Dachau, but that's where he went, Dachau. And if my father would have been [indecipherable] he would have gone, too. But, he -- the chief said, "I don't have an arrest warrant for you here. They probably have a [indecipherable] your hometown. So I have to make a call." And he called the chief in Mitchiglumba, and he said, "I have a," -- I think he said old friend of mine, apparently [indecipherable] and he didn't say, I have a Jew here by the name of Willner, and he an old friend of mine. "I don't have an arrest warrant wi -- but he lives in your city. Would

you check, please?" He said, "Yes, he's on the list to be arrested." So the guy that was my father's friend, he, "Okay, I'll send him back to you." Hung up the phone, and of course my father listened to all of this. And the chief said, "I'll tell you what Siegfried. The next bus is at 11 o'clock, you will be on it, back to your home, and then you will report to the police, which is what we agree [indecipherable] here." And he did like this -- your problem. So the other policeman knew, and --

Q: He winked, yeah.

A: He winked at my father. And to make a long story short, the next bus, 11 o'clock, my father thought he was being sent back out with a police escort to -- the chief said, "Get on the bus. Report to the chief when you get there." No police escort, or -- and my father, of course, didn't report to the police. He -- he went home first and said, "I'm not going to stay here, they going to start looking for me," and he [indecipherable]

Q: I'm going to interrupt you because I don't want to repeat all the stories that you've already told in the video interview. So, I wanted to just move on to the time of your liberation. And -- and you described in your videotaped interview about that, about how that came about, and how you had been with your friends Mike Swab, and how you had been following the -- the sounds of the -- of the artillery fire, and -- and eventually became kind of caught up in a battle, and went over to the American side. Can you describe in some detail how -- how once you got over, and were -- and were joined with the American army, what happened?

A: Okay, we es -- we escaped, of course, from a transport of Langenstein concentration camp, to -- we were going east. That I knew. I knew a couple [indecipherable] from a map I had seen. I didn't have any maps. And Langenstein concentration camp was one that was going to be a temporary camp for the building of tunnels, to produce the wheat to underground, because the factories were all bombed out by the ally. And Michael Swab, that's one of my best friends, and I describe Michael, how I met him in a camp. His father was killed, and his brother-in-law. They were frozen to death. They came back from work and they had been told they did not perform properly, they were sabotaging German wer -- wer -- for these 150 germ -- 150 Dutch Jews, who had arrived at this small camp, which was about 600 people, to repair railr -- railroads, and then -- so Mike's fa- father and brother came back from work one day, and they were accused not having worked properly, and they s -- wanted to make example of them. They stood these people up in the middle of the winter, which is pretty bad in Poland, not like here, and they took a fire hose, and hosed them down with cold water. Ordered them to stand, they couldn't rub themselves dry and warm, it was ice cold water. And to make a long story [indecipherable] by next morning they were -- most of them, they were dead. Mike's father and brother-in-law, Morron. That's where we came -- there were f -- I spoke Dutch, that was the other thing. I think I explained before why I -- how I came to speak Dutch, I picked up a Dutch -- [indecipherable] Dutch was very inposit. So, when we emptied the camp, they had a new method, I thought. In the previous Death March, that we had from Bleshammer to Roshosen, we marched everybody together, 4,000 some

people that marched out. But there were other people came in from other camps, smaller camps, so the -- Swallhallingpoint, which was our camp. And so, there were actually more than 4,000, I didn't know that til after the war. All through my friend, Mizza Kraning. And they decided, when we walked out of Langenstein, to walk out in groups of 500, which was for better control, in case some people may escape. And there are 4,000 people coming, and -- which was good for us, too. Not every group had a police dog, German Shepherd, or had a lot of guards. Some of the guards were ol-older guys, older SS men, and they knew the war was finished, they lost. And so -- but, we didn't walk -- want to walk out, Mike and I, and we hid for awhile, and then we saw the Germans put up machine guns. I figured they're going to execute everybody in front of the camp. Well, they made a last appeal over the PA system, they said, "This is the last call, everybody get out of the back who is left, who is hiding. If you don't be marched out, you will -- you know what's going to happen." So Michael and I decided we got up -- not disappear, but in the final stand, sh-shoot out on the spot. We stayed there through some cases. We went to -- or came out of hiding, and there was a double wall in one of the barracks, and we were loit the last group walking out, and we lucky we did, because I have pictures from the v-video from the National Archives, that was taken on the camp, we were in the middle, where the barracks were, the -- how do you call his? The appelleplatz in German, which was the -- just like soldiers have to be on the --

Q: For -- for roll call?

A: Yeah, for roll call. The last roll call, they said otherwise they -- they get shot. So Michael and I decided we're going, that well escape from outside of [indecipherable]. All that has been ah -- always our friend. So we wen -- walked out with the la -- a last group of 500, or so. And we decided that we must escape. Oh yeah, we joined in the group, four other young fellows who were mostly Dutch, there was one other guy there, who we had confidence in, we knew each other. Mike knew them better than I did. And they accepted me, and we -- we had decided that we will, during the night, escape into three different direction, two each. We did two each, because that's always better than being alone, for one thing, give you more encouragement. And then also, when we escaped, six, two in each direction, one back, and one forward, or one to the side, or whatever, that when they start firing, it is much harder for them to get all of them, if they all bunched together, running away. And that we would have a chance to come out alive, that somebody's is get -- going to get shot, and somebody may be lucky. And the -- Mike Swab and I were the lucky ones. We -- there were shots fired at us, but maybe by one or two guys in the group.

Q: What happened to the other four?

A: I don't know, frankly. They went in another direction. I assume, I cannot say, that they were killed. They fired enough shots. And one thing I didn't mention, we escape, we had the -- the -- the situation had to be proper -- prop -- had to be in such a way that they couldn't follow us where -- where we were, didn't have the -- the personnel to do this. We had just crossed a small bridge, and we knew that police dogs pick up the smell of an

escaping prisoner, or somebody else, particularly us, we smelt to high heaven. We were full of lice, we -- w-we're walking skeleton. By then I'm wa -- when I was weighed -- weighted by American, 75 pounds when I was 18 years old. But we were healthy -- and Mike's about the same. So okay, we decided we do this when -- I think the word is pospicious. When the time is proper to leave. And the big thing that helped us was it was a pretty dark night. They could not put on lights, the SS, to see who is running, or ma -- because there were airplanes are overhead, Americans.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

A: -- we had talked about this many times befo -- before our escape. We thought it would be good to escape the dog or dogs, if we swam through a river, because they couldn't pick up the smell in the water. And -- or, in case there was no water, they would go after the prisoner, then bite them, go for their throat. And then by their barking, attract the guards, help them finish the job. So, when we crossed the bridge, for awhile, our luck was on our side. We knew where the river was, we could just cross the bridge, but -- and there were planes overhead, so we knew they couldn't put any searchlights on. And we were told -- we were marching ranks of four, two to one side, and two to the other side sumweech. And the SS were -- they went a little bit further out, and we got -- then they're going to hit just as much as we would if they stayed there. And so here we were across the bridge, and we said, "Now." We all took off, and Mike and I, we l -- took off for the river, because we didn't know they were planning before, who was going to be on the

river side, who was going to be other way. Michael and I [indecipherable] and running the other way, but running the river way. And we also didn't know who could swim. Well, we talked about it, and some guys were too weak to swim. And Mike and I could swim, which was no problem. And the river was a tiny little thing, but enough to get the dog off our back. And not dogs, and -- one dog. So we got into the water, which was of course, ice cold, and the dog got Mike in the leg, but we -- we want to strangle the dog. We decided the dog is not as -- he's ferocious, but makes a lot of noise, and their dogs -- we have here the police department, who will also attack somebody, but not for the throat, like these dogs were trained for us. And well, to make a long story short, it wasn't [indecipherable] the guy called off -- the guy in charge of -- I guess a group of 500, there were two whistle blows, and I think that meant recall, I don't know, I think it meant recall, because the dog immediately left us, and also ran back. We thought we were going to kill the dog and -- and -- because I know from doing this after the Holocaust, a dog that attacks you, even German Shepherd, and you get to the throat, and you get -- cut him off his air, he cannot -- he may be able to bite you, but he'll tear into you everywhere, and that's what we had thought we would have to do, but he was recall, and we went through the water on the other side. And then made a U-turn, sort of through the back [indecipherable] you fear somebody's going to come across the bridge, and we don't want to be here. And could hear at night better. Also if maybe they made a U-turn, too, and we meet head to head. So where to prevent all that? Well, we draw a split second

decision, and well, we went and we saw a couple of f-farms -- farmhouses. I said, “We got to get into one of those farmhouses, not wake up the inhabitants, and” --

Q: Hold on one second.

A: -- so we hid in a potato cellar of the house, which was which was -- faces to the outside, and we s -- ate raw potatoes, and we left the house again because didn’t -- we didn’t want to be discovered by the farmer. So we only travel at -- at night, in the daytime we hid in bushes, to watch the sound of the artillery, we hear sounds of the arti -- it was coming from, we figure out, the front line. And it was towards the west. There, I [indecipherable]. So, but we got a little bit confused, we didn’t know, we didn’t care where we were, as long as we stayed away from these -- so we hit one more time, and near t -- near a village, outside, and we heard tanks rumbling. We were -- it must be the Americans. We didn’t see one German tank in there. We saw soldiers far away. And we said we have to do everything to get as fast as we can towards them. So when we -- one morning, in the early morning, there were German old guys, and young guys, what they call the li -- not li [indecipherable] volksdune, which were the guys that they got back in the service, too old to be a soldier the front, or too young. And they were lay -- laying -- lying in holes, real -- two guys per hole, or under vilv. We were afraid the American tanks were coming through, like as if they were not the regular soldiers, but they were called up again to serve. Well, how do we get past these guys, dincorner? Like I said, it was very dark in there. And we listened first, and we figure out there’s one hole there, and one hole further, but enough in the middle to crawl through. They can fire at us, but it

looks as don't come out [indecipherable]. Didn't know the enemy's right across the field. And they wouldn't fire a bazooka or a det at the German weapon against tanks, which we call a bazooka. And -- so I said -- we s -- we decide to crawl [indecipherable], and the -- all of a sudden it got light -- oh no, be-before you -- you got through, this German called on us, and we gave the password, and he called loud enough so you could -- everybody could hear, there was -- it was quiet for awhile. There was nobody firing, it was a wait. And -- and he i -- asked for the password, and of course, didn't have the pas -- I said, "Hell mund." Shut up, I said. This -- the German army patrol, they call it the patrol. My German was good, you know, and I had heard command given before. Michael [indecipherable] me [inaudible] he spoke [indecipherable] German, but not that good. So I made up something, I said, "Shut up," to the German reconnaissance patrol. And he said, "But the password." I -- I -- this was all calling, ontaw, I didn't even see the guy, I knew he was in [inaudible] and I said, "We are from the -- I said some," -- I -- I -- I mentioned Germany. I don't remember what I said, I made up a unit, and then -- so I apparently didn't get the password, but we're here for the same thing, we want to find out who is front of us. And we kept crawling, we just didn't bother, and he didn't say anything. So, all of a sudden, it was like these guys were behind us, and we saw tanks, maybe five time as far as the tree on the other side of the street.

Q: Okay, so the tree is probably about 30 feet away?

A: Yeah.

Q: So maybe 80 feet?

A: So before that moved up in the night, and sit still.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Because they were going to move early in the morning, and -- which they did, when it was light, and they had been ordered to move up, relieve another unit, and there was 16 or 17 tanks. One company, a thir -- a third armored division. 32nd armored regiment. And when we saw the first American tank switch on the mo -- the engine, they started to move, Mike and I came out with our hands up. We were the only people around that they could see. And the moment we did that, they all stopped, and waited for the command of the commanding officer, what they should do. [indecipherable]. Well, a couple of guys jumped off the tanks, and we showed the number on our arm, and they looked at us, we're full of lice, skeleton, he said, "Okay." He jump on the tank. He as -- he said, "We're going to take you along. [indecipherable] this village fine." Okay. "Where are the guys with the panzerfow, or the bazooka?" We said, "There are two holes hide behind that, because we sneaked right through the middle." So a German -- a American who spoke German more or less fluently, a sergeant came up, and he had a public address system, was [indecipherable] thing. He said -- he said, "We know where you are, that you've been ordered to defend the village, but we just found out from two," -- he didn't say [indecipherable] we came, "who have just come through there, who knows where your positions are. We give you five minutes. Come out with a white flag, or we going to blast your village to pieces." And they gave them five minutes, and the tanks started forward, and the Germans came out with their hands up, a couple dozen all along the

village. And that was about all. They took them prisoner, but I don't think th -- at least we didn't keep them. They were turned over to some other Americans, who came by, who were supposed to take them to a pr -- a [indecipherable] or something. I guess -- they're all old guys, and young kids, six -- 15 - 16. And then so, we identified us, and then we come -- the commander came, first lieutenant, and Lieutenant Hovlent is still alive today, a very nice, religious man, who gave permission then to -- that we stay with them, that we didn't know where to go, and maybe show them where some other prisoners would be hidden, or liberated. That's why they sent the radio out, and also they were giving wh -- well, I told them that the camp is probably about so many miles from here, within a radius, if they should dispatch a column in their camp. And it had now -- another unit already got there and found the camp. Okay, so they went to the next village, and it was night -- evening, [indecipherable] to stay here, I -- that's where we going to stay. We thought they were going [indecipherable]. "You stay with us, you will sleep like us, you throw some Germans out of their homes, and they can go and find some friends, sleep with them. But we want a good, nice, warm place. And you can go with us." And Lieutenant Hovlent, and his executive officer, who unfortunately, died recently -- because he knew more about -- I coming to another story later on, than Lieutenant Hovlent. He -- he set up to a kitchen [indecipherable], about 150 soldiers, in a company with 70 tank, and, "You stay with the kitchen. When they sleep, you want to eat." Had to come to the kitchen to eat, but the kitchen [indecipherable] there. So [indecipherable], and he made

announcement that these three young boys, [indecipherable] the kitchen, they can go in any time they -- they want to, and eat. Okay.

Q: Did you speak any English?

A: Yes. Mike also, though not -- not very well, but like I said, one sergeant spoke German, and there was a Jewish soldier, too.

Q: Do you remember what you talked about with some of these young American soldiers?

A: That we came from a concentration camp. They didn't know about the camp, but they [indecipherable] when they heard from other guys, and I guess in their u -- papers, the journal they kept, yeah, the military journal the commanding officer keeps, what they did today, what they did yesterday, how much ammunition they have left, how many guys went sick, and [indecipherable]. So we were -- spoke enough English to [inaudible], and Lieutenant Hovlent never spoke very much, he still doesn't. He was a very religious guy. Toward the fraternization phase, when the war was over, six months later, that peace was signed. A lot of American, there was a -- not the law, but a rule, not to fraternize with the German, and it was more or less an -- an order, not to go out with German girls, because [indecipherable] available. And they wanted food, which the soldiers gave them, and they got sex in return. But some of them -- many of the soldiers did, but Lieutenant Hovlent never talked to a German, never touched a girl. And there was one more guy with them, Hansen, who was of German descent, parents spoke German at home. He knew fluent German. He was in the kitchen with us. He slept with us. And I said one day to him,

"Nick, you told me you have German descent, your parents spoke German at home, do you speak German?" He ne -- he said, "Yes, fluently." "And then why don't you speak with some of them? Why do you make it difficult?" He said, "After what I -- you boys told me, I'm not proud to be of German descent, and I decided I'm not going to speak any German." And he kept his word, he never spoke [indecipherable] he lives in New Jersey, Nick Hansen, and like I said Lieutenant Hovlent was a very religious guy. He lives in Minnesota today. He has other children. His wife, unfortunately, has Parkinson's, too, so we have another thing in common. But I lost Lieutenant Hovlent's contact one time when he moved, and for years I didn't talk to him, or call him couple times a year. But my wife went on the computer one day, and through research, she found him. And this was a couple of years ago. And I call him up again, and since that time we're calling each other once a month.

Q: Were you given any work to do with the kitchen crew?

A: No. Our work consisted of just watching them prepare the food and eat. And I picked up 50 pounds in three months, which was actually a danger, because a lot of prisoners died from overeating, and also, I forgot to mention, one of the requirements to stay with them was that we go to the battalion surgeon, to the doctor [indecipherable] and get ourse -- self examined, see that we don't carry any infectious diseases, the protection of [indecipherable] soldier. And well, we got examined by a doctor, and he decided we don't have any infectious diseases. We are full -- we are full of lice, we have to get rid of them immediately, so nobody else -- and about food he didn't say, he said they got to be -

- be fattened a little bit. He -- he -- th-they -- they weighed us, and that's why I knew five -- 75 pounds. And they knew that we were just skeletons, but healthy. So, we stayed with the kitchen crew, and then they got orders to move onto another village, another va -- and the same thing happened again, they soja -- oh yeah, I forgot. The first thing they did after they came from the doctor is two soldiers [indecipherable] escort a -- to a rel -- to a German house. The woman's husband was fighting somewhere in Russia, and she was there with one child. And he said, "Well, we putting these two boys in your house, and -- where's your husband?" She said, "In Russia. Maybe he's dead," she said. "Well," he said, "how big was your husband, how tall?" "Small, like I am." "Well," he said, "these two men here are small, too. Show them the clothes that you had for your husband." Went into closet, and take -- pick out some clothes, and he -- they said, "You going to stay temporarily in this house, til you've been deloused, you got some clothing and pick out what you want. And then when you finish bathing, we want to come for scout, we going to go leave you now here, and we come back with a medical team." [indecipherable] And the woman cried, and cried. We weren't -- we weren't going to do any harm to her, but she thought them were [indecipherable] come take her house away, and -- which -- so she had a big pot -- pot -- a big vat, where she cooked the food for the cows, and for the other animals, and she was taking care of all the thing. The thing was, almost same size like the company -- [indecipherable] company has for cooking their food for the Soviets, in big, round thing. A tub. And so she had one of those things in the -- where the cows are, in the --

Q: In the barn?

A: Where the -- barn. And she asked, “Is this big enough?” I said, “That’s good, we can both get in there.” [indecipherable] big enough, [indecipherable] was clean, you know, but there were now smell of some food or something. The [indecipherable] smell was making us sick, not the -- not the [indecipherable] smelling food sometime, because we had been -- we had -- the food that we had eaten for -- for a long time was just bread, mainly, and some ba -- bayjay -- what’s the -- what cows eat they cooked in there, and they gave them, and so on. Th-they this big, and not bir -- [indecipherable] is the German name. [indecipherable]. Let me think.

Q: Beets, or --

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Beets, beets. They’re special beets for animals, okay, but people can eat them, too, when you’re hungry, you can cook them, the beet. And we used to occasionally steal them from the fields we were working nearby. And so -- and the woman said we going to stay there, and we hadn’t eaten dinner yet, she’ll cook for us, too. I didn’t know, and really [indecipherable] back too. But that’s what they wanted us, to stay overnight there, to get rid of all that [indecipherable] clothing that was full of lice. When I say full, my clothing must have been crawling with a couple of hundred lice, and [indecipherable], and we were picking up [indecipherable] but -- by having so many -- well, needless to say, we got rid of all our clothes, we went in the tub, she made hot water.

[indecipherable] by that time these guys came with DDT, or something, and all [indecipherable]. And he said, “We gotta shave your hair once more.” Our hair was short, but had grown back already, little bit. We don’t want there to be any eggs, or anything like that. We said okay. And so we stayed all night. Next day we moved out, with the [indecipherable] -- and oh, when we got back to the kitchen, they said, “Lieutenant Hovlent was here, he left some clothes for you.” There was a pile on the floor. Uniforms, American uniforms. You going to stay with us, right? Yes. [indecipherable]. He put some clean belted uniforms on, and no rank on it, because we didn’t have any rank, we were not in the army. And just a uniform underwear, [indecipherable]. So we looked like them, to make a long story short, we stayed six months with them. The war was over, but was, you know, we got [indecipherable] sign the armistice, so we never --

Q: You stayed -- you stayed with them how long after the war was actually over?

A: Six months.

Q: Six months.

A: Okay. [indecipherable] the big story which about DP camps, that’s where most people went. But before I come to that, we stayed with them for so long, and we gained weight, we were healthy again, spoke better English, and then they talked to us, they said, “Well, what are you going to do, we’re going to return to the United States, pretty soon, and we had you here, and you had -- you enjoyed us, we enjoyed you.” And well, I said, “I will go back to Brussels, where I have a sister of my mother living, was married to a Catholic. She was the one that sent the cookies to my father, and she’s probably still there,”

because in the beginning they didn't touch mixed marriages in foreign countries. They were coming there late August, decided when they have time to do it, but there was a war going on, that came first. And so none of the mixed marriages they didn't bother with right away. So, I said, "I'm going back to Brussels because all of my c -- my family agreed that's where we going to meet, at my aunts." And Mike said, "Well, I know my father's dead, and my brother-in-law. I don't know anything about my mother and my sister. I'm going back to Amsterdam." So Lieutenant Hovlent said, "Well, suppose you don't find anybody there, what are you going to do then?" [indecipherable] yeah, he said, "You were happy here, a lot of things are still mixed up. [indecipherable], after the war you can stay with us as long as you wish, til we return to the United States. But we may stay here for a couple of years, we don't know." So we said fine. So they made out phony papers, military orders, with my real name on them, and for Mike Swab. No -- no rank on there, not private or anything, and say Eddie Willner is traveling to Brussels, Belgium by train, by orders of colonel so and so. [indecipherable]

Q: What was your -- I'm sorry, go ahead.

A: And I went to Brussels --

Q: Okay, before you talk about being in -- in Brussels, what was your impression of the United States, by that point?

A: Oh, we didn't know much about the United States, they -- except the military. They were great, they were enthused, they -- everybody tries to help out every, but these are the people that [indecipherable]. There's another, unfortunately he is dead, too, I mean I

found out an address, my wife did research at the computer, Brady Laird was a mess sergeant, he was a nice guy, and then I found his -- he sent me a letter, he said he never married, and the next time I wrote a letter to him, it came back. He had died. And so -- Brady [indecipherable], and -- and the -- the other guys we made friends with were a couple of guys, for various reasons. And one big Texan, he was huge, I have picture, he was the largest man in the company, and when he stood with the arms stretch out, Mike and I were standing under his arms. I have an picture of that. He didn't fit into a tank, he was so big.

Q: You still have pictures of these times?

A: Yeah. And I -- we caught a couple of Nazis then, that -- the German population turned in some guys who are back, and our -- had to undress them, and [indecipherable] the uniform and put in some prisoner's uniform, and turn over to German police. And I even put on the German uniform, which I think fitted me, and got a photo of my hands up, and boots on the -- [indecipherable] fun with the company. We didn't have any -- any duties, or any work, although we participate a little bit in the kitchen [indecipherable]

Q: Do you remember what your hopes and -- and dreams were at that point?

A: My -- well, my hopes were to find my mother, and father, and -- who knew I was there, and find other member of the family, and to -- I had no plans, except go to Brussels, and maybe walk back to Germany, my hometown, and find my grandfather, [indecipherable] who had been sent to Theresienstadt, and who I don't bel -- I just found out recently that he died in 1944. How could an old man, whose 80 years old, last that

long in [indecipherable]? I don't understand. I intend to check into it, he -- he was German [indecipherable] but he was a tough old cookie, but still being that way, he -- how an old man survived that long, and die from hunger, like some other. In Theresienstadt, there was no gas chamber, they managed -- they shot some people, in the mass of people. There were no max -- mass executions there because Hitler used as a showcase for the Red Cross, and for international. And my wife and I went to Theresienstadt, and that's how we went to the room where my gr-grandfather lived. But I didn't know at that time that he lived three years, and he had been thrown in a mass grave there, that -- with [indecipherable] but not gas chamber. When somebody died they didn't do away with the body, you saw that. Bu with the --

Q: The tape's going to end, I'm sorry.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape number two, side A, of an interview with Eddie Willner. You were just about to talk about going to Belgium right after the war, and ad -- looking for your family. And what happened when you -- how did you get there?

A: By -- I got there by train, and with travel orders from the American army, which was illegal, but nobody questioned, I went. And Mike Swab went to Amsterdam, he didn't find anybody from his family, so he went back to the Third Armored Division, and there was -- and [indecipherable] where I don't find anybody. I come back and [indecipherable]

Q: Ex --

A: Mike [indecipherable] got adopted by a soldier from the company, and got that way to the United States. And I came back to Belgium, I put in my papers, I found a sponsor, and I had to wait for my affidavit to come in -- my paper. And I was finally -- I finally left the United States, in December, '47.

Q: Did it surprise you that the American soldiers were so kind to you, and so concerned about you? Did you question why they were?

A: Yes, in a way I did, but I remember it made me so comfortable. The only -- frankly, I'm sorry to say, the only guy that made me uncomfortable was a Jewish guy in the unit, because not what he did towards us or anything, it was the way he behaved. We came out of an anti-Semitic world, or group, and we -- myself -- we behaved, before we became prisoners, while we were prisoners, in a way that normal -- but em -- let me say I didn't

fin -- I hate to say this, cause it sounds like prejudice, but it isn't. Jews from eastern Europe are different Jews from western Europe, because they grew up in ghettos, the eastern European, the -- the western u -- was integrated, like my family was. I didn't know that I was Jewish until [indecipherable] I didn't know I was Jewish, I went to synagogue, but it never concerned me, never gave me a problem. And then came the Jews from the ghettos, and with the pious, and other things, and I was in the impression, the way the Nazis made us look bad, the Jews, they said all Jews are merchants, or they get the money out of pocket of a -- questioned the ma --[indecipherable]. I found out that some of the guys who came from Poland, because of their surroundings, were different people. And I look at them differently, just like the Germans -- the non-Jewish people looked at Germans who -- or who are Jewish, and [indecipherable] they said they like us. Whereas in Poland, because living conditions in Poland said these are not [indecipherable] Jews, or whatever, they're different. But in -- in the American army, the one Jew that I met in the company was not a nice guy, to start with, and nothing to do with being Jewish, but he did some of the things that Jews were oft accused of. He tried to make money, and the way he did it, he gambled with soldiers, he took the money out of their pocket. I'm not saying that non-Jews don't do that, but I was a little bit more aware of things -- not to be criticized because I -- whatever I do is -- as a money business, or whatever. I was not in a position to anyway, but -- but there were things this guy did, and had w -- he won quite a bit of money, had already done this on the way over, on the ship, had made thousands of dollars. And so I -- the others were [indecipherable] and

they saw this, too. And they saw that we didn't associate very much with him, unless he associated with us, he was a -- and he was from New York. He was what you might call a ghetto type. Now, New York the ghetto, too. So New York Jews, I -- I -- I when people ask me where you from, some people think I'm from New York, cause I pick up a little accent from the three months I was there. And -- and so I wa -- I wasn't very proud of him, he did a lot of things that didn't make me proud to be a Jew, or something I could -- you could say. I was ashamed for him. And so your answer to your question that the American were nice, yes, they -- they were nice, I found this guy Hansen, didn't speak German because he -- he felt very badly about, from a moral viewpoint that this happened by his former people that he came from. And he didn't like that. Like Lieutenant Hovlent was -- I found out after the war, was very religious, that's why he behaved that way, and the guys also, I -- I compare notes with many people, but soldiers behave different in war -- in the war [indecipherable] conditions. Like the villages we were in, guys thought about taking the women, maybe the husband wasn't there, and didn't make any difference to them, and [indecipherable] it didn't happen our unit, not that anybody got caught, but -- but the guy that I don't -- didn't like, he would have been capable of doing such a thing. He tried it one time, and I -- we told him, Mike and I, sta -- stop. He came to the [indecipherable], I told you about that farm woman, that made the hot water for us. He wanted to go to bed with her, and he put his weapon on the table like -- like a threat. I -- and, "Louie, don't do that. I don't want to be a part of this. I had my problems with the Germans. I -- I do-don't do this because I love the Nazis, or that, but this is a human

being, don't do this. There's no -- this woman is not a -- walk around in uniform with the Nazis, tha -- she is just plain farm woman, and her husband's at the front because he was ordered that way. And you don't do this, be -- how would you come a soldier into your home?" And he ever -- absolutely had been drinking too. And we told him that he better go home to his home. And he kept on, and we took away his rifle, because we thought he might -- not do anything to us, but [indecipherable] well, and we just [indecipherable] that he was the only one that we knew -- there may have been another guy was Jewish, but -- but we had good experiences too, after, and -- with Jews, and non-Jews. But he gave me a bitter taste in the mouth, and I -- he got married, and later had kids, I called him, and [indecipherable] but I never went to visit him, I just talked to him on the phone, you know. And the guys was nice to us, why, I -- well, basically because what we had endured. And there were many, and they'd seen pictures in the paper, and read about it. So they probably felt a little sorry for us, but we didn't feel sorry for ourselves, so there was no problem. We weren't -- we were treated okay, like men, and -- and there were talks about them, we'll find a way -- they want to go to the United States, which Michael did. So [indecipherable] many nice people there, aga -- or say that you thought the Americans were nice. And we found out that a lot of them were of different background, like Louie was one, then we found Irish Catholic, and we found all kinds of religions. And maybe because some guys were religious, or believers, that's why they were nice. And people were not so nice. Cannot say that they were not religious, but they -- th-they -- people like [indecipherable] that I said about Jews now, I [indecipherable] for the other

Poles too, who were not Jews, we had many experiences with them, too. Some of them were worse than the Germans, some of them were in guards, or were [indecipherable] from the area, were sometime with Germany, and sometimes not. And when we had Poles as supervisors for our work, they beat us like the SS did. So, I cannot make statement, all American are nice, or all are bad, or Jews, or whatever. And -- or Italians are a certain way. Yeah, I think that it's -- it -- it's [indecipherable], and we found out very early that we didn't -- like Nick Hansen was German [indecipherable]. I disagreed with him, I said, "Talk to these people, not all of them are bad. If all of them had been bad, I wouldn't be here today. There were some good ones." But I -- my experience has been talking to people -- Americans, maybe Jewish people savay, that those who were not in the camps, hate the Germans more than the wa -- than the ones who were in the camp. That's an unusual thing. Because they say all Germans are bad, some of them are -- all -- all the Nazis are, they make -- don't differentiate be -- no Nazis. And so I saw Poles who -- that were very bad, and who are -- had German SS, and some of the Poles, and know, you find bad and good everywhere, but being good, and being able to do good, also had something to do with material things. United States is a rich country. We had soldier chocolate there, had everything to eat. And it's easy to be a good guy sometimes, when you have a lot of things, if that's what needed, bread, or something to eat, be hungry. And then somebody -- the -- the person I feel is sometimes really good, a real great person, when they don't have much, and then give away something. And right now, I did pretty well in life, professionally. I worked hard, and I -- I'm glad I'm not dependent on

German government because I came out sick for the rest of my life, and get a small pension. The business that's going on now in getting back for the Jews, the -- some of the things that they owned, paintings, or getting pension, because they -- bec -- like Social Security, they say if you worked as slave labor, but -- but the companies that that used your slave labor should pay you compensation. I filed for it, I didn't want to. My wife did for me, I sign it, because I -- I certainly earned it, and I yi -- I -- I know -- I know I wor -- worked for what German companies, but I said they should have given it -- most people are dead already -- right after the war, and they're -- they're waiting so long til they're -- no -- not many left any more. So when the money comes, I'll take it, but I am not going to use it for myself, I'm going to give it away. To my wife, who has been good to me, can do whatever she wants, and some percentage to a good cause, not necessarily a Jewish good cause. In my donations, I include the others as well as Jews. And I don't need their money, and I -- I tell you, I'm torn from the experience that really upset me. I got myself examined by Germany, to file for [indecipherable] you know what the [indecipherable] is? Making [indecipherable], and normally you do that if you have a -- something happen to you, and you get -- you need medi -- medical help for your life, and the Germans pay for it, some extent. Well, number one, I went in the army, for various reasons, to give something back to this country, as a civil service employee, in the army now, in the army, also as a volunteer. And like I said, I got exa-examined, and they said to me, some people, "Yeah, but you -- you act like a -- like the strong guy, you're a military officer." He -- some -- some people said, "You don't look sick to me." And I said, "I'm not, I," --

but -- but when you go in the -- the Germans, you got to tell them you -- you suffer. I didn't. That's ridiculous. I'm not suffering, I'm happy, I don't need them, and -- but I did get myself examined, and they didn't pass the law, whether you have something or not, you get the minimum, if you have been one year in a camp, or more. So -- but then they came up with something else, not -- couple of years ago, which is like Social Security, say they worked, but they didn't pay in, but we owe it to them. We didn't pay them, si -- they came out with German Social Security, and they sent me a letter, and they said, "Yes, you entitled that, but you must pay in the basic sum, so we can start in to -- to make it so many quarters, you don't have enough." Or whatever, I -- I [indecipherable]. So I did that, and I figure I earned that. And they said, "In your -- with your background, you got yourself education after the war, which we consider college education, [indecipherable] military [indecipherable], and you -- so -- so you entitled to it. Who are you -- did you work for?" And I did say it, and send the papers in. And then they said, "You got to get this exam done by a doctor in Washing, who is a confidential" -- not -- what do you call it, not confidential, who do it confidentially for the German embassy. I went to see the doctor, was a German [indecipherable] in Washing, who had been taken prisoner in Africa, by Rommel, Africa corps. No, he was in Africa, but he was taken prisoner by the British. I start undressing for him to examine me, he said, "We're the same age." And, "You were in a concentration camp?" "Yeah." "Oh yeah," he say, "you have a number." And then I took all my clothes off, he said, "You look better than I do, physically." Whatever that meant, and [indecipherable] would see that he was going to

give me negative, say this guy's in perfect shape, he [indecipherable] a mark on him. Well, I have a mark here.

Q: You have a scar on the back of your head.

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And --

Q: How did you get that scar?

A: Well, that was from a big shot in the camps, and they took some guys for example, they fired, and they going to liquidate us, an example. And I came out I think I have it on the tape. We were left for dead, and the -- well they told me to use that, but the only thing I -- I was disqualified from the U.S. Army after one parachute jump. They told me that I should not jump, I am not going to be a jump bump -- this is a good thing to do if you -- if you [indecipherable] to jump, y-yo -- to show you got courage, to jump out an air- airplane. So the young officers all did it, I want to do it, too. And by the way, my children, [indecipherable] five out of six are par-parachutists. So, they had to do what the old man couldn't do. But anyway, then, so this Social Security from Germany, the guy, he -- I thought he is going to send me a confidential report. He send it to the embassy. I didn't see what he wrote, but he wrote nothing good for me that was in my favor, and nevertheless -- well, he probably was a Nazi, or anti-Semite. I don't know what he -- I had that feeling all along, that he thought I was getting something for nothing, and -- and I didn't, you know, I was entitled to it. So anyway, when he came out, they made a

ruling. After checking what could I have been, if I had, under normal circumstance, not in a concentration camp, not having to go in the army to make a living, and to -- what could I have been today? They gave a wide -- well, they gave me a high category, officer in the army alone, that the same thing, had went to college, or you become a -- a teacher, you have to have a certain intelligence, and they told me they going to give me a high rating in Social Security, but in that case, if I want a higher -- rating higher income, I have to pay them anyswhere between 20 and 40,000 dollar, whatever I choose of categories. It is not well known, but the reason was -- and if I do not choose the high income, the lowest one is you pay in 2,000 dollars, and you get [indecipherable] income when you're 65. Well, we had some friends in German embassy, and some other people [indecipherable]. And there is Leo, [indecipherable] language when they have the German, and this guy was the German finantha a -- finance attaché at the embassy here. And -- and he said what -- any -- I said, if I had 20,000 dollar, 40,000 dollar, I -- I'd rather invest it in here, in this country. I don't know what's going to be Germany to-tomorrow, but I'm not going to give them any money. I don't have that money to spare, and I -- it just didn't feel good about it. But the mistake I made [indecipherable]. So I -- I gave them 2,000 dollars. They advised me I should get my foot into the door, I'm entitled to it [indecipherable] like those thing, but to -- to give to the la -- and then they give me small sum. Well, they came out with a small sum which was so insulting that I immediate -- I -- I didn't get upset very often about things I -- they're sending me every month a check, they have been for three, four years now, for 46 dollars. I think that's an insult for somebody who spent

three years in a concentration camp. And that becau -- now, if I would have given them 40,000 dollars, I'm probably -- I don't know how much, I'd probably get a thousand dollar a month income. I didn't do that. Well, I -- I would have liked to have that kind of money coming in, but I -- I -- I don't, and I do very well without them. But the small check is an insult, I think, for anybody, not because I [indecipherable]. I -- I -- I -- every time I see that they have money come in -- so --

Q: Did you feel any hatred or -- towards the Germans right after the war, or desire for revenge at all?

A: No. When it comes to revenge, my friend Mike Swab tried some revenge, and I stopped him, because revenge is good for people who maybe you know did something bad to your family, or to -- killed people now -- SS, particularly. I feel -- felt that -- I guess if you know something about somebody, and the SS officer came to one of the towns that we occupied when I was with the tank company, and Mike went up there, I didn't know about it, had taken this gun along, we all were given a -- we both were given a caliber 45 pistol in case there was some problem. But we were not to wear it, because we weren't [indecipherable]. We didn't even have any documents [indecipherable], but they were nice, and they said just in case, never know what happens. There may be a -- what they call the werewolf, they may start again. A terrorism attack against the Americans, even if the war is finished, whatever. It didn't happen in Germany, but they hated, like Mike, and -- I -- I can't even say he had hated, he [indecipherable] make it even with some people, this guy was an SS officer, whom some Nazis -- some -- no, not

nat -- some of the people in -- in whose house we lived thewa, had said, “Well, these guys were in a concentration camp, he -- he got to be known around town that two of the guys with the Americans were in concentration. Well some people feel really bad, and want to make -- do -- do us a favor by coming to us and saying, “In that house, that’s not even occupied is a big Nazi, or an SS officer.” So somebody had told Mike there’s an SS officer came back, and then I [indecipherable] myself and Mike, we both would red if we saw an SS, particularly an officer. And most of the SS were bad. There was such a thing as the waffer SS, you probably know, that’s [indecipherable]. But they were bad. So he had gone to this house, and I thought he was going to kill this guy. He pistol whipped him, he hit him. When I hear screaming, I went in, and Michael said to me, “This is an SS. I want to kill the son of a bitch.” Well, I said, “No, Mike. I don’t have any sympathy for this guy, but you going to be in jail again. You came out on one, you’re going into another jail because it’s against the law in Germany, and you don’t know if this guy -- what he did. If you happen to know, maybe I can underst-stand, and other people will understand, too. If you knew him yourself, in a camp, or something, I think. But not this guy.” Also was crippled, by the way, and I figured he’s been punished. But we got out of there, [indecipherable], and I said, “Michael, don’t ever do this again. I’ll be your friend for life, but my,” -- talking about Mike [indecipherable] about him. My license plate on my car is Michael’s number on -- that was his arm. So I don’t ever forget Michael. When he lived in New York, and he died of cancer, he was married twice, the first wife died of cancer, too. He had a lot of bad luck. And when he knew he was dying, in Holland, I

went to see him. And in Holland, you can die at home, [indecipherable] and you can also be given a pill to h-hasten it, you know? I don't know what he did, but he knew he was dying, and my oldest son, and my oldest daughter came [indecipherable] to them, they decided. And like I said, a couple of years ago I put a lifesaver card, they ask me [indecipherable]. I wasn't going to sell my whole story at that, I just [indecipherable] my best friend had this number, and then he died. And you're going to make one special for you. So I didn't tell him the story, so they said the governor allows only this and that. I said, "Look, I go as far as [indecipherable] necessary." I think I want to do that a lot of people put on their right now what they -- they're a veteran, or won a -- a m -- a medal. But this guy was in concentration camp with me, and we both made it, and that's why I want this special number. And I have that now permanently on my car. Some people said, "Well you don't want to be reminded every day for the camp." I'm not. I used to, but I do think of Mike, at least once a day. And I told his second wife [indecipherable] no consequence because he doesn't have that feeling for things like that. He's buried in Holland, as a Master Sargent in the U.S. Air Force. He went into U.S. Air Force, and he's the one [indecipherable] so Michael -- we left this SS, and he didn't do it any more. So Mike tir -- hated. I decided that hatred is bad. If you hate somebody who did something bad to you. It nags on you, it -- it -- it eats you up, hatred, and you become a bad person yourself. It's no good. I've seen many people who will hate the German [indecipherable] German, and they say Nazis. I can understand that somewhat, or you find in Germany [indecipherable] today. I found some. I found some here, but -- in the army, but not bad

for me to get excited about it. I think that's natural for some people to hate one or another fo -- or for one reason or another. The people way Jews hate them because they originally taught that for awhile. The present Pope has tried to correct it, but in -- in United States, it doesn't bother me if somebody's anti-Semite. I can tell them to go to hell. I can tell them in Germany too, to go to hell today, and nothing happen. People in Germany have different feelings. If he then --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

A: -- was an enlisted man after I came into the United States, went into the army, and I wanted to become officer, but I couldn't because one, mostly for educational reason. I stopped my formal education in Germany when I was in seventh grade, and then I went to school in [indecipherable]. So what --

Q: Okay, where --

A: We just said something about --

Q: Okay, we're back after a break, and -- and -- and we're going to just continue with that thought that we stopped with.

A: I want to tell you, the reason it doesn't bother me here, because I know that no action will be taken, prejudicial action. That somebody makes a bad comment, it's a free country, free speech, and to me, that's a greater thing here, living in this democracy, that it's not you'll have good food to eat, or be [indecipherable] one time, and that I -- this -- this [indecipherable] that as far as food is concerned, and many other thing, but the bigger

thing with me is free speech; that I can say anything I want. That I say in the office, I'm working for the government, the president's a jerk, I don't have to worry about the police coming, picking me up at home because I said something against the president, I'm a government employee. This democracy, too. For people who never -- who were exposed to that, and we were always afraid of saying thing, [indecipherable] opinion about something, it means a lot. For somebody never had, like North Americans, it's -- it -- it doesn't -- it's not very important, because every day we have an example, we say things that under a dictatorship you couldn't say, and you have to worry about it. So I feel free that even if something bad had said, nothing's going to come of it, they're not going to smash somebody's windows because of that. It's just an expression here, and it's like somebody said something about Blacks, nigger. My next door neighbor was very prejudiced when I moved in. He's my best friend in the street right now, a-always has been -- not all -- not in the beginning, but I noticed their opinion about Blacks, and they talked about niggers. And our swimming pool here was segregated. I didn't know that, but when I want apply for membership, I found out that my next door neighbor's also the president of the swim club. And I went over to him, because you needed two people to sponsor you. That's how Blacks never got into the pool, because some people were already in the pool, were not [indecipherable] some Black person to get in. Went to see my neighbor, and I said, "Look, I know you don't take any Blacks into the swimming pool. I want to join the pool, but you probably not going to sponsor me. And I don't feel the -- about Blacks the way you do. It's just blind prejudice, I don't think you -- I think

you a good person, but you grew up that way, to -- not to like Negroes. And you get together people who think the same thing." And when the hou-house were being built here, the superintendent said -- he had some Black workers here, and when he talked about Black workers, "Watch when they walk on the new grass. Don't let them walk on it." And I said, "Why?" "Where a Black walks on grass, no grass will ever grow again." "Are you kidding?" I said, "You don't mean that. A joke or something?" "No," he said wa -- and that's the superintendent [indecipherable]. The next door neighbor didn't say anything about that, so I know how he thinks. So when I came to him the application, I said, "You probably not going to sponsor me, because you know how I feel about Blacks." "Oh here, let me think about it." Boy, and I give him time to think about it. You know, I didn't want to start to be the troublemaker in the neighborhood. So I went to my wife, and I said, "I don't think I want to join the pool here." Which would be a good thing for the children. And then I decided, well, I'm also depriving the children, my wife had to -- we had only one car, I have the car, and she -- it's good for the health to go in the summer to the pool. I think I -- I -- I'm going to talk to him. I went to him, and he said, "I'll sign you on, and I -- I get you another member to sign." I said, "Good. But I also want you to know I'm not joining your pool to be a troublemaker. I don't agree with your policies, and they going to be changed one day, and you know which side I'm going to vote for, to let the Blacks in." And I felt that was necessary to say [indecipherable] know what kind of neighbor I am, and maybe he -- he won't have any part of me, but we became good friends, and he does anything for me I want him to do. He knows I'm

Jewish, and they're Southern Baptists. And Southern Baptists were automatically against Blacks in those days. I went out with a girl one time in Richmond, when I went to school [indecipherable] and she was Southern Baptist, she took me on Sunday morning to a church, and I said, "I'm -- this -- I don't see any Blacks in here." "Oh," she said, "they're not welcome." I say, "In a church? Well, let's go then," I said. "I don't want to be in a church -- I'm not very religious, but I don't want to be in a church that doesn't let everybody in. That's no church for me." So, come back to my neighbor, they don't call Blacks by nasty name. They are very dilerant. Their son, Ned Fortune, also called them niggers, and when he was very small, he changed. When he talked to my children, my children told him they don't like they u -- to use that word. And I really can see where he had a change of mind. He grew up that way, and his wife grew up that way. So, that's why I think, in a democracy, where you can say every -- anything you want.

Q: What do you think made him change his mind?

A: I just started thinking about it. I don't remember at the time, but I would say that he basically thinks I was right, and he did find out about me, what I went through through the war, and he -- he was an en-engineer with the telephone company. And he -- he -- he grew up saying this -- calling people that name, and that was just a daily thing where he came from, and his wife. And he had second thought about that, and -- and to -- and to add something to that story, his son, who is getting married next week, and we the only people in the street who are invited to his wedding. That shows you how good friends we are, we are. Their son went to William and Mary. I think he went. And he -- his

roommate was a Black guy. And he changed his mind by living with a Black guy from Africa, not American Black. And he doesn't -- he didn't use the word any mo -- [indecipherable], but he still went to college, if he would have known beforehand that his roommate was a different color, he prob -- may [indecipherable], but he didn't. He had a good experience with this Black guy, and he is changed. And he getting married now. So, Freedom of Speech, the greater thing, as far as I'm concerned, in my life in the United States. I have to g -- if I want to complain about something, I can go and complain. My children haven't been handled properly by people, by authority, by -- I have good example there, and people did not think -- I didn't -- never think -- I never thought, for instance, being Jewish I carry a chip on my shoulder, or it's something that I have to be ashamed of. I'm not even saying I'm proud of it either, but I'm proud to be a Jew -- I'm not proud to be anything else either, but I can be proud of something I've accomplished. But, well, maybe my ancestors accomplished something, that's why people call them a proud Jew. But I -- the people who are anti-Semitic here in the United States, can be fought against openly. In other countries, they call themselves democracy, but are not a real democracy. And we have things that leave something to be desired, to -- maybe not the Jewish [indecipherable] something else, or the Black, particularly, have -- they're still being prejudiced. I always said, well, as a Jew I can go [indecipherable] have the right color. But if you're Black on top of it, you don't accept in the first place, just because of your color. But in America, there are many people -- and America has changed, even during the ti-time I've been here, for the better. It's not perfect, it never claimed to be

perfect in question of race, or -- or many other thing, but we can change things here, as long as we stay a democracy, and have the [indecipherable] the -- that we have, the -- the -- if you discuss this wi -- Germany, for instance, there still is this not anti-Semitism, not Hitlerism, or anything, but what basically in German's eye, my wife will -- like we could have -- like a -- [indecipherable] sometimes too arrogant, and with this arrogance there comes this prejudice, or they say this guy is this or that. The -- some people have certain traits, Jews have certain traits, some of them not too good, and some are good traits. I always point out on TV when somebody is Jewish. And my wife asked me one time, "Why do you think that he is Jewish?" Not because of her [indecipherable] had to impress her, but I think the children should -- they -- that's one part of the learning process, that you can be proud of some people -- when it's a criminal that's being shown on TV that is Jewish, or -- certainly not. But I want to point out that people who invented the -- a good example, in 19 -- soon after we got married, I was ordered by the army for 10 days to Brussels, from Germany, to go attend the World Fair, and to visit the Soviet pavilion there, and look at some things. And I don't [indecipherable] and I went the second time with the American joint media, we came from Washington, I came from Heidelburg, and because he didn't speak German, they said, "Take him under your wings, he's one of our people," or -- you know, key people, "and show him around." [indecipherable] too new to it, you already have some experience with speaking the language. So this guy turns out to be a Christian American who was a -- who are the

people who -- they are very simple religion, they all speak up. I can't remember the name now, but is their religion. Not -- they have a very simple church.

Q: Quaker?

A: Quaker, yeah, Quaker. Very nice man, but he was anti-German. He told me on a boat about [indecipherable] my wife was my fiancée then, how I could marry a German. And nothing. I was German, too. I was Jewish as my religion, but so she was not a Nazi or something like that. And to me it's -- I don't think it makes any difference. But we walked in the German pavilion from the Russian pavilion, and in the entrance hall had life-size picture of a German no-Nobel Prize winners. And a -- more than a third or so were Jews, German Jews. And this man, who was a Quaker, high ranking in -- in the Palmer defense, said to me, "Look at this." And I said, "I noticed, I know." "I don't get it," he said. We sat down the table eat lunch, the cafeteria, and there was a lack of space, and the waiter came over, and said, "Excuse me, you have a table for -- you're only two. I have two students here, would like to sit down, they're tired. Would you mind I seat them at your table?" "No, go ahead." They sat down the table, they happened to be German students, and this guy saw red, the guy that was with me. And he said, "Did you see," -- he addressed the German student, "did you see the Nobel Prize winners that are on -- how can you have the nerve, Jews that you persecuted, take credit for them in your entrance hall?" And I was shocked, and th -- I knew that -- but I didn't know he was going to talk like that, and one of the German students said, "Well sir, that was -- these people were before Hitler, and after Hitler, and Hitler did that, about the Jews. And we are proud of

them today again. I'm glad we are proud of them again, that they were Germans of the Jewish religion, who won the Nobel Prize." But I never could convince this American that I married a German, and several times happened to me here, in particularly Jewish people. My own family [indecipherable], and the only family I had left [indecipherable] was in New York, a distant relatives. I stayed with them for three months before I went to the army. I slept in the kitchen. They had come in themselves to the United States right after the war, and they -- when they were in Bolivia.

Q: How were they related to you, and what were their names?

A: They -- the -- this was my father's sister, Paula Friedlander, and my uncle Herbert Friedlander. They daughter is still living in Florida, only five -- five years older than I am. And where were we ma --

Q: So you were living with them the first few months that you came?

A: You wa -- I want to say [indecipherable]

Q: Did it relate to the -- to the anti-German? Something about --

A: Yes. My cousin lives in Florida, send a letter to me in Germany, I said I was going to get married, how could I marry a German? These were German Jews from Berlin, and she couldn't understand. A matter of fact, came to a point where she was insulting. It wasn't about not being Jewish, but about being German. If your not Jewish they had no problem with that, they were non-religious. So then I said to her, "First of all, you are German, too, of the Jewish religion, or you were." And then you have to know the person, know the family. In her case, I checked it out, they were not Nazi family. I could

not, I don't think, for her parent's sake, that I could not marry Nazi family, who maybe were anti-Semitic before I changed their mind. Even though their daughter may not be responsible for this [indecipherable] it would be hard thing to do. You very much in love with somebody, you can do a lot of thing. I -- I could have married in the family Nazi, bu -- but in -- I'm getting off the subject -- in my office in Heidelberg was a soldier, a rabbi's son, who married a German whose family were big Nazis, and who told him never to come to their home [indecipherable] Nazis after the war. And in my case, with my cousin Flora, I then told her, "Look, if you will not accept my wife, you don't have to -- you don't have to come to my house. I don't come to yours either, and I don't want anything to do with you any more. You reject her and you don't even know her. You judge a person not by the family -- I mean sometimes you can, but not -- in this case absolutely not. So if you remain with this opinion or position, let this be the last letter between us, because I'm going to live with her, not with you. So it's important to me." So my aunt, her mother, wrote back to me. "I know how you feel about the family, we haven't got many left. Don't do this, cutting her off, not writing her any more, seeing her any more, some," -- but I said, "I agree with you, very few people left. I am not making decision, she is making decision. So I don't have to -- if she is against my wife, she is against me, and I don't like people who make judgments without knowing the facts, without knowing the person." To make a long story short, I married her, and because of my job I was changed -- I'm coming back to that again with some other thing [indecipherable]. I beca -- security, with a top secret project I was working on, they say

he cannot be married -- the American army said, “He cannot be married to a foreigner.” As a matter of fact, even worse, not to somebody from the East Block country, East Germany, and -- because I’m working on -- on a secret project. So, the army said, “We’re not going to give you permission to get married.” But they changed their mind later on, he got cleared, and I -- I married her. I -- I threatened the army that I’m going to resign my commi -- “You cannot stop me from marrying her. You -- you -- because I’m going to resign my commission and leave the army. I have served enough time, I can get out any time I want to.” And they said, “Don’t do that, don’t make that quick judgment.” “Well,” I said, “you stop me from getting married. If you come with me and say that she’s an east German spy, that’s why [indecipherable], and I have top secret knowledge, I can see, but you checked her out, that everything’s okay.” So to make a long story short, because of this assignment that was pending -- I didn’t know about that, they send me and her to United States, and she became citizen, three weeks. They cleared her, and my boss said, she’s as clean as [indecipherable] family -- about Communism, not about Nazism, but I checked that out too, in the meantime, on a -- in a personal way. That was a k --

Q: How did you check it out?

A: I had friends who had access to paper, secret papers in the army. I was intelligence officer, and there were other intelligence officers. So my boss, the colonel, came to me and said, “We agree, and I tell you something, that they won’t tell you, but you work for me, that in everything I checked on your wife -- your future wife, came out as white as a

sheet. Absolutely [indecipherable]. Nothing suspicious. So -- but the new job that we have you -- we have planned for you, your wife has to be a citizen if she is -- cannot be a German wa -- particularly from East Germany. So, the general wants to come and s-see you. He -- he wants you to come and see him." A-And so I went to see the general, and he said, "Well Willner, we have you scheduled for a nice, plushy job. You going to work as our liaison officer at the German Central Intelligence Agency, okay? But a requirement there is that your wife be an American citizen." If the guy is married that the job is given to. "Well," I said, "sir, you know the problems we had first, and so you are -- he -- you find out what -- you find out what I can do for you to get your wife to be a citizen, yeah." He -- he already knew, but he just wanted me to go through a procedure, to see what's involved. Well, in the middle of the week, had all the information I needed, I went back to the general, and he made the statement -- made the statement, sent me to the Chief of Staff of the army in Germany, in Europe, and another general, and they s -- made -- gave off -- they gave statements that in the interest of U.S. security, my wife is to become a citizen as soon as possible. They didn't say that I was scheduled for a new job, that's why -- they just said that -- they send us on a military plane back here, and my wife became a citizen in three weeks. She studied on the plane all the question they might ask her. So, she became a cit -- series -- I had to wait three -- three and a half years, and I was in the army.

Q: We have a couple minutes of --

A: So, we came back to Heidelberg, and her job -- she -- I met her in the American headquarters, where she worked when she wasn't studying. She was studying languages at the University of Heidelberg, and when she didn't have any money left, she went to work with the Americans, in an office. When she had enough money, she went back to the university. Well, since she was already working in -- on -- without having a clear [indecipherable] needed up there, she worked on some non-classified stuff, but she had a German salary. When we came back from the United States, she was an American citizen, and her boss was an American, of course, civilian. He said, "You posi -- your job has changed. I couldn't keep you, because you not germ -- German any more. This position was for a German." She said, "Okay. What job have you got for me?" He said, "Same job, we will switch you. You going am -- federal civil service." And he got his [indecipherable] out of it. So it's -- overnight, she was making three times as much money, but unfortunately, my job was seen to a different location, and she had to quit that job, go with me. And that's what she needed a citizenship for. They knew all -- they knew all that in advance, that might change and that -- and that -- and if we had children there was still something else. But -- so, we came back to Heidelberg, and we -- we live in government housing, and I got changed to another city in Germany, and became the liaison officer to the German CIA, for the army, and there -- I'm going to speak about some other interesting things.

Q: Okay, let's switch the tape.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape number three, side A, of an interview with Eddie Willner. Oh yeah, you can start with --

A: No, I going to start here.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay, I'm sorry we -- I'm -- should have had part of my story before, and not now, and -- to be in the proper order of sequence.

Q: It doesn't matter.

A: It doesn't matter? Okay.

Q: No, cause we put --

A: Okay, we go back to Brussels, where I went after the war and stayed --

Q: Yeah.

A: And at that time, I was all by myself, and I went to Jewish organizations for help, and I was very lucky. I was considered an orphan, but here was a 19 year old orphan. You don't put an orphan of that age in an orphanage. But the head of the Jewish organization -- there was the HIAS, and the Joint Committee, the head to -- was -- not the overhead, but one of the heads was a Mr. Muntzbah, who was in the internment camp in France with my father, and I knew him, and he survived the war, and became an official in one of these organizations. And when I went to see him one day, he said look -- I didn't have a place to stay, I stayed temporarily with some people -- and I also [indecipherable] the Dutch people I stayed with. He said to me, "Well, we have an orphanage here of children

who were -- who were in -- hidden by Belgians during the war, but whose parents went to the concentration camps, and then the orphanage still we've -- have a place for them [indecipherable]. So, I know they can find a place for you, but you will not be part of the orphanage except for sp -- sleeping purposes. You can go after a career, or back to school, whatever you," -- but they couldn't help me. So I said, "Okay, I'll take the room." They gave me a room under a roof, very nice. I went back to visit it two years ago with my second son, my wife with me. So I was in an orphanage, and I was free to go, and I -- it was arranged for me to -- they say, what do you want to learn to be? What do you want to be? Well, I had no idea, and they had -- some Jewish organization had the place to become a mechanic or something. And there were [indecipherable] people go to Israel. And I went in there and I went to school, and then I found a photographer there, who was a -- the court photographer for Belgium some. He had a very big studio on a main street in Brussels, very fancy, very rich. And I was inter -- always interested photography, and he was a Russian Jew who had lived in Belgium most of his life, who was involved in un -- during World War two, in a spy group, working against the Germans, that operated in France, and in Belgium. And there's several books written on this spying group, called the Red Orchestra. The German Intelligence, the Gestapo call it the Red Orchestra. But most of the members of the Red Orchestra were Jews, and so had been my boss, the photographer. So he was very well known, and because of -- not [indecipherable] because he was photographer, and he did take portraits, mainly. So I wanted to work in the lab, and I think he had two labs, one was for his real business, the other one probably for

some other business. He and I got along fine, but in the meantime was being re-interviewed by Jewish organizations, and they kept asking me about going to Israel. These were American organizations, some of them are Israeli, or pa -- or Palestinian. And they continuously tried to tell me I should go to Israel. I didn't have a job, I didn't have a profession, I didn't have anything. But I was healthy, I was a body, and they needed bodies there. So, on one of the interviews, this Jewish interviewer said to me, "Well, you know, with your age, and your experience, having come out alive from the concentration camps, and being healthy, intelligent, and whatever like that, right now learn to be a mechanic for photog -- photographer. These are the type [indecipherable] in Israel." I said, "Well, I agree." He said, "How about you?" I said, "I don't like me. I have no interest in Israel. I have sympathy for the Jews that found a new home there, who came like me, out of the camps, but to me it's too much sand." I -- I needed to say something, why I wa -- that was really -- I -- I needed -- I don't like hot climates, that's one reason. There were a number of things, and also it was not -- how should I say? Fancy, like going to the United States. This was a country developing, that didn't have their statehood yet. Everything was new, and it was going -- like going to military again in -- first, also. And -- and the United States appealing to me -- they did, because liberated by them. I ge -- I liked the guys. You asked me that before, why I liked them, and so all this and more appealed to me. And I was a western European, this was the Middle East to me, and -- and -- and in one of the answers the guy said to me -- oh, I said -- why do you not [indecipherable] I said, "Well, too much sand, and too many Arabs. I don't like hot

climate." And he -- he looked at me, and I thought I had to say something, and I said, for a joke, "And too many Jews." And I thought at that moment the guy was going to throw me out of the office. But I -- I meant it as a joke. But too hot, and too much sand, that was one of the things I really meant. In short, I wasn't interested in going to Israel, but he tried to push me. I'm glad I didn't go, and -- but -- but th-the worst thing I did was when he asked me, "What are you going to do then?" So I said, "Well, I -- I try to go to the United States." I told you that once before. "Well, have you got paper?" "No," I said, "I'm trying to get paper." And -- "From whom?" I said, "I located a cousin of my father." Apparently he is -- he was rich, because he had to have some money to sponsor somebody, and everybody at the time tried to go the United States, not just Jews, eastern Europeans who didn't want to go back to Poland, or somewhere. And he said, "Suppose you don't get the paper to go? What are you going to do then?" Well, I thought about staying in Brussels. I also had a quite nice girlfriend, and -- was 12 years older than myself, a teacher, but that wasn't the main reason. I still wanted to go United States, and make a new life for myself. And I already had tasted American life with the young men I was with in Germany. They had a big influence, really, on me. Clean cut guys who already knew something about war, and had traveled, and seen Europe, an-and a lot of other thing. Well, United States [indecipherable]. So, when the guy said, "Suppose you don't get your papers?" Well, I said -- he was -- he was [indecipherable] "I'll go back to Germany." And I said back to Germany, because that's where I came from, where I knew a lot of people, my parents had friends who were not Jewish. And when I said go on back

to Germany, he said, “How can you go back to Germany? The land did this for you.” I said, “The land that some people did to me and my par -- my family.” Well, we disagreed, and again, like I said, he was going to then throw me out for sure, but he didn’t. And I was serious, but today I would say I would have made a mistake, because for a Jew to live in Germany, like I said before, it’s different than living, a Jew, here. I would take real offense if I heard them all Nazi talk, and I have, in the military, on the -- being American uniform, and understanding German, I overheard many things that people said, in outdoor café, or what -- someplace.

Q: What did you hear?

A: Anti-Semitic statements. Nothing out of the ordinary. Anti-Israel. And for that matter, I want to add this here, about German, and the talk I gave in high school about the Holocaust, that these people, like the SS, who did this [indecipherable] exist anywhere. In peacetime they become criminals because they shoot somebody, beat somebody to death. In wartime they get away with it. They kill an enemy. So the people that did this in Germany, the same people we have in United States, too, only we have a different government, democratic government, and for that matter, I think we have them in Israel, too. I am sure that Jews who could kill Arabs, just because they’re Arabs, who hate them, and Arabs who just can hate -- kill Jews, because they’re Jews. Unfortunately, that’s the way the world is. I think you have to be realistic about that. Hatred has always existed, will continue to exist, and as far as I am concerned -- like I said before, it can tear you apart. It’s not good to hate. It [indecipherable].

Q: Okay.

A: Okay, I was interviewed for Palestine, too. Okay, start?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Okay, one of the nicer things about going to United States, and waiting for papers, was first when I found a sponsor. Was a distant relative of mine, cousin of my father, I had never met before. But he turned out to be a rich man, but not very generous, because I came to United States with 10 dollars in my pocket, he did not pay -- want to pay for my ticket on the ship, which would have been about a hundred dollars, or so. So I went in person to his home in New London, Connecticut. I thanked him, and send him every year, for Rosh Hashanah, a card. But he didn't answer. He really didn't want any responsibilities. I felt -- I felt, I didn't say so, but I -- that if I -- this -- I had been in his place, and a young boy comes over, missed out on a cation, has nobody, I send him back to school, maybe -- possibly through college, and if he want to [indecipherable] his money back for college, say, "Look, you can pay me back when you can." But he -- this was not the case, and there was also one of the reasons why I went into U.S. army. I want to be on my own, and as it turned out, I don't have to have to say thank you to anybody. I just did it on myself, I wasn't dependent on anybody. But one other lucky thing happened in Bozdoltz when I was sitting in a -- a sidewalk café, having a cup of coffee, was an American sitting next to me, next table. He couldn't speak French, and I helped him along, asking the waiter some questions. He turned out to be a big businessman from New York, and he involved me in a conversation, and then I told him I waiting to go

United States, and he said, “What are you going to do there?” He offered me a job in his import export business. He owned -- also owned a zipper factory in New York. And he said, “Well, when you get to y -- New York, come and see me, maybe I have a job for you.” It turned out he did have a job for me, and I learned production of zippers, and I worked in -- he really wanted to employ me in his import export business, because I spoke language. I didn’t tell him I was going to go to the army. I would have been drafted anyway, there was still a draft on at the time, and I would have had to serve two years. So he lost me anyway. So instead, I enlisted in the U.S. army for three years, whereas a draft would have been for two years, something like that. This afforded me an opportunity to get a high school diploma, and -- which I did all while working as a soldier, training and so on. And I -- from the time I applied, to the time I started with the U.S. army were about three months. I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey for basic training, and stayed there four months, and then this incident happened with this colonel, I think I might have told that story.

Q: You didn’t tell it on tape.

A: I didn’t tell on tape?

Q: No.

A: Well, I was chosen from my battalion, wh-which was at a strength of about seven to 800 men, I was chosen the soldier of the month, that meant being a good soldier, and doing things right, and handling weapons all right, and going to study certain items, or things, that the army needed. Basically what a young soldier does who first comes in the

army, nothing special. Well, out of this, based on the points you win, through the months, I got the highest points, and was named soldier of the month. That meant having the honor of sitting in the colonel's office, on Saturday morning when there was no training, and answering his telephone, on -- on the -- on his -- yeah, outside -- sit -- sitting outside the colonel's office, with the adjutant, who was a captain. At that time the colonel was reading the New York Times, and all of a sudden, very loud he said, when he read the headlines in the New York Times, which said Israel a state, United Nations has voted to welcome Israel into the nations of the free world, or -- and the colonel said to himself, or maybe so everybody could hear it in the office, "Goddamn Jew politics." Well, the adjutant knew that I was Jewish, the colonel didn't. He wasn't very much interested in the soldier of the month. To him it was just another soldier answering telephone -- although I did get a certificate from him for that. And he -- I -- I wasn't sure how I was going to respond to that, he didn't say this to -- to me, just to himself, expressed something real loud in the office, and I walked out, and I wasn't going to have the honor of sitting in this man's outer office. The adjutant came after me, he knew what I was doing, and he knew that I'd understood what the colonel had said. He was very embarrassed, and he asked me to please come back. He didn't want to make a big issue out of this. I said, "No, I just came here to the United States, and I admire the freedoms we have here, also freedom of expression, but -- but not improper things like -- like that." So he underst -- said he understands, but it wasn't his opinion, and no -- he didn't think anybody else in the office, just the colonel's opinion. Well, I said I can understand,

everybody's entitled to his opinion, but not in a position like he is, make a blanket statement like that. So, the final thing was that I did not go back to the office, and in leaving him, he said, "Willner, remember for the rest of your career, that all kinds of people make this world." And I just remember that sometimes.

Q: Did you ever experience any -- did -- repercussions? You were saying a little earlier that -- that the adjutant was concerned that you were going to be maybe demoted, or something, because you had left the office.

A: I -- I -- I really, at that time, could care less. I mean, I didn't -- I -- I -- I didn't think of that I'm afraid of being -- I don't think that could have happened to me, knowing already what I knew about the U.S. army, that everybody's pretty much the same, and people are people, there are good ones and bad ones. There's always a rotten apple somewhere. But there also good apples on top. So, it didn't bother me. Particularly, I was very con -- not concerned, but aware of the freedom that people had here, and this was part of it. When I finished that basic training, was a battalion at Fort Dix, my luck started. The whole battalion was ordered to Alaska, about 700 men or so, and I was in despair. I thought if I'm going to be in the army, I'm going to use my language background, French or German, or both, but what about Alaska? Besides it's very cold there. So from my viewpoint, I also had to consider -- which I always considered, giving back something to this country, and I was debating with myself, well maybe I should go to Alaska, like everybody else, but again here's free speech, I can open my mouth and say I'm better fit for Germany, or France. I can do the army more good, and perform better than being a

soldier. Many soldiers better than I am, they can shoot better, and do this better, that better. And I decided, no, I should not keep my mouth shut. And particularly I thought perhaps, being soldier of the month, maybe somebody remembers me, and they will talk to me, because not normally down in the army that you go and complain [indecipherable] with reason. So I went to see another officer who was in personnel, and I said what I'm -- I'm -- I'm not norm -- not normally in the habit of making complaints, this not a complaint, a suggestion, I would appreciate look into this. That -- that [indecipherable], as you know, I said, the battalion, infantry battalion is going to Alaska, and I feel that I'm wasting my time, and I'm wasting the army's time by just being a soldier. The only thing he has to know maybe, to fire some weapon, and I can do that, but I can do much more if I'm in a position in -- in Europe someplace. So the United States at that time was all over Europe, except in the east. And so, make the long story short, he didn't say yes or no, but he said, "You'll be notified." I was n-notified the next day that I'm taken off the orders. So that was the first day, it didn't say I was going to Germany, but then I went around, I was excited. I went, asked some people, some -- most people didn't know, but then I came up on the sergeant who said, "Yeah, I've seen your name. I think you're going to Germany." Well, I -- I was hoping he was right, and it was true. I went to Germany, and on the ship to transport were some other foreign-born people, also in the army, mostly Polish, or Czechs, in total about 10. And when we arrived in Germany, in Bremerhaven, the security people came on board, and they said, "You, you, and you, and you. You remain here." There was myself included, another guy from [indecipherable] Germany,

and about seven or eight Poles, and one or two Czechs. And what this was, they were hunting spies. The -- the [indecipherable] Intelligence had gotten information that some of the people who claimed to be refugees from the east, were not -- were from the east, but were not refugees, they pretended to be. They want to get into United States, and spy for Russia, or Poland. But they check everybody out then, including myself. Anybody was fa -- I forgot to say, I was not a citizen at the time. And everybody -- oh -- oh -- amo -- among these 10 men, didn't have American citizenship. The regulation at that time was that anybody who immigrate to United States, who comes in, and is of draft age, will serve in the army first. This for all the people who signed papers that they come for permanent residence to United States -- not if you're visiting here, you -- and you've given up your citizenship. I never reclaimed my German citizenship, which I could have. I can go today the German embassy and say, "Under Hitler I was deprived of a German citizenship, I want it back." I could have it. I know somebody that did that here. I have no interest in that. They can keep their citizenship after all that. So -- so we were held in Marmuk, Germany, we came in Bremerhaven port, then went by train to Marmuk, Germany. It's an old German castle. There were no fences or anything again. Not as a prisoner, but just a place to live. And they told us they have to investigate each one of us, and clear us to go to our new assignment.

Q: What year was this?

A: This was in 1948. I didn't think, frankly, that six -- seven months, or eight months after immigrate to United States, I would be back where I came from. Never in my

wildest dreams I would have thought -- it wouldn't have happened if I would have gone to Alaska, and I thought I'd go to Alaska, or go the Far East or something. But -- so I opened my mouth, and I learned my first lesson, you want to get something done, don't complain about it, go and talk to the right people. Maybe you'll get a no, like people are re-religious, who think about praying to God, to give them this or that, or -- and then it doesn't happen. Or like a rabbi once said, here in the military, "Well, God is hearing you, but he just said no." Well, that's the way I felt about some of these things, so they say no, say no, but at least I try. I don't know if you see that little saying on the wall, I've had for 25 years. Failures [indecipherable] people are failures. Failures are people who thi -- who thought -- I'm n -- y -- all mixed up now -- who thought and never did. Number [indecipherable] plan yama, but if you don't do anything, you know, nothing's going to happen, or you complain about somebody if you don't complain about -- you go into a store, and you have something to complain about the merchandise, or the sales lady, well don't talk to her, talk to her supervisor, or to the manager of the place. Get something corrected. So my saying is failures are divided into two classes, those who did and never thought, and those who thought and never did. You thinking about a plan of something [indecipherable] or you do it, otherwise you might as well be talking to the wall. And also [indecipherable] you doing something, to think about it first. I have buil -- built many things which I thought were -- help m -- help me in my sickness, or whatever, and to -- in order to get my shoes on better. It's harder to get myself dressed, and I've become very inventive. The moment I think about something, I start doing it already. But a lot of

things I've done, just sitting in a corner, they're useless. But I did them, so it was fun doing them, and the idea to do this, and I pass on the ideas to other people, who were able to help themselves [indecipherable]. So -- and finally -- it was about 10 days later, after sitting in [indecipherable], only two people were released to go to their destination, myself and another guy. And all the Poles were kept, because they were pretty sure, they just didn't know who, that there were spies being infiltrated into the U.S. army in Europe. Okay, that was the start of the Cold War, let's say, and -- but it was true, there were people who were being infiltrated. It was a good chance for them to do that. And to -- there was specifically a case -- not one case, 5,000 people, they called it the Lodge act. Lodge was a senator, and he had a law passed that said there are many people in Europe, or in Germany, particularly, who came originally from East Bloc countries, from Poland and Russia maybe, Czechoslovakia, who cannot go back, because they are not Communists, or for other reasons, whatever. Some unfortunately, because they're war criminals. And he said, "We have to do something, we employing these people." The U.S. army was employing them as auxiliary guards. They had the regular uniform that GIs wore, but it was dyed black. No insignia. And they wore rifle at night, and they stood guard around these places, where there were American soldiers housed. And these people, probably some of them were on the Nazi side [indecipherable] because they lost the war, not on the American side. But the Lodge act said we give them a chance for new future, and they don't have any dependents, they must be unmarried. We accept 5,000 of these people, who are already working for us, in the --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

A: -- he was a army Intelligence school at Owamagow, Germany. That's where they have the Passion play, you may have heard about that. And the school had two courses, and I was picked for the criminal investigator's course. What is this, being a de-de-detective in the army. Which is nice, because you don't have to wear a uniform, you go out in civilian clothes. So you're a soldier, I fig-figure for tho -- for two years, and you have a ID that you are a -- a detective, or a criminal investigator in this case [indecipherable], and you have many privileges, including most of the officer's normally have. Here I was only a private, or a corporal, and I applied for it, and the captain called me in, and he said, "Well, I don't think you are qualified." I said, "Why not, sir?" "You're too short." I said, "Captain, have you ever heard of exceptions?" I thought he was a guy who would cat -- not ask please do this, or do that, or -- I -- I was showing him that I knew what was on. He said, "Yeah, well wh-what do -- exception would you have?" "An exception for height." I know that the minimum is five foot in o -- in -- in officer's school the same thing, but they give a -- a exception. He said, "And your English is not that good." I said, "That's true, but I can learn very fast." And [indecipherable] he didn't want to let me go to school. So at that time, I had this civilian friend, a lady, who was a girlfriend of a colonel, who was higher than the captain, she told him my story, and that the captain had refused let me go to school. And this girl called this captain and said, "Why don't you let Willner go to school?" He had some stupid reasons. He himself was a stupid man, and so

the colonel said, “Well I -- I think he is very capable, and I think you should consider him.” He couldn’t tell him what to do, but captains don’t fool around with colonels. And so next thing I know was an orders to come investigator’s school. Very interesting, in the mountains, beautiful, and I became a criminal investigator and they teach you all the things a detective learns. But you deal only with army members, or air force, or navy. And -- so when I finished that, I was assigned to Heidelberg, which is the headquarters for yu -- all U.S. forces in Europe. And in Heidelberg -- it -- it’s the headquarters where there’s staff officers. Well I wasn’t going to be a staff officer, because first of all I wasn’t an officer. Number two, that’s -- you have to know good knowledge of the English language, you had to write reports, staff studies, that wasn’t for me, I knew that. So I didn’t turn out -- I’m going to the right school, and -- well, in Heidelberg. Our captain, the commander, was a Jewish guy by the name of Marcus. He was a lawyer in civilian life, and he was being -- he had been drafted for the army, and he became the commander of the investigation unit. So he was very good. And -- and then he ha -- assigned me to an en -- to a guy who also was Jewish, who had been a police force in Philadelphia. And he was a champion boxer there. Big guy name of Goldstein. And they assigned me to him as his partner. Now in police work you usually will partnership with a policeman that’s already well into it, and Goldstein was not only former policeman, he was big, strong, a bully of a guy, who if you -- he talked to you, pay -- you pay attention. He was a nice person, too. He had himself been a captain, but he was demoted to captain after World War two, because they made many people officers, and after World War two --

Q: Excuse me --

A: -- it was common that a lot of officers, who made more money being officers in the army than civilian life, wanted to stay in the army as a career, but they couldn't use everybody on staff, there was too many people. They were losing the forces, and he was rift. And then they had a deal, when people were rift, could re-enlist in the army, but not as officers, as master sergeant. That's a ter-ter-terrible come-down. You -- that's not a proper thing to do in proper management in my opinion, to have people moted up, and then they go down again. But again, that was our system, and when I knew him was a captain, and I was a corporal, so Captain Marcus said, "You go as -- w -- Goldstein." And it turned out to be terrific experience, he turned out to be a terrific guy. He was very good investigator, he was very good with criminals. Good interrogator. I really learned a lot. As a matter of fact, he was very courageous guy, and he treated me like -- he taught me thing, and I was very grateful for that. And th -- and then he got into trouble. He was honest, but he had an affair with a German professor's wife. [indecipherable] been invited the house -- and the German professor was not a Nazi or nothing, nothing to do with, strictly -- so Goldstein did that, and then she was going to divorce him, and marry Goldstein. And she did, finally. I saw them one time in the States. Okay, those things happened there, but -- okay, I working with Goldstein, and -- interesting cases. And -- for instance, a guy [indecipherable] from Heidelberg all of a sudden, came like -- w -- from Paris came a request, they want Heidelberg to send an investigator to Paris that spoke both German and French. German, because he had to operate in a French zone in

Germany, and the American zone, you had to know German. Not all investigators spoke four language. There was one thing, and the second thing was that he -- yeah, that he spoke French also fluently, and work with the French police in the past. I thought that was great. So I went to Paris. I bought my first car, I bought a surplus Jeep from the army. One thing, but I didn't have any money. 400 bucks that I pay for that thing. Lot of money in those days. And I put my dog in it -- I always had German Shepherd -- and baggage, and I came to the French border, and the Frenchman said, "What -- what do you have in there?" Gasoline, I had four extra cans of gas, because gasoline was expensive in those days. You had to buy German, but we were entitled to American gas [indecipherable], and I had four jerry cans full. And the French customs officer, "What's in there?" He knew what was in there, gas. "You cannot import any gas to France." I said, "It's my gas, not for sale, and selling on black market. I have to report to Paris, and I just bought this Jeep, and I was told that it was difficult to get gas, and also more expensive. So I took four [indecipherable]." You know, you cannot take [indecipherable]." That was just plain harassment. They were jealous. Then I said, "Will you give me a statement that you don't let military allies -- that you won't let me cross the border with four cans of gas? What big deal is this, four cans of gas?" [indecipherable]. He said yeah. Also, they -- he wanted me to leave it there for him to sell Black Market, they were [indecipherable]. So I -- I got upset, and I drove my car to a ditch. He said, "What are you driving it there for?" I said, "I'm making phone call, telephone there." But I went to the ditch, I took my four cans of gas, and I poured them

into the ditch. I filled my gas tank first, one more time. And the French came up, “Ah, if somebody throws a -- throw the match down there, and going to be fire,” and all this. But I was really upset, and th -- this guy, he got upset. That’s what I wanted. I wasn’t going to leave those four cans there. I made it to Paris, but I might as well not have made it. 20 miles out of Paris, I was looking at my gauge, and was at the end [indecipherable], if worse comes to worse, I would have gotten the French gas, but my car start to be on fire. I don’t know, I’m not a mechanic, I don’t know anything. I’m not interested in mechanics. I -- I -- I know my car’s out of gas, or little -- couple little things. My wife the same way, my old son the same way, and he should know about mechanics in helicopters. Well, it started burning, and I thought I had a fire extinguisher, couldn’t find it. I said, “Let the he -- damn thing burn, I want to get to Paris.” 40 more miles I hitchhiked, but I figured, with the dog, it’s going to be difficult, German Shepherd. But I get picked up, and some drove me into Paris. Not only drove me to Paris, but drove me to the place I was supposed to go. So okay, that’s that. In Paris I had my greatest time. I figured I can pick up on my education, and the army is going to pay for it. They encouraged that, they -- and the GI bill, and I was assigned to the French FBI [indecipherable]. They had several [indecipherable], and I wound up with a very nice inspector, who taught me all [indecipherable] thing. Basically, the job was, if an American did something wrong in Paris, the French arrested him, and then they didn’t know what to do with him. They turned him over to the Americans. So they decided to have somebody permanently up there -- not always, call somebody someplace. And got the job, and I -- they paid for a

room, the army paid for nice hotel room in a [indecipherable] from the Arc of Triumph, and the owner of the hotel -- hotel, liked my dog. I was all fixed up. So I lived in there for -- short of a year, and I had interesting experience, I was -- I'll just mention one, or two. A -- they had phony money circulating then. This -- these were not phony dollars, but the occupation money, they call it scrip. Scrip was money that the Black Market was done with. You would go in the PX, and buy things with it [indecipherable].And [indecipherable]

Q: Your job -- your job lasted a year. What -- will you describe more specifically what your job was?

A: My job [indecipherable]. As a criminal investigator, criminal investigations within the army. Somebody murdered somebody in the army, and somebody stole, raided the supply room, sold on the Black Market. Some people got involved in drugs, phony money being printed by the French in southern France. Everything, like -- yeah. And I -- even including homosexual, which was not normal that time. My boss asked me one time if I had been in England. I said no. "Want to take a quick trip to England, just across channel?" "Yeah, what is it?" "Well, we have a guy, the English arrested a guy, a Black man, who is a homosexual." And the English [indecipherable] people know about the English. At one time Britain was known for homosexuality. The men -- n-nice people, well-known people. And he said, "Well, the guy is a homosexual. He is not dangerous, he is not commit any other crimes, but [indecipherable] been arrested, he can't turn loose again, he must be escorted back to his base." I said, "Do I have to wear a weapon?" I

figured I might fall asleep, it might grab my weapon. He said, “That’s required of you, but you wear it underneath your jacket, concealed.” I said, “Okay.” I went to London, and picked up the guy, and he was a Black sergeant and he -- very intelligent. He was obviously homosexual, but that was not -- not my problem, and he -- I got curious, the guy was intelligent, talkative. I never handled a homosexual. I had one as a friend one time, and -- in the army. I di -- I di -- know he was homosexual. It didn’t bother me, but -- but some people criticized me for it. I figure what I can do ma -- in my own bedroom, nobody’s business. I ran away and I [indecipherable] good. I had a interview with the CIA when I retired from the army, and the CIA questions you, and puts you on a lie detector, polygraph test. I answered everything truthfully, til they got to my sex life. And the guy on the polygraph said, “You went out a lot?” “Yeah.” This nothing held against you. They rather have somebody that he’s been around, knows what’s going on than somebody who is shy, and timid, you know? But some -- they had to ask [indecipherable] question. So, I was sitting across this guy on a train coming back from London, and, “Excuse me, I -- you seem to be a pretty nice guy, and -- and in some places it’s not considered a crime, but I’m new in this. Can you tell me please, if you want to talk, why are you a homosexual? You look nice, and --,” He said, “Well sir, we walked here and you see a good looking woman come out in the street, you -- make you excited, you may get -- you -- you look, and that’s basically the same thing when I see a man.” That’s a -- that’s all he said. A nice guy, I didn’t think [indecipherable]

Q: So how did you feel about the army's policy, or asking you to arrest this man for being homosexual?

A: I didn't arrest him, I escorted him. I'm ne -- my -- my arrests were in different [indecipherable] Nazis, which we were not supposed to arrest, but I did [indecipherable] people [indecipherable].

Q: One more question before you move on. So you were just saying some -- something about the polygraph test, did you finish that thought?

A: They ask me, "How's your sex life with your wife?" See, it was okay if you said, "Well, I fool around, I have lot of girlfriend." They think you're normal, but with a guy it was [indecipherable]. I said to him, "Well, I tell you, I -- I s -- talk about everything, my life is an open book. To my wife, too. But it's not just one of your damn business what goes on in my -- my se -- sex life with my wife. If you ask me about a girlfriend, or somebody else, I could possibly answer. But not about my wife. It's none of your business whether it's good or bad." And I got up. Oh no, he s -- he said, "This -- this -- this concludes the interview." Fine [indecipherable], but they -- they come out with some other thing, asking -- they -- they particularly interested in -- you recording this? You are?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: There's a problem, and I don't know to which extent it's true. I'm -- I -- I -- I believe this could be true, that when you apply for a job in the CIA, or some other intelligence organizations, they don't take you like before with j -- if you're Jewish, because of Israel.

They think the Mossad is everywhere. And they are very active. I have never been approached, but I have been five time in Israel. I [indecipherable] my business there, but when they start questioning, I -- I never got the question, and -- and they trusted me, because know my opinion. And somewhere I might have told some of my bosses the incident that going to Israel with a guy who [indecipherable], and they thought, well, this guy's okay, but -- but nevertheless, I'm sure there's some who -- who think Jews have double s -- citizenship, and some of them do, some of the non-Jews do. I met -- I met a Danish businessman in Germany. He showed me two pass -- the American passport, the Danish passport. He was not Jewish, but --

Q: What is the incident that you just mentioned about going to Israel with somebody?

A: The -- Israel [indecipherable] somewhere. I went with my wife, and my younger son. And I wouldn't have goin -- even going to Israel, wouldn't have had the relative there, who even provided me with the money for the ticket. I didn't make too much money in the beginning, and when he asked me to come, I -- he gave me -- it was my uncle, he was a pu -- he was very -- he was in east -- stayed in Germany, my mother's brother. He was decorated during World War one, he's the one with the saber story I told. And he wanted to fight the Germans, because his mother got arrested and sent to Theresienstadt. So the Palestin -- the Israelis didn't take him, he was too old. He had been a bachelor all his life. He was a playboy, as a matter of fact, but nice guy. He was my favorite uncle. He didn't care about money, or anything, but he liked to go to parties, and -- and a woman that was interested in him, 20 years younger, and was our do -- my doctor's daughter. And she

want to marry him. She was 20 years older than he was. And I have picture of her sitting on his lap when she was 20, he was 40, at a party. Well, he never married her, he went to Israel, because his first girlfriend, who was a nurse, who enlists in the army when he enlist in the army, and they -- and he was sent to Queest, to what's that? A ci -- the island Cyprus.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: The Germans want to attack there, want to take Greece, and he was in British uniform, he was still a German citizen. That's excuse for [indecipherable] but he, you know, [indecipherable] uniform. But he didn't care, so the British said, "Well, since you speak German fluently, we have a special job for you. We [indecipherable] landing [indecipherable] keep the Germans out [indecipherable] go on to Italy." And he said, "What do you want me to do?" "We want you to parachute at night, in the [indecipherable]." He had never jumped by para -- he was 50 years o -- oh, they didn't take him to the army [indecipherable] were 50, I think. 50 is nothing [indecipherable] the army. He said, "Okay." When he was in the aircraft ready to jump, there was a [indecipherable] the aircraft, and the pilot gets a little shaky, and he s -- he figures something's happen -- ha -- something's happened to the aircraft, that's going to be more of a fire on it, and he said, "Jump." And my uncle didn't know whether he was to jump because of the fire on the plane, or before he arrived at destination, because the pilot was [indecipherable] was the destination, and they were all taken prisoners by the German. They fall off the plane. So he had all these men, sent to German prison camp, including

my uncle, and he -- this -- the -- the German commander under him, Wehrmacht commander, the army commander, not -- not a [indecipherable] person, knew that his house was already full of people [indecipherable] anyway. He didn't -- well, he got them in there, and the -- the commander was a [indecipherable] officer, and when he got to my uncle, he ask him, "You ever serve in German army?" What he going to answer? [indecipherable] he couldn't prove it, you know. [indecipherable]. He wanted to show he fought in the German army, and the British army, he was traitor. He [indecipherable] some o -- someone -- he tried to find out who the Jews were, and I think he was given an order, he didn't do this on his own, he was given an order to do that. So he said, "All Jews step one step forward." They were all line up, and nobody step forward. He said louder, "All Jews step one step forward." I don't know how many men there, I forgot. I know it was something like a couple hundred. All the British soldiers step one step forward. And there was [indecipherable] for a prison camp. And my uncle was found out anyway, but they couldn't prove that he had not -- he'd given British citizenship, which he -- which he hadn't. He was still German citizen. So may -- the -- when he finally [indecipherable] he became PW, and then [indecipherable] one day the Gestapo, and had him on the list. He said he cannot stay in this prison camp, he is a Jew, and he is a danger to this country. They send him to another camp, the people were punished [indecipherable] and he -- he --

Q: I'm -- I'm just going to interrupt you for a moment. I think we should focus on your own story as much as we can, just because of our limitations of time. So, I -- I -- maybe

we should just get back to the chronology, and you were talking about being in Paris, and you had left Paris.

A: Paris [indecipherable] the only interesting thing I did in Paris, was when there was information on being phony American dollars printed in Marseilles. And the French knew all about it, and they were appearing in Germany, that's where they used that phony -- that scrip money, and there was a lot of Black Market going on. So the French said they found the printing press in Marseilles. They asked me want to go along for the ride, not to do anything. Take my gun with me, but not to do anything [indecipherable]. Went down there -- and I was afraid of the French, because they always had [indecipherable] for money, just like here. Like giving the whole thing away, and selling it [indecipherable] on the way down, and [indecipherable]. So I was very careful. We came down and they didn't know about it, you know? And police covered all the exits, and told them to wait, and they called [indecipherable] pretty soon it got pretty interesting. I myself had a small experience with phony money, because of my language background. And phony money was the thing at the time, that had a value, you guy in the PX for it. PX has everything. And in Heidelberg there was a [indecipherable] there's some guy who sells phony dollars, the occupation dollars. And my boss, "Well Willner, you go find out, by yourself, otherwise two come, they think [indecipherable]. Go by yourself." I figured, well, phony money cannot very dangerous. The guy has a gun, he probably is out there -- what they call the -- what did they call Eichmann, they -- shripeshoop. They gave a nickname, shripeshruf merror. The mer -- office [indecipherable] all that stuff, killing

people, went out on paper wi -- in his office. He didn't work there in the country, he visits it.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is tape number four, side A.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: I've got the tape recorder on again, so you were going -- were you going to tell me about how you met your wife? Oh, I'm sorry. I started too soon.

A: Was -- the reason why I was successful, and it's amazing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: [indecipherable] before you have a -- the boss told me there's a guy who was a distributor, like people do cocaine, or -- but phony money.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I thought we were going to do like in France, [indecipherable] big. He was carrying the money around, selling the people for German marks. I wanted six people to support me, because you never know what's behind it, and what members when they go -- be by -- by myself, because y -- they never suspect you, you're short, nobody thinks you're with the police. "Yeah," I said, "but who is there to help me if -- to [indecipherable] over there?" "I'll have some people sent in by [indecipherable]." I go in this place in Germany, in a coffee house, meet the guy, and I [indecipherable], "Do you have the money?" "Yup." "Can I see a sample of it?" He said, "What do you want it for?" I said, "Well, I'm immigrating to the United States pretty soon, I earn a lot of -- more German marks on the Black Market, I want to convert it into money." [indecipherable] then have to get green dollars for it. He looked at me, "Where you from?" I made a lie.

"Are you Jewish?" That was just how -- he thought I was a Jew who was immigrating [indecipherable]. I said, "No, I think -- but I still [indecipherable] some money. Aren't you -- are you seller, or aren't you?" I said and the phony money, all this was being recorded on me, and I had a [indecipherable] turned out to be outside in case anything happens, and more than one guy there that I could sound the alarm. So, I mean, I [indecipherable] sat there at the table. I said, "Can you show me a sample?" I said, "What for?" No, he said, "What for?" I said, "I want to know -- I'm not buying this for myself, I'm buying this for a friend of mine, but he is in a position, he cannot be seen." Okay. "[indecipherable] show me a sample." But the money he wanted for it was quite high, and I think if it's high, he has probably good production, that will pass for -- for real. Then may a problem, and this doesn't look good, it's no problem. So, he takes out a bill under the table, he hands it to me under the table, and he says, "That's a risky business. I hope nobody's watching us." And the police all over, he just sat there. "Yeah," I said, "probably, but why here [indecipherable]? Nobody following me, you know." Okay, him -- we made a deal, he gave me bag of money, I paid him, and the moment the translation -- the transaction was completed -- completed, he said -- I say, "You're under arrest," in German. But I had no right to. I was a German under the -- in the company of a German policeman. Well, we just didn't have one at that, and the moment I said that, he looked at the rear door, he looked there, he was going to escape it, but I had his money, and I said, "[indecipherable], if you think of getting out of here without getting caught, you're mistaken. I have a military police company outside, of over a hundred men." It wasn't

true at all. And he said to me that he's stupid, and that -- that I have to understand they have to do this to make the money, well, other people [indecipherable] making money now. But then I came out, he esc-escorted me out -- I never even called the guys in. I walked out the front door with him, and took big MP's kind of by the arm, and put him in jail. So that was my [indecipherable]. Then I go in from Heidelberg, to Paris already [indecipherable] that too? And [indecipherable] Paris -- Liege, Belgium. Liege is a pretty big town, for Belgium it's warm. And I lived there before in Brussels, if you remember? So I was very happy to get to Belgium.

Q: Were you in touch with the family that had -- y-your foster family in Belgium at all after the war?

A: [indecipherable] I -- I told you about that, and when the [indecipherable] the manager. Didn't I tell you that?

Q: Not on tape.

A: Okay, I -- I -- I'll weave that in here. I had been in Belgium before, and I enjoyed my assignment there. Then one day my job was changed. Instead of doing criminal investigation, I was going to do congressional investigation from our [indecipherable] here. And they needed qualified or -- investigators for that, partially speaking the language. What happened, congressional investigations in washing, if you had a son who was the army during the invasion of France, or in Germany, and he was found missing in action -- there were many of them, thousands, but they had also quite a few hundred who deserted, who didn't want to fight, and who got married to other women, local women.

Had already wife in the United States, maybe children. And the last that we knew of them, he never showed up, he disappeared from his unit. So, a guy didn't show up in his unit, that could happen he got lost, or had a girl from someplace, then he was AWOL. AWOL is absent without leave. He would get some small punishment for that, but they cannot give you more than 30 days in jail, unless the guy stays a-away, excuse me, a year or something, then it's desertion, it becomes automatically desertion. So, congressional investigation demanded the parents, let's say, had the son missing in France, he was never found. We have cemeteries over there, and usually people got buried in our American cemeteries. We do not have cemeteries in Germany. It's not a fact well known, because our law says we will not bury American soldiers in enemy territory if they get killed there. So if they got killed in Germany, they had to transport it back to France, or -- or Holland, or Belgium. Okay, so this congressional investigations were usually initiated by parents, who went to their congressman, say, "Hey, do something about it. We want to get our son home in a casket [indecipherable] buried -- or even buried over there, but w -- what -- know what happened to him." So you could get people buried, not in Germany, but in France, Belgium. So whatever the family decided. I had the -- this cousin, who before the war, came to United States, he got killed in France, has a grave there in a military cem -- an American military cemetery, and I visit his grave, send the picture to his parents. They were originally from Germany. And then they ask me that the government told us we can have his body brought back here, buried a local cemetery, or have it -- him stay in a French cemetery. I said, "Leave him there. He's dead. I know y --

how you feel about him, but if you bring him here, what have you accomplished? You go more often to the cemetery, you feel worse. Sometimes gotta finish -- the war is finished, you can't go on and on with these things." And -- he was the only son. I said, "You had to -- you paid a high price for escaping Germany, came to United States, but that's the way it goes." If I had to make a choice, my family [indecipherable] 10 members of the family, and what I'm po -- proposing is that we do a certain thing, but 10 -- out of 10, eight are -- eight [indecipherable] took them all alive. I know this in advance, you may still do it, or you may not do anything at all, because you're a coward, or you say this won't work, or -- anyway, so in the -- in these congressional investigations, like I said, I -- we had to go further than the cemetery, the cemetery was only the last instance [indecipherable], or in the United States. And the deal was -- my job was to find out from local people, if there was an American, or more, killed in that area. They usually knew because the German shot him there, they were not going to bury him. And then the French fo -- found him, and they make a local grave out of it, right in the cemetery, bury him. So I said to this guy, "Do you have any unmarked graves here, where you don't know whether they are Americans or German?" He said yes, and that's the way we usually worked it. If they said yes, if they were sometimes a mound, not totally un-underground, they would say, "There a hundred soldiers buried here," or, "There a hundred French soldiers buried here, a hundred American buried here." Or German troops with Americans. We went to the extreme, our country, to -- which I -- I think is -- was right, even this point. These guys, they died for their country, and they have a right

to be properly take care of. So -- and finally -- so what I finally [indecipherable] hundred guys that the farmer told me, “I don’t know, we -- we just picked up these guys after the battle was over, and they were dead, and we threw them all in a hole, covered up.” I said, “Are they Germans, or Americans?” He said, “I think they’re mixed, they [indecipherable].” Sometime that is only German. I said, “Okay, we got to open this grave up.” That wasn’t my job. They had what they call graves registration teams. They were Americans, comprised of guys, and linguists, and dentists sometimes with dental charts, and what was the other thing? Well, may -- they -- if I thought, or somebody else thought, among those hundred Germans, may be two Americans we’re looking for, they decided to dig them all up, and sometimes that the uniforms, they were a mess. But fortunately, I didn’t have anything to do with that, I just had to investigation, and -- and then report, and then they took action on what to do about it. So I had this place with about a hundred Germans, and I said to this farmer, “Are you sure they’re no Americans?” Because I got after action reports from the army, before I [indecipherable]. They said the 75th infantry company went through there, through the area, and I had a map -- had their all map f -- when they went to the war, and they send out two scouts, to find out where the Germans [indecipherable], and those two scouts never came back. I have reason to assume they got killed, if they were taken prisoner, and they could have [indecipherable] as prisoners, but prisoners we usually found alive. So, here already hundred or so Germans, and they decided to dig up. When I said I come back in two or three days, when you should be finished, and then -- and they had not archaeologists, but

they had dentists sometime, and [indecipherable] soldiers. And they couldn't, they were bloody and rotten already. But the teeth, you could tell. And the other thing was dogtags. Had the dogtags, you have two of them, and take one off and take it with you, to report that this man was killed.

Q: But were all these bodies from the last battles of World War two, or were -- what was the --

A: [indecipherable] yeah, probably.

Q: So there were [indecipherable]

A: Except -- except for the ardents. The ardents offensive -- where I worked my way through [indecipherable] there was the ardents, or the -- they have another name, too. The Hertkin Forest battle. Hertkin forest was very tall trees, and the artillery shells [indecipherable] up the top, there was bird and [indecipherable]. And many people got killed by shellbursts from the top, the Germans were shooting not to the bottom, but to the top, because the top created a lot of splinters, and whatnot, and -- and -- and then spread out to the [indecipherable] underground [indecipherable]. But in this hundred men grave, I came back a few days, and they -- we -- they told me, "We didn't find what you asked for, but we found something else interesting." Not the guy -- the guys were looking for. And they came with a box, and in that box was half a leg, and in that half a leg was a pair of boots, American boots. So right away I knew these were American's feet, I didn't have to look at a dogtags, I think. And so I said to guy, "Well, put this in the box," clean it up, took some of the dirt off. And then I said, "Open up the boots." So he opens the

boots, we gi -- at the time we had boots, they were not boots total, they -- on the side we had two closures, you tied them up[indecipherable]. So, opened it up, and I find the guy's name in there. He turn -- didn't turn out to be the two guys I was looking for, but another guy who was also missing in action -- I thou -- I thought was missing in action. So apparently, during the fights there, he had his leg shot off, and I said, "Well, his body must be nearby or something." And I said to the guys, "You want to dig a little further [indecipherable]?" And they didn't feel like it, I didn't feel like it. I said, "Okay." I know we don't tell the congressional investigator that we found a leg, that there was the rest of the body [indecipherable] whole thing. I said, "But they will be convinced that he is killed, maybe." I -- you see, I was not in favor in spending so much -- too many dollars with digging up people [indecipherable] rested in peace. And we sent that box back to the States by air. Five days later I get a call. Wh -- some colonel on the phone. "What are you doing out there, Willner? You having a lot of fun?" I didn't know what he was talking about. He said, "Or you have nothing to do, you do things like you do?" I said, "Colonel," I said, "tell -- I -- I don't know what you're talking about." "Well, you send us back a leg." These were the people that they -- they have [indecipherable] like a morgue, they process dead bodies, clean them up, put them in nice box, very fancy. And so he said, "The leg you dug up, you want to talk to the guy?"

Q: Hm.

A: Yeah. The leg had been shot off, and the guy was alive in United States. [indecipherable] his serial number, and they found him, and then they went to the

Pentagon, and said serial number such and such, he wasn't killed, he -- he's right here. So I was, you say the butt of joke or something, for a long time down there, I am digging up legs, and finding guys that alive.

Q: So this was in -- during the -- the bat -- World War two, that he had lost his leg?

A: World War two, on the Belgian -- Belgian, French and German border, generally. And --

Q: What -- what -- how did you feel about being in -- being in Germany again after the war, and doing this work for the American army? Did you feel comfortable?

A: I had a great time, I found my personal -- a lot of satisfaction, being successful, had a free hand, my boss was so good that I went out in faraway places, and the weekends were coming up, I would have liked to be home, but I liked to see other places, too. Had a Jeep available, and a driver. Normally a team consists of three people, one officer, one sergeant or corporal, and one dri -- drivers were these Polish guys who went [indecipherable] United States, they employ them as guard, or driver. So I -- I was operating [indecipherable] also very independent, and the boss we had, he kept the [indecipherable]. He said that I was doing a great job, and normally he said, "There's an officer, but I cannot promote you to become an officer, you got to go to school, and -- but I'll give you another promotion." Got another stripe, and on -- once a year you have an inspection of people who don't normally wear a uniform, who -- who work in special units, and my boss came around for some general took once a year look at you. And we had to have all our uniforms in a closet, neat, pressed, insignia and all that. And it had to

be open, not locked. And we went about our jobs while these guys were looking our stuff. And I had my hung up properly, and everything cleaned, and shoes shined, you play soldier again. And then captain -- that evening, Captain Marcus called me in. He said, "Willner, apparently the general knows you, he heard of you. You do [indecipherable] sharp here, but you got one problem. The question was why you not an officer." I told him same story, you have to be a citizen first, and you cannot become commander of American troops if you're not a citizen, only if you're doctor, a chaplain, or -- you can't be foreign -- not [indecipherable] foreigner." So he said, "Yeah, but he looked particularly through your stuff, he wanted to see what -- how you keep your stuff. He [indecipherable] nothing -- anything about your stuff, but I found you -- you -- he put me i-in a bad shape. I -- he -- the general asked me what grade I have by now, and I told him sergeant. And we open up your locker, and you find corporal stripes on there. That's one less stripe [indecipherable] there are three. Why is that?" I said, "Captain Marcus, I tell you frankly. I feel like a nothing with just two stripes. I -- I -- I decided I'm going to put my stripes on when I have three stripes, to amount to something." He know -- I was a good [indecipherable] Captain Marcus, I could say that, and he laughed, and, "Look, if you don't have them on by tomorrow morning, I'm going to take your three stripes away, you -- you'll be nothing but a private." [indecipherable] and what -- then I wrote a letter, I think I can get [indecipherable]. I wrote a letter to the general, and I said it's not normal to -- for a sergeant to write to a general, and has permission from his commanding officer, and I do not have permission from my commanding officer, he doesn't know

about it, but I'd like to explain something. And what he -- what I explain is maybe not acceptable to you either. It was not acceptable to Captain Marcus. I told him that I think not because I earned them, or I'm capable of doing the job, I just thought th-three stripes were better than two stripes, it's a higher rank. A lot of guys had two stripes, but [indecipherable]. And he laughed, he -- okay. Captain Marcus took care of it, have me put them on. I know. I had the same thing happen to officer's school. You get promoted if you're a private or -- or is a [indecipherable]. Okay, my three year -- now comes the important part. My three year less -- lesson -- enlistment was up. I had learned English better, I have got myself a high school diploma. The army had arrangements with state of New York board of education, that for military people who needed a high school diploma, they can take courses, or they can take a final examination for high school, and the state of New York will issue a high school diploma, even if you have not graduated from high school, provided you pass the exam. So I looked at, and asked the guy that was in charge of it, looked at this and see if I am -- where I was weak. I always felt weak in -- in m -- n -- math, or English maybe. I looked at it, it didn't look that difficult to me. And I said, "I'll take the exam without studying, and if I don't pass, I'll start studying [indecipherable]." I took a 10 hour examination, five sections each, and passed with flying colors. I was so happy. And that qualified me to take another test to become an officer, because you have to be -- and the other things involved, first of all, because the Korean war was going on, they accepted people with less education to get them to officer's school without a college degree. But you had to have a high school diploma, and

to be a citizen. So I had the high school diploma, but I didn't -- I wasn't a citizen yet. And with the -- I explain that, an-and in past a system has been developed, it also has to have college education [indecipherable] army. They used to have a time where you can get your college education in the army. The University of Maryland, Virginia, they taught courses in the Pentagon, and some other place. And they -- so that's what -- what was I go -- what I was going to do. But I was up 19 -- three years, and I saved up all my leave time, which was 30 days a year, I never took leave, never went on vacation, and Captain Marcus knew this, and he said, "When you go to Paris, and you have to stay over the weekend, in the arm -- army's expense, because something ready for you, you are spending time working with other soldiers that are taking the weekend off, going someplace. And I will make a special deal, which I'm also as commanding officer. I know you saving up your leave time for other things more serious. So when you in Paris, on Saturday, you don't have to come back, you want to stay there you stay there," and this is -- I -- he -- he -- commanding officer could give you le -- leave time, three days, no more. It was only three days you had to take [indecipherable] leave, and it was just at his -- it's like an award they -- they gave away three day passes to guys who did good jobs, who wanted to see their families. And so I had 90 days, the agreement with [indecipherable] was I go back to New York, I go to the -- get my citizenship, and the requirement was that, when you get a citizenship if you're in the army, it's three years, if you're a civilian, five years, unless you're the wife of a military, and he is all -- overseas,

and he can -- the wife can get it two years, I think, because they prefer to be citizens, to protect the pe -- United States. So --

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

A: -- planes, but the Dutch knew, or they want metal detectors [indecipherable] but we're sitting [indecipherable] and they go melting, and discover or find the plane. And the pilot's still sitting in his seat, completely preserved. I've seen it. And the reason why preco -- preserved, because the ground is different, and it's calcium, and whatever is in there. It's very soft, and it's very -- it -- it's like what do you call that, embalming stuff.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And it -- it's exciting when you see a young pilot, and the last place he sits, and he just --

Q: I'm just -- say this is tape number four, side B, and we're -- we're rolling.

A: Okay. I got my nine -- 90 days of leave, was to carry out some personal affairs in New York, maybe get my citizenship, and then re-enlist in the army, if I get to go to officer's school, because you could not go -- you could pass the examination -- entrance examination, but you could not go to officer's school unless you went in front of a board, and they -- they voted for you. Nine people usually, they ask you questions. And -- but like I said, I needed the citizenship paper. And I figure 90 days enough, because [indecipherable] said three years in the army, and what was the other one? No punishments, you didn't go to jail for anything, had a clear record. And three years in ma

-- and oh yeah, three years, and -- and then you -- you re-enlist, otherwise you leave the army. And then you had to show the high school diploma, and your citizenship papers, and then you had to go in front of a board of officers, and this was not my area, New York, this was in Governor's Island, you know, Governor's Island, New York. Governor's Island had at one time military people on there, and offices, there was a whole fort, and that's where I had to go to get all my administration done. But I didn't have anybody to help me, I had to carry my [indecipherable]. But my main concern was to get to be a citizen so I could go in Governor's Island in front of the board, and the boards are maybe done twice a month, or something like that. And then they give you a selected, or not selected. So, I went there the day for two months to the headquarter of the immigration naturalization service in New York, on [indecipherable], and stood in line, you know. And I got very upset. I figure, I'm qualified, I did nothing wrong, and these people are preventing me from doing what I want to do, [indecipherable] me up with office school not in being in time, and the army realized they -- can realize they [indecipherable] can -- can do all these things. And already 60 days gone by, and I talked to an officer, and he even said [indecipherable] advice, he said, "Willner, go to Washington, go to the Pentagon. These are civilians here who -- they're bureaucratic, well, the military are bureaucratic, but they like to give people the runaround. But if you are qualified, really qualified, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't go to the Pentagon, let them help you out. Your people. You [indecipherable]." It's a funny thing. I walk in the Pentagon, in to the adjutant general's section, I didn't know who to see, and I

told them I have a serious matter, I'm going to talk somebody high up, [indecipherable] said that colonel so and so will see you. I walk in there, gave him a sharp salute, and told him my story. I mentioned concentration camps, I mentioned citizenship, and what I'd done in the army so far, and the guy was impressed. And he said to me -- I said -- my opinion is they give me the runaround for one reason or another. Well, if you're qualified, you're qualified, that's -- we'll take you into -- and he grabs the phone, and he mang up the phone, he said, "By the way, are you a republican or a democrat?" I didn't know what to say, I figure I'll say a democratic, he's a republican, he's not going to help me. And I was really a -- up -- I was nervous. I think I have to say something. So the guy said -- I said, "Sir, I'm not even a citizen yet." Make an excuse. I [indecipherable] "I'm not even a citizen yet, so I can't vote." Well, he said, "Make up your mind. Do you want to become citizen? Say you are a citizen, what would you vote, democratic or republican?" Again, this is [indecipherable], I said democrat. He said, "Good." He was a democrat. But -- so I -- I-I -- I --

Q: So you were lucky.

A: I was l-lucky. I was lucky. Now I'm more luck -- even luckier than that. He still had the phone in his hand, dialed a number -- I didn't know he was going to, and during the ta -- and came through, he was talking to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, junior -- junior fo -- the son, who was a congressman, and he was a golf partner of him. That's how the colonel knew Roosevelt. He was a big one, looked like his father. And he said on the phone -- called him by his first name, and, "I have a young sergeant in my office, he had

an interesting story, something for our public information people, maybe." He said, "No, never mind public information, I'd like to talk with the guy [indecipherable]." And the colonel said to me, "Well, I don't know if you haven't gotten it by now, but I've been talking to Franklin Roosevelt. Not the president," he was dead already, "but his son, he's a congressman, he may be able to help you." So I -- I said -- I figured that it's probably true, he can help me. And then he asked a few more questions that Franklin wanted answered, and he said, "Ask Sargent Willner he's free for lunch." Of course I was free for lunch you know, a guy like him, and have the honor to meet somebody like [indecipherable], and somebody who could help me, really. Better than na -- in the army colonel, you know, [indecipherable] general. So he said -- yeah, and the colonel said, "I'll," -- he asked me I had transportation, I said no. "Well, I get a staff car." So they go and get me a staff car, he took me to Roosevelt's office on the hill, and we greet each other, and he said, "I heard you have an interesting story." I didn't tell him how I told you, but I told him a little bit. He said, "How about your family [indecipherable]". Nobody survived. "And, so what's your future?" I didn't want to shoot too high, but I said [indecipherable]. I said, "I -- you know I'm here because my citizenship. I passed the examination [indecipherable] officer candidate school. I haven't passed the board yet for officer, because they won't take me until I'm a citizen, and that's what -- what the problem is. I'm fully qualified, and you have to be a citizen before they -- the board takes you [indecipherable] become an o -- become an officer." "Okay," he said, "[indecipherable] make a reservation for two someplace, yeah. I -- I got to call this." He

called the commissioner of immigration naturalization in New York, he was a retired general, forgot his name, but he [indecipherable] him up. And he said to him -- he was ordering him to, “General,” -- they all [indecipherable] general [indecipherable] retire. “I have a young sergeant here, he has a perfect -- perfect record and everything. He’s a refugee from Germany. I think he’ll be a good officer, I think we need some fresh blood, and he’s given the runaround by your people.” And he didn’t talk back, but he wrote down the information, and then he said, “Yes, that’s all.” [indecipherable]. “Oh, one more thing,” he apparently said he’s going to call the people responsible for this, you know, right away. And Roosevelt said, “I’m not going to wait very long, and Willner hasn’t got long, I will see this to the end, before the month is up.” So when I -- he made the reservation, and he called the general in New York, he said, before we left -- I don’t know if it was an hour, 11:30. I know some people take long lunches, but by one o’clock, I want an answer from you personally. Call his office what the state of it is. If there’s a problem, no problem, I want everything handled immediately. I could have lied and said something that -- that they didn’t know. So we went to lunch, we had a good lunch, we didn’t talk about anything bad, he just asked me some questions -- you asked me how -- how I felt the United States, and if I knew about his father, and I have a letter hanging, from him, downstairs, and he asked me about the situation in Germany, what I thought about it. And my knowledge was limited except to what I experienced. He had some political questions, too. But we had a good conversation, and he said, “Well, the army’s not for everybody, if you do all right, I -- three years won’t do you any harm. But maybe

you want to become a politician like me." And I was going to say, "Well, with a father like yours, that's easy," you know, but probably -- only now foreign born people become politicians, too. Hey, there's a Holocaust survivor, too, but --

Q: Mm-hm [indecipherable]

A: And [indecipherable] politician [indecipherable]. I don't know, but we kidded around a lot, and yeah, oh yeah, yeah, I know what he said, "But not like my brother." You know his brother's story? He had another brother -- he had several brothers, in cali -- in California, James. He [indecipherable] he make me laugh, or something, and he said -- I -- I -- I didn't know. I never heard the name James. But I said -- "Oh, oh, you don't know. He's running for office again, and he's quite a ladies man, he's married. And he just had a very interesting poster put out about him by the opposition. He -- he had a folder -- poster they were putting in California on the walls, and it said on there, send Jimmy back to Washington. The wife you save may be your own." You have your -- laugh about his brother, you know, fooling around, and it's so funny. He was really a -- he was really -- I check on it later [indecipherable], and he was such a ladies man.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so then we came back from lunch, and the secretary said, "The gentleman called already. He didn't want to talk to me, he wanted to talk to you." Said okay, he take the phone. And I'm making this up, I mean, I didn't hear what he said, but he must have asked Roosevelt if I could be next morning in New York. And Roosevelt asked me if I could be there. "Sure. I'll -- I'll get a private plane [indecipherable] but -- but I'll be

there." He said, "You'll be -- not going -- you're not going there just to talk to people, you're going to be sworn in citizen tomorrow morning. So get a clean uniform." I said I don't have any [indecipherable]. So -- and you may have to answer some questions there. So I was next morning in New York. They had a special ceremony for me, I was the only one. I walked in [indecipherable] room, and there's a woman judge, and she said, "So you want to become a citizen? You already half a citizen, you are military sergeant, and I'm not going to ask you a lot of questions, but just a few." She want to put me at ease. And I was worried, I -- I hadn't studied like my wife did later on, I -- just when I ran into. I was too busy, and too nervous. He -- she -- she said, "Who's Uncle Sam?" "Well," I said, "he's the guy I work for." And then she said, in getting more serious, she said, "If you're a citizen, are you willing to pay taxes?" I thought it was a stupid thing, I said, "Yes, off course." I said, "Not be willing to pay taxes, I don't think I can get to see. The military take -- takes the taxes out of your pay right away. So -- but I'm willing to pay taxes." And I don't remember the third question she asked me. So I was sworn in --

Q: She only asked you three questions?

A: Two.

Q: Two questions, mm-hm.

A: And the swearing in ceremony was very nice, but people -- my [indecipherable]

Q: -- the thing about the swearing in ceremony.

A: After I was sworn in, I had my certificate, I immediately went back to my place, I packed, and that -- for New York. And I left [indecipherable]. So when I came to New

York, my next move was to get in front of the officer selection board, and I had my papers, and I went to Governor's Island. There was the headquarters of the first U.S. army. And I went in there, and told them what the story was, and they said they have selection boards only once or twice a month. I said, "That might be trouble, so w -- when's the next selection board meeting?" And he didn't know. And I was lucky again, there's meeting next morning, but I was not on the list of people to be interviewed. So they added me to it. And they say this is a special, and -- so I came in front of the board, there were nine officers, and there were about 20 or so people to [indecipherable]. So I timed these people, see how long this takes. Five minutes. And I went in there, I was still going on for half an hour. And I thought -- not like here is interesting, or -- I thought I'm not going to make it. They're asking real hard questions. And nothing against me, they were very nice, but you -- you are nervous when you go. This is my fu-future, and now I have everything, now I got to go to school, and then I worry about getting through school. So, they ask me all kind of questions and I answer. Then this thing was finished, I was the last one, I had to take the ferry back from Ellis Island to New York -- Manhattan. I got in a ferry, and one major was on the ferry, and there was an aboard, and he said hello [indecipherable] far away. And then I decided I'm going to make a move. I know it's not legal for him to tell me, but I made [indecipherable]. I've got to know, I won't be able to sleep. People had told me I will be notified in about a week. And the way this thing worked up there, I know they asked me a lot of questions they didn't ask the other people. They were concerned, I was a foreigner, who was going to be in charge of

American troops, maybe with a career, and into combat. They wanted someho -- body they can trust, and they -- so when I left, I didn't know whether am I going to make it or not. So I find this major on the boat, on the ferry. I go over to him, and I say, "Excuse me sir, I know it's illegal, I know you cannot give me the answer, but I'm going to ask you anyway, because I'm so damn nervous. I've been waiting for this for a long time [indecipherable] problems, they all got straightened out, and you got 15 guys -- nine guys -- nine guys, and nobody took more than five minutes, one guy took 15 minutes, and I was in there at least half an hour. I like to know where I stand. I know you cannot tell me whether I made it, cause they told me I'd be notified. And -- can you give me an indication?" I wa -- atsfa -- I tell you, the guy's nice, he will say something. And he said, "Well, I cannot tell you anything. But you can go home, and tell your folks you did all right. I know that you did all right." And so I was notified, and they did another nice thing, they changed my order, I didn't have to go back to Europe and pick up the stuff I left there. They sent it back, and the army immediately sent me to Fort Dix. I went to a prep school first, for leadership training. So I graduated -- and leadership training school was not mainly for officers -- for future officers, but for future sergeants. For the guys who get higher, but need more leadership training, that was eight weeks. But they added the officer candidates to it, and -- because the army say, "If they cannot make that course, they sure as hell cannot make the officer's course." So I did that, I did all right, and I made two great acquaintance there, which were important in my life. One was my best military friend, who was not Jewish, but who had also come from England, so he was

military. His father was American who went to England, married a British woman, and he was a sergeant [indecipherable]. He became very good friend. He got married while he was in school, when he was not allowed to get married. With my money. He's -- asked me, one day he called up, "I got to get married. I don't want to lose this woman, can I borrow money from you?" Remember this, that a lot of guys borrow money, but we never borrowed from [indecipherable]. I said, "How much?" He said, "300 dollars." I say, "Sure." I send him 300 dollars, he got married, he had three boys. But then we started this school together, and went to Philadelphia, from Fort Dix, on the weekend, to go to a -- to go to an orchestra, I believe, philharmonic. And a famous guy was there, a British conductor, sir -- sir -- sir -- in the military they got free tickets. So we got together four guys, went to Philadelphia. On the way back, a drunken guy drove into our car, he backed out, high speed. I was asleep in the back seat, I wound up in the hospital. I was five weeks in the hospital by a concussion, broken nose [indecipherable]. And so I didn't go to the course because I was atained in the hospital, but my best friend went. So, I got healed, and then I'm [indecipherable] there to the doctor, my nose was going back to the side like this, it broke in two places. And the specialist -- military specialist, didn't want to correct it. He had made a mistake and not set it back when it happened. And he said, "Well, what do you want to be, a Clark Gable?" "No," I said, "I just want a straight nose again." I -- I -- and he said -- and start pushing on my nose, it started bleeding, and the nurse shook her head. When he was out, she said, "Don't take that doctor." "Yeah," I said, "to me, he's more like a veterinarian, or in Germany, they call a -- a horse doctor. I

never se-seen anything like that." And he told me to come in my quit. He said, "You still want it done, you can be -- come to my clinic." And he want to do this again. I said, "No, I'm refusing now to be touched by you. I don't think you're doing the right thing." To make a long story short, a year later, Walter Reed Army Hospital operated, plastic surgeon, went put it back where it was. Very nice [indecipherable]. He was just -- just a jerk. Then I went to day school, and we weren't on the same class -- every class was 250 people, and my friend was ahead of me, but because he got married, his weekends were spent with his wife, he didn't study too hard, and he flunked a couple of courses. Not -- he was intelligent, but he -- he didn't study. So they had a deal in the school, if a guy is a good guy, he's -- if he's -- they think he's capable of making [indecipherable], they gave him a second chance, they started him again the second time, beginning of the course, we had three months in already, and he flunked. He was sent back to my class. So he was -- here we were together again, and we graduate together. And so in --

Q: We've just got a couple more minutes.

A: Okay, I will tell you one thing and then -- a very important thing I'd like to get it in -- not now, about prejudice at the officer candidate school. And [indecipherable] the officer -- the class I was in, usually a hundred and tw -- 250 people started in class, and out of 250 people who were selected, 95 percent were college graduates, who were not in ROTC, [indecipherable] but who didn't want to go to Korea [indecipherable],and who wanted to become officers. So the -- there was a lot of competition, I didn't have cl -- I just finished high school, but the requirement was that as soon as I become an officer, I --

I -- I studied for two years on the side, for two years college. Now they changed that to college degree. So I was lucky in that respect too, I can remember that, but the competition. My room mate, we had two guys to a room, had [indecipherable] top guy, and he was from -- he had a master's degree in hotel business. He went to New Jersey someplace, or ne -- well anyway, he helped me a lot, and I helped him. He was academically tops, and I was in some other things tops. Like shine your shoes. No, no, but physically. So out of the 250 people, 121 graduated, less than 50 percent. I was feeling pretty good, and I was number 112 out of 121, but I made it, first time. They told me -- the officer's told me if I don't make it the first time, they'll make me make it a second time, that my friend did. And they thought I had the capability, and -- but they treated me very nice there, except one major who was prejudice. And that story [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, let's stop there for today then.

End of Tape Four, Side B

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: It's now the 13th of July, and we're on tape number five, side A, of an interview with Eddie Willner.

A: I think we stopped yesterday on -- on when we graduated from school, and I gave you some figures. Well, there was one major in the school who was what they call a tactical officer, who is instructor --

Q: Actually, we did the figures. The only thing that -- yeah.

A: Yeah, the figures I -- I'm not going to mention.

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: So I'm -- when we actually graduated --

Q: Okay.

A: -- it was in a theater, with a stage, there were two generals there, and all our former instructors, and officers from the class, they were lined up on the stage. So on -- there were three -- usually, an -- normally, there -- two people call on the stage to have the bars pinned on by a general. He's the top academic guy in the class, and the second guy is the top athletic guy, who wins all the military stakes mishum sports, and stuff like. So the second guy got called up, and all of a sudden they call my name on the stage, and I was number 121 in line to get the bars, and only the first two get their bars pinned on by the general, and the others, somebody else pins them on. I was called on stage, and we supposed to complete the prize to have the bars pinned on by a general because it was stated that I was the first naturalized citizen after the war who became an army officer.

Not only that, that I was cited for having done -- worked the hardest to become an officer. And then the general made a joke, he said, “Are you f -- did you follow your or-orders from your immediate superiors not to go on weekends to a hotel and study -- sit in a room, but just to go out and have some fun?” I said no. I was ordered one time, because my colleagues reported me -- we had what in -- what they called buddy ratings. 24 guys who live with you on one floor, had to report on each other what kind of -- criticized you, or -- so you could think about your -- they called them buddy ratings. And our instructor would look at them, and I was reported by quite a few of them for not going on leave on weekends, which they wanted to, because it’s very hard, the studies, and some guys cracked up, and went out -- went out of the school, they couldn’t take it, it was too -- too -- too strict, and in my case, I took leave like e-everybody else, went downtown like everybody else, but didn’t go to a movie, or didn’t date any girls. I went to hotel room, and I studied. So, at the time we had, like I said, a couple of people that need psychiatric treatment, because they just couldn’t take it. But that’s the part of becoming an officer, th -- taking a lot of stress and th -- and to me that didn’t mean anything, I had gone through a lot more than that. But I need to study. I figure if I’m going to make it, I need to study. Physical part was no problem. So I study -- they reported me that I didn’t take it easy on weekends, that I went to a hotel room and studied. On Monday the senior instructor had me in the office, and said, “You got to stop this. I don’t want you [indecipherable] about it.” Anyway, that was one. So when I -- here we were on a stage, and I was the third one to get the bars pinned on by a general. And then we had to say good-bye, salute every

officer that was our instructor, were about a dozen or so from my class. And the way it worked, you got your diploma, shook hands with a general, and he put the bars on rikey, and then went on to the next guy, and then went from rank to rank, lower, lower. Til I got to the major who was so prejudiced. And actually, I knew this, he'd tried to get me out of school, get me -- not have m -- not graduate fr-from the officer's school. And I don't think I told the story, what -- the actual happening, what -- what -- how I found out that he was prejudiced, and that he really tried to get me, you know out of my way, out of school. And this was not just me, but everybody who was Black, or Jewish, or some other foreign [indecipherable] came from foreign country, maybe, or his parents gave him [indecipherable] name. He was picking on them, and tried to get them kicked out of school, including me. In my case, it was another story. He used my being foreign-born, and having gone through the Holocaust, by saying when -- during a coun-counseling session, "Candi-Candidate Willner, if you become an officer, and the army sends you to Germany, wouldn't that be very bad that you hate those Germans, and you -- because they killed your parents, and your family, and wouldn't that be very bad for the army, send you to Germany, and you would have to put up with those people, who did this? You probably hate the Germans." I said, "Major, I don't hate the Germans. I -- that's the only people are responsible for what happened, but I don't put everybody in the same pot. I -- those who have done bad things, I don't want any part of them, but there's Germans -- many Germans who are good. Otherwise I wouldn't be here today." "Well, I don't understand you," he said, "I -- I -- I -- you must hate the Germans." I said, "No, I don't

hate the Germans. I am German myself, of Jewish faith, and I don't have that problem. If the army sends me to Germany, I'll conduct myself the way is expected of me, and I immedi -- I had to keep my personal feelings to myself, in the interest of the army [indecipherable]." Well, he kept on and on, digging, but he didn't get anywhere wi-with me, and he apparently tried to talk me into saying something that I hated Germans because what happened, and therefore I would not be a good representative of the United States Army, or United States, in Germany, because my hatred.

Q: Did he -- did you talk to people about -- I mean, the war was over a few years, an-and you were starting to get a little bit of distance from -- from those events. Did you talk to people about what had happened to you during the Holocaust, or did they ask you about it?

A: Oh yes. If I just take the officer candidate school, seven instructors asked me, and they even were so nice that if -- they said if you have any problems during examination time, they were si -- going around checking, see everybody was honest during examination. And they even told me if you have any problems with the answers in English, write them down in French or German, we'll figure it out. The other main instructor, same rank as this prejudiced major, who asked me, counseled me, this was the highest rank in our group, major, he happened to be a war hero, who went to Korea, and was promoted twice on the battlefield. Was a major, and was -- and -- and received two Silver Stars, which is a high decoration, and he knew that this guy was prejudiced, and he talked to me a couple of times. And he in turn talked to a captain who also asked me, "What did he ask you?"

So it became known among the other instructor, this guy's prejudiced. But in my case, not in some of the other cases, they want to see me get through with this, and graduate, and they told me not to worry. And knowing this, that I had everybody else behind me, I was able to go ahead, and not be intimidated, and they did a lot of things for me, to help me along.

Q: So you were really -- it sounds like you were really on your own, as a -- as somebody who is such a recent citizen. I mean that you -- that was really unusual at the time.

A: It was unusual, it was stated also in g -- on -- on the graduation citation that I had been in a concentration camp, and that they -- I was the first one to go through. There had been other foreigners may -- foreign born people, but not one who had been in a concentration camp for that long, and had escaped from a transport of -- of a concentration camp. And had been for years, not just short while, imprisoned. And had outlived his time -- that normally was people lived, if they worked for a year, and then they went down, you know [indecipherable] and then I did this for three years, and prior to that, in the inter-internment camps in France, which were not that bad, they didn't kill people, but some people died from hunger, and so -- and then I had escaped actually twice, once in France, but then I got caught there, and well they -- they explained all that. So they were very impressed, I would say and -- and also I felt that -- that I had something tell my fellow officers, that I was a good influence to my friends and colleagues, and they saw it from a different viewpoint, they thought it was something, having been there, not hating the Germans, but that I could add something to it, which was actually true, because I was

involved once in writing up a plan in Korea, for prisoners of war, not to mistreat them, because we didn't do that, we went by the Geneva Convention, and because of my experiences, I was very sensitive to when a guy becomes a prisoner, not like I became one because I was a Jew, but to become the prisoner in the field, in -- in war time, that they are not to be mistreated, or to interrogation -- what do you call that -- tortured. I was very outspoken on that, and -- which all -- is the American way, we don't mistreat prisoners generally, and there were some exception, which also looked -- could have happened -- when I said one time that somebody asked me this could happen here. I said, "Not with our -- in our democracy, but there are people -- not the country, that would do bad things if not properly supervised, officers included." To wit, Lieutenant Calley in Korea -- in Viet -- in Vietnam, who killed women and children, who went to jail for a few years, but in my opinion, that -- the case of Lieutenant Calley was that his superior officer, a captain, should have been punished more than Lieutenant Calley, because he was responsible for him, he knew what he was doing, and he should have stopped him. And he should have made a supply officer, not the combat officer up front, where he could kill. Give him a job where he doesn't need his rifle. And during class on how to treat prisoner of war, because the war in Korea was going on then, they gave us a case in school, which they wanted us to solve. They say suppose you were in combat, and you take Chinese, or Korean prisoners. And the day before you attacked, and you went in Chinese position, and some of you -- your friends got captured by the Chinese, or the Koreans. And you knew that they got captured alive, and the next day you're on the

attack -- we -- we Americans are on the attack, and we overrun the Chinese position, and you find the guys they were taken prisoners the day before shot in the head, their hands bound behind them. In other words, the Chinese shot the prisoners, your best friends, your comrade. What would b-be your reaction? Well, we had different answers. When I -- came my turn, and the instructor asked me, well, somebody said we kill them, and it -- it happened actually, that they got so upset about it during combat, that when they found this -- this really happened that they got killed, with their hands bound behind their back, that our troops went wild, and they took no Chinese prisoners, they shot them. Or in one case, they had a few prisoners, and the lieutenant said to the sergeant, “Take him back.” Take him back was generally understood to a prisoner enclave, an enclosure to take them out of combat, and keep in a prison camp. But in this particular case, this officer always said, when he said to the sergeant take him back, he meant take him behind the hill, then execute him. It happened. So he asked me, what would you do, this happened to your unit? You find out the sergeant take these guys over the hill, and you find out -- not your order, but you find the sergeant did this on his own. What would you do? Let it go on? And I said no. I would court mar -- if -- if a b -- I would prefer charges against the sergeant after the battle, and have him court martialed. “Is that -- that is the proper procedure, isn’t it,” I said, “in the United States.” The instructing officer said, “That’s correct, that is our policy, but in doing this, you will destroy the fighting spirit of your troops, and you have a morale problem, because you’re stopping guys to get even with the other side, who did that. And my answer would be close your eyes to it,” -- and this

was not the school's solution, this -- this was this instructor. He said, "It's my -- my solution, not the school's solution. And if you court martial a guy after the battle is over, your -- your -- the rest of your troops probably won't fight the way they're supposed to, because you're doing something against your own people." I say, "I'm sorry, but we fight by the rules of the c -- Geneva convention, which are very humane, and a prisoner is supposed to be taken back and put into an enclosure. When the war is finished, he's released." And if I have a problem with the morale of the troops, my job would be that after the battle is over -- during the battle you can't do anything, you're in the heat of the battle. You can't say that shooting's [indecipherable] stop this, or because you don't -- we don't do this. But after the battle is over, the next day or something, after everybody already calmed down, say, "Well, this what I witnessed yesterday. This not the way we fight a war, we don't execute prisoners, and I don't want to see this happen again." Not threaten -- threaten him with a court martial, but just imply that you will take stern action if this [indecipherable] our side does it. And I finished up saying this discussion back and forth, they were back and forth. I say, "If we do this, we're not better than they are, even that's revenge. And you don't do -- you don't kill a prisoner." So that [indecipherable]

Q: When were you -- when were you in officer's school? Was that --

A: This was in 1952.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: I graduated on my birthday, 15 August, 1952. The war was going on in Korea then.

Q: And did you go to Korea after you graduated? What happened?

A: I was a lucky guy, yes I did. But the Korean [indecipherable] was coming the finish the war, they gave up. No, I'm kidding. I got there at the end of the war. I didn't have to fight anyone. But my instructors told me if I don't graduate from officer candidate school, they will send me to Korea everybody else, and they have -- they would think that I would get a battlefield commission, having gone through the other thing. And I said, "Don't do me any favors. I fought enough in my lifetime. If I have to go, I go, I do my job. But I don't want to become an officer by being courageous, or getting a medal, and post -- posthumously. After I went through this in Germany, I -- I don't need to die on a battlefield here."

Q: Was it hard at all for you to be known as this -- this survivor, among your fellow officer candidate?

A: No, on the contr -- on the contrary. They are very understanding, they ask me a lot of questions. My roommate was a guy of Italian descent, this guy [indecipherable] and he also change his name from an Italian name to -- his name was Nash, and he -- we compliment -- compliment each other, and a lot of time discuss things. He was a great guy. And I had no problem being a -- I like to finish up by saying this thing. This major, who tried to get me out of school, was not -- wasn't able to do this all the time. I -- I'm sure he was stopped after this case, my case, which became more of less, not public, but the officers talked among them and say this guy shouldn't be able to do that. Or I'm sure there were actually three majors, and the others were lower ranking, and two majors were for me, and just this one guy against. And the two majors were for me were -- one was

like I said, a war hero, and a -- and the other was a very fine gentleman too, and they -- they ask me sometimes some questions, but not in detail, and they thought I was an asset. So anyway, at -- at graduation they were all lined up, and I stepped down when I had my bars on, and you said good-bye to each one of the officers who were your instructors, and -- and saluted. And you were in the military, where you turned right, and formed a line. You salute, you shook hands, turn right again, turn left again in front of the next guy, about a dozen guys, and here was my major who [indecipherable]. I made two steps instead of one step, and I stepped past him. I didn't salute him, and I didn't shake hands, or say anything to him. And I know that a lot of people watching, a lot of people knew my dislike -- or his dislike, that we had a problem, but that I -- and I figured I was a -- an commissioned officer now, although I was inferior to him, he -- that I was -- I wanted to do that, I really -- I had planned this, I -- I didn't just do that on the spur of the moment. I said I'm not going to salute. On the outside, I salute him, it's required, but here -- I won't make an issue out of it. And nobody's going to say anything during a big ceremony. We had a couple hundred people there. And particularly since I was cited [indecipherable] stage. And I'm sure the general didn't know about it. He might have asking question afterwards, why didn't this lieutenant salute, or -- but they were too preoccupied with things there. And -- so I figured well, everybody saw this, and the people that knew about it, they wonder what happened once the doors open, everybody was free to go, this guy would come after me and tell me that was a bad thing. Some guys came over to me and said, "Boy, I take my hat off for you. I know what's going on." And I said -- he never

came to me, and he let me go. And I figure if he does, then he will make case of it, but otherwise he -- maybe you've taught this lesson. And I always hoped that in the milikin -- military career I would run across him so I could really tell him off. I never did. I don't know what happened to him, I don't -- so that was then. Can we stop for a minute?

Q: Yeah. After s -- what happened after you graduated then? You went to Korea just briefly?

A: No, I didn't go to Korea, I went to -- everyone went to a specialized school after you become a second lieutenant. You go to -- this was an infantry officer's school, that was your basic instruction, whereas other guys went to F-Fort Knox, if they wanted to be in tanks. They would then be tank officers. And there was another school to become an artillery officer, and one more to be -- infantry, artillery, tanks, and -- yeah, that was it. Oh yeah, and -- and th-the four -- and the other branch was branch [indecipherable], you were assigned to a branch afterward. You could be assigned to a branch right away, then you went to your branch school to be specialized. You were an ordinance officer, which meant repairing tanks or guns. You went to the ordinance school at -- it's outside Washingham. In my case, I was trained as a combat infantry officer, but I wasn't specialized as such. I -- I -- my desire was to go into Intelligence because I spoke languages, and had served with [indecipherable]. So my desire was really to catch spies, people who were stealing our secrets, in this case the Russians were good at that, and our side had to find out who these people were to catch them. And that was the intent, that was my plan, to be a counter-Intelligence officer. But that's not what you become right

away in the army, you become an Intelligence officer, period. You do first Intelligence work. Not secretly maybe, and sit in the staff, or in an office. And so that's what I intended to be. And I went for six months then, to two schools -- actually eight months. No, six and a half -- six and a half months. I went to Fort Lee, Virginia, and I wound up at a course in there I had not intended to take. The last course I took was aerially -- a-aerially supply. Aerially supply meant for the paratroopers who come -- some out of airplanes, but not that. But to -- we supply these guys by air, too. Somebody was surrounded in a battle, like it happened in World War two. They needed guns, ammunition, first aid, doctors, so they would have to jump over an area where these guys were surrounded, and therefore you needed aerially supplied. So I took that course, and what it amounted to is jet plane that could be opened up from the rear -- by the rear door, not on the side, and supplies were stacked up in the plane, and you had to shove them out. And they either came down by parachute over a target, or the plane flew -- flew so low, just above ground, like a couple of feet, and would had to be a skillful pilot, and these -- aerially supply officer would be inside the plane to see to it that it got pushed out on time, over the target, not over the enemies side, that he would get our supplies, and so I took that course. When I was finished [indecipherable] I wanted to go to Germany. I was called to an office in the Pentagon, and there was an officer of Chinese ancestry. He was civilian Intelligence officer, he turned out to be a former aide de camp of General Wainwright, who was the -- we called Vinegar Joe, who fought in Asia during World War two. And very famous, he was in charge there. And this guy that talked to me in the

Pentagon was his aide, Chinese American. He was aide during World War two, and he spoke Chinese, and he was at the young age of 27, a lieutenant colonel, because a general's aide. And when I met him, he was civilian Intelligence officer working for the army, and he was my sponsor, if you like. And they wanted me to go to Korea. Of course, that's where the action was at that time, and I told him that I would like to go to Germany, because I know the language, and he said to me that, "Oh, you're not married now, and every officer has to go initially to Korea." The war was still going on, we didn't know when it was going to be finished. "And it's better to go now while you're not married, because you may be thinking about getting married, and then you have to leave your wife at home for a year. But go now while you're single, have a good time, if you're not in combat." And I said, "Okay." He said he'll guarantee me that I go to Germany wh -- after I come back from Korea. I'm glad I took his advice. I could have insisted I go Germany, when -- talk to somebody else and -- but he appreciate I didn't go over his head, and made a big thing out of it. I went to Korea, and he saw to it that I got a position in Korea which was -- called for an officer with th-two grades higher than I was, a major --

End of Tape Five, Side A

Beginning Tape Five, Side B

A: -- went on a troopship, and on the troopship to go into Korea, we went first to Okinawa, and I was given a job on the ships as a -- being a compartment commander, and the troops sleep on the troopship four -- four beds high, o-one on top of another, filled

with people. We had a lot of problems, guys getting seasick, including myself, but -- and messing up the place, and then other people get sick, well, I took some action by having -- having teams go topside, get fresh air, go down and change -- put another [indecipherable] and I kept my place very clean. And I got commended by the top guy there, and well, wh-when I arrived in Korea, I -- I was given a letter of recommendation -- I forget i -- I'm a very -- what'd they say, a very active, or -- I wa -- I was an action officer, what they -- one --not just sits by and watches. So anyway, it was a go -- I -- I came there, bu -- good thing -- also I had my dog on board, which was illegal by the army. The army said no pets to Korea. And I didn't have anybody, no parents, no -- and I didn't know what to do with my dog, I -- somebody advised me, "Take him to Seattle, to the port, see the captain of the ship, of the troop transport, because he is navy, you are army. The army told you no pets to Korea, but the navy might think different. And you -- if the navy gives you permission, the ships under -- under navy control. Maybe you'll find a captain that's sympa --." And I was lucky, I went to Seattle two days ahead of time with my dog. I went up to the ship, I knew the ship I was going to sail on. Saw the captain of the ship, and I said, "Captain, I have a dog that I feel very strong about, and I wa-want to take to Korea. But the army has regulations that say no, you can't take any pets to Korea." He said, "That's the army." Just like somebody from -- "I don't give a damn about army regulations. The ship is -- I'm the captain, I'm [indecipherable]. You want to bring your dog on board, bring him on board. But bring him one day before troops come on board." I did. I was lucky, I'd prefabricated a dog house which could be

taken apart in no time, just a couple of screws. I came on board, the captain al -- sees me, gave me a corner for my dog. And I brought my dog into Korea. I had [indecipherable].

Q: When did you get -- just a little sideline, but when did you get your first dog after the war, and what made you decide to do it?

A: What -- I won -- I won't say a long story, but I -- I was lonely. No parents, no wife. That actually is a thing I really didn't talk about because it's too long, and too -- too involved, and very personal, I think, it -- what one goes through when you're lonely, or when you have everybody killed in the family. And I was just like -- the dog to me was like a member of the family, and there were two things that I did to remain sane, actually, and to -- not to -- I couldn't stay behind closed doors was one thing. I all -- I -- even today I leave the doors open in my house. I go to the toilet, I don't close the door if it's just my family that's in the house -- not when there are other people, because I don't like closed doors. And I didn't like that before, and I just -- I -- I -- in the camps, you always had comas, people who were the same boat, and my whole story with Michael Swab is the same thing. I had a buddy, I had somebody who -- who felt like I did. And when I was in the army then as an officer, it's sometimes lonely, because you are maybe the only officer, and you are with the men, but they're not on an equal level with you, you still lonely. So I wung -- wasn't going to do that. I said, well, even my first sergeant was a man 20 years older than myself. When we were in private together, I ask him to call me by my first name, not say Lieutenant Willner, or sir -- he's 20 years older. So I made up for some of this loneliness by doing certain things, and the other thing that they didn't

talk about was having girlfriends. I got involved with other women. I was lonely. And I also, since I was -- since my liberation, I -- I wanted to get married, but I knew I didn't have an education, I didn't have a job, or -- in the re -- once I was in the army, I figured, well, a lieutenant doesn't make much money, but I'll wait til I'll be a captain or so. But I wanted to get married, and have children. And I -- there was part, getting married fast, not to be lonely any more. But I said to myself, I must find the right woman, because be very difficult to be married to a concentration camp survivor. You have your idiosyncrasies, maybe. But other people have too, who were -- who were not in camp, but there are certain things that we do have. I'm aware -- I'm aware of it. Some people don't know it, my f -- my best friend, Michael Swab, his whole life, whenever he was with me, or alone, walking the street, he look -- he look over his shoulder. He did this all the time, even after he got married, because he always thought some Gestapo or somebody was following him, that he was being -- so, that was a problem he had, not -- not a big problem, but so I observed him one time doing that. And some people had, like I said, idiosyncrasies. They also had -- think they are very bad. I must al -- also say that, since I was very close to Michael Swab, that he beat his second wife. And she told me one time, when she was -- when they were visiting here, and I -- I was really shook up, and so I decided -- I told my wife, and she said she knows, and thought that was terrible. When you got upset about something, instead of arguing with wife -- I argue with my wife, but then we clear it up before the end of the day, if it's not cleared up right away. But he beat his wife, so he was -- some of the real bad things from the camps, he took with him, and

he applied it to -- so I -- I couldn't -- this was terrible. I decided I will go with him under false pretense and talk to him about it, very seriously. Because we had no secrets for each other. And I took him to the Potomac River, near -- in a secluded area, nice day. I said, "Michael, I got you up here because I want to talk to you. I don't want anybody around. And I want to tell -- to tell you -- you beat your wife." I had to be careful because he -- he would know that she told me or my wife, and that he'll beat up again. "I -- I-I -- and this I-I cannot be quiet about. And you know, we've always been very truthful to each other, and that is not a thing that I -- that you should do. There's no excuse for it. Absolutely none, you ca -- tell me anything you want, but I-I will not accept it. You don't beat your wife, you don't beat women, and I don't have to tell you why not, you don't do." He never said one word. He didn't say yes, no, or it's none of your business, which he wouldn't have said. And that was it. So anyway, my loneliness -- oh yeah, finding [indecipherable] wife. After I was 19, and out, every woman I went out with, or I was intimate with, I always considered, not marrying her, but what am I looking for besides sex? She had to have certain qualities that -- maybe more qualities because I went through the camps, but particularly because I went through the camps. Have [indecipherable] and I start making up a list. Get organized was always m-my way of doing things. And I wind up with good point and the bad points, what I want to see. And I gave each question a point, and when I came up with more good points than bad points, I -- would she be a good wife? But it was just still a little game I was playing with myself, but I didn't ge -- consulted anybody else, but -- but needless to say, but I -- I -- I did get

involved with quite a few girls, and didn't make any difference what religion, or -- I did have one thing I do want to mention. I was a-always very fond of the French language, and everybody would have bet that I'll marry a French woman, so I could sp-speak French all the time. And I -- I thought so, too [indecipherable] my ol -- my oldest son just went to -- they had the 50 anniversary of the Normandy invasion in Europe. He and another officer went to France, and took some pictures there on the beaches there where we landed. And they still have some tank obstacles there. And I had to laugh, because he visited that, he took pictures, and I said, "I was there, too." He said, "I know where you were at that time." He knows exactly where I was. "No," I said, "another time I was there, not during the invasion." When I was in the army, as a criminal investigator, I had a case, which took me to Karankan, France, which is right behind the beaches where we landed during the invasion. And my son [indecipherable] Karankan, but when I was there I met a French girl, and I stayed with her for a couple of days, and then I said, the same time I visit the beaches, and I have a picture with her standing next to the tank obstruction. They're not -- they're not bodies any more, but there are certain things that you can still see why -- what we encountered there. And -- and on the back it said the place, and the year, the -- and he said [indecipherable] the same place, but not like you probably. So, what I'm trying to say is that I -- I was never alone by doing this, and I came -- I never came -- oh, I was engaged once, to a Jewish girl from Detroit, because I went to the chapel, to Jewish services here -- the military chapel, and I met this man, and he introduced me to his niece, who was visiting from Detroit. She had just graduated

from high school, she's very cute, and I started dating her a couple a -- they wanted me to date her. I was 26 when I graduate from officer's school, and the average age was 22, guys who [indecipherable] from college. I was a little bit older than the rest of them, also a little maturer. But I dated her, and I got seriously thinking about marrying her. I introduced her to my relatives in New York, and I -- the one who was against German, the daughter I'd mentioned before, that she lectured me I shouldn't marry a German, and I didn't tell the rest of the story, I just will -- didn't want to [indecipherable]. I -- I was going to break off my alle -- my -- with my cousin, you know, but my wife came to New York to get her citizenship, three weeks after we got married, she met my cousin, and my cousin fell in love with her. She loved her, and the -- the one [indecipherable]

Q: The same cousin who had said -- uh-huh -- said don't --

A: Marry a German.

Q: -- marry a German. Uh-huh.

A: And I was going to break up with her [indecipherable]. Well, that was okay. So she met her, and there were no more problems. My wife still talked to her, and din -- din -- she didn't throw it up. And -- so back to -- to a girl I got engaged to. She was okay, her family was okay in New Jersey, but then I was supposed to meet her parents -- excuse me -- in -- in Detroit, and I went there, and I had just graduated from officer's school, I was very proud to have made it, and to have a career maybe, ahead of me, and to have succeeded, and all that stuff, okay. So -- also I -- I probably looked pretty good in uniform as an officer at the time. And so she was impressed, probably, but I found out

she was okay, but maybe too immature, just graduated from high school, and I was very mature. I could have handled it, but could she handle it, a difficult guy like me? No, but -- I wasn't difficult, but I -- I did have certain things I -- I -- the thing came a-abo-about in a way that I did not expect it to break off our engagement, but it was the right thing, I was lucky. When I visited her parents, they approved of me, and the father took me aside, say goodnight, and said to me, "You -- you are going to Korea I understand." I -- I -- I expected to be ordered to Korea, I didn't know yet for sure. I said, "Yes." He said, "What -- what do you want to be, a defender of capitalism?" And he talked to me in the way a Communist was talk -- would talk. And he was entitled to his opinion, but that was my country, I had went through hard times getting there, and I -- what he basically said that I shouldn't be an officer of an im-imperialist army. And I said, "I'm not going to give up my career be that I've practically fought for it," I went -- so I told him that I was not going to leave the army, and I could also called it I'm a defender of a democracy. And I didn't argue with him, but just discuss it. But those were his words, actually, defender of capitalism. So I said to myself afterwards, I've nothing against the girl, nothing against her parents as people, but this bother me. So knowing that I would be going to Korea, I said to myself, under normal circumstances, if I'm married, and going to Korea, my wife, if I have no children, would either go back to her parents, or probably to my parent's house, and live with them til I come back from Korea, and then we have a house, or su -- apartment. So I said, well, I don't have parents. I don't have anybody. She will be with her parents while I'm in Korea, and every day she'll hear from her father, "What kind of

life is this? Your husbands the other end of the world, you're here, and he's defending imperialism th -- over there in Korea." And before I know it, before I get back after a year, I have a divorce on my hands. I said, "I'm not going to get married." This -- she -- she going to be under influence of her parents. She's young. If she had made up her own mind, be a different story. If she'd [indecipherable] living with a girlfriend, but her intention was to stay on with her parents. And I think she'll be hearing this all the time. I'm not going to start -- I want to get married once, and [indecipherable] and not get divorced. So she had to be the right woman, and I felt she wasn't the right one, so I broke it off. I felt very bad about it, and my aunt told me -- this woman who was against the marriage, "Well Eddie, it's better to feel bad for a couple of months, than feeling bad the rest of your life." And I agreed with her. I went to Korea, but I had, shortly before Korea -- well, this really doesn't matter, I met another woman, and I'm mentioning this not just to mention I went out with women, but that I -- the specific circumstance. I -- when I went to Germany one time [indecipherable] the first time, as an enlisted man, I went to criminal investigation school, I mentioned that. And on the train I met a British girl, who was traveling with her mother from England to southern Germany. And I got to talk to her, and she said her mother was Jewish. So she was half Jewish, and that her father had divorced the mother under the nur -- Nuremberg laws. And -- but he wasn't a Nazi, but he took advantage of the Nuremberg laws. And he left Germany, too, he went to South America someplace, with the two boys. And he left the mother and the daughter in Germany, they got a -- they got to England. So when I met th-the mother, I was re-

visiting friends, and I didn't know that her daughter who was traveling there, was married at that time. I didn't expect a woman, traveling with her mother, that she was married. She never told me about it, and she came to visit me at the school on weekends. That was near Munich, Germany. I got involved with her, and -- and when I went to Korea, she told me -- she asked me what I was going to do, I said, "Well, I have four weeks of vacation. Since I'm not engaged any more, I don't have any plans." She said -- and I still didn't know she was married at the time. She said, "If you would come visit me." I said yes. She, I think, took four weeks. We got [indecipherable] around the [indecipherable] and couple other places, and then she told me she was married, but that she's going to divorce her husband. And we had not talked about marriage, she and I, we just -- and to me it was another attraction. I -- I had -- not going to say that her on my list of prospective future wife, particularly just -- she was married, too. And I had no intention go out with a married woman, or -- because my time was valuable, and I figured a married woman, that's probably just for sex. But some ba -- maybe I'll marry her, maybe not. Not her -- not the British girl. So we were together four weeks, and I s -- said at the end of four weeks, "Don't wait for me to come back from Korea, even if you get divorced, I'm not going to marry you." Because it was her intention would get to know me better, and I thought -- I never thought one moment I would marry her. And there was nothing wrong with her, except whatever the problem was between her husband, she told me what it was. And so I knew from the beginning I was just spending -- having a good time, and she was having a good time. So, when we left on last day, we said good-bye for

good, and I was on my way to Korea -- after a couple of days, she asked me, in England, if you -- you can only get a divorce, which she still wanted to get, if you commit adultery -- you admit to adultery. And when she talked about adultery, I said, “Well, in my book, my dictionary, it said adultery is two wrong people doing a right thing.” And -- and so I tried to keep -- keep a happy atmosphere, you know? To her it was just good-bye for good. Well, to me, too, but it was no -- no problem for me. She had still hopes that I would -- she was going to divorce her husband, maybe I’ll be interested. She -- so she went back to England, I went to Korea. All of a sudden -- well, she asked me if I would help her in -- in her divorce, because she can onl -- if she admits adultery in court, then she can divorce. But I figure I’m single, I have no problem. I have no wife -- adultery, not that I say it’s okay, but she committed adultery, but I didn’t [indecipherable]. I said, “Sure, you can -- if that helps.” And I was in Korea, I got a letter from the British court, from a judge, that she swore in court that she committed adultery with me, and they want to know whether it was true or not. And I found myself in a situation in Korea, I said -- I didn’t think that far. An officer in the United States army, you’re not supposed to commit adultery. An officer and a gentleman, they always put that gentleman in there. You know, a gentleman in my book is a man who di -- who’ll defend a woman from any man but himself, that’s a gentleman. But so I -- I was in -- I -- what do you call that, in a -- I couldn’t --

Q: Bind.

A: In a bind. So I say, if I don't answer the letter, they going to write to the Pentagon in Washington, trying to find Lieutenant Willner, and they'll write what it's all about. It's a question adultery, and then the army's going to question me. And I'm not doing the right thing, they're going to kick me out. So what do I do? I had two sleepless nights in Korea, and it came to me all of a sudden. I said, I must answer this letter, but I will not admit to adultery, because the army [indecipherable] they were very strong on that at that time, not -- not -- now it happens all the time, guys get with their fellow officers of lower ranking, and used to read in the papers, generals get kicked out, and so it was much more serious than now, now it's -- okay, so anyway -- but I cannot say I didn't, because she swore in court that she did. I'll call her a liar, which she wasn't, she was telling the truth. And I wouldn't tell a lie. So I sent a one sentence letter to the British court, I said, "I will neither deny nor admit it." That puts her in the clear, and I didn't do anything. If the army comes [indecipherable] end of it. So that just on the sideline. We go further. When I came from -- back from Korea, and I was in -- actually, before moving to Japan, I was on teedeewhy, in Japan, on temporary duty, because the war is finished, and we didn't have anything to do. I had my men, they were bored. I studied the countryside in Korea a little bit, and I went to Tokyo, I was ordered to Tokyo to take care of some small job, and I was one day -- this very funny. I was one day in the men's room, doing my business, and a general was standing next to me doing his business, and he said, "Oh, you -- you are Lieutenant Willner." I said, "Yeah." He saw my red name tags on. "Well, when you finish, stop by my office." I had gone to officer candidate school with his son, who was

not going to be a professional officer, but as a favor to his father, he became an officer -- a reserve officer. And his -- I had met him once before, with his son, who took me home with him, and -- so I thought he wanted to chat about his son, or what we doing -- or we done since [indecipherable]. So what he said, “You were here in Tokyo once before from Korea. What for?” “Well,” I said, “they have some stuff to be -- files to clean out [indecipherable], and we didn’t have anything to do in Korea, the war is finished.” “Well,” he said, “the army’s spending a lot of money having you -- you and a couple of guys come to Japan and take care of -- why don’t we transfer you over here, and you do it here? Because eventually bi -- in Korea we have less and less troops, the war is finished.” I said, “General, that’s nice, but my plan is to pick up an education, I like education to remain active as an officer, and I want to go back to the States from Korea directly, and then enroll in some courses, night courses, or whatever. And I wanted to go to Washington.” “Well,” he said, “let’s do first things first.” “Also, if I go to Japan, I must stay much longer. Here, my year is finished, I go back.” The rules were that you stayed two years in a place where there’s no war. [indecipherable] go to Korea for [indecipherable] one ma -- one year ago, yeah, and then -- actually it was nine mon -- nine months there, in Japan. So they said, “Okay, we’ll give you a special deal. You talk to my deputy, and we’ll transfer your unit to -- to Japan. And I’ll --.”

Q: Maybe we should continue on the next tape, cause we’re about to get cut off.

End of Tape Five, Side B

Beginning Tape Six, Side A

A: I went with my unit to Japan, and everybody was very happy, including myself, because I wanted to get to know Japan, and I knew I didn't have to stay for two years in Japan. So I stayed nine months in Japan, def -- s -- fixed up my papers saying that they agree that I should pick up some courses, that wasn't -- Japan wasn't the place [indecipherable] might be, and I should then go back, which I did. And I -- and I had nine wonderful months in Japan, in Tokyo. And I transferred back to United States, to Washington. I was assigned to -- as an assistant to the commandant of the command management school at Fort Belwah, which is right outside Washington. And I was living at Fort Meyer. Fort Meyer is -- was very nice. That was just for living purposes for me, and I commuted every day to Fort Belwah. One year after that, I was assigned to Heidelberg, Germany, to the headquarter of the U.S. Army, Europe, where I had been before as an enlisted man, a criminal investigator, and now I came back as an officer. And I knew the place, I liked the place. Heidelberg is a very romantic place, very beautiful. The Nekile river flows, there's an old castle there, and the Americans always picked a nice place to put up their headquarters. It was in a bombed out, very romantical. And there was a university there. It was a famous place, and also good to be stationed. So I was assigned there as chief of the analiss section for technical Intelligence. It was a staff officer's jo -- assignment, and -- which was good for my record, and my boss was an Italian American, lieutenant colonel, whom I got along with very well, but actually, I found out when I -- shortly before going to Germany, that I was supposed to go to Berlin.

And I got this letter from this colonel, and it said, “Due to unso -- foreseen circumstances, you are coming to my headquarters in Heidelberg.” And I didn’t mind. Berlin would have been okay with me, too. And my old friend George Strauss was there already, and it would have been interesting in that we were -- would have been -- he -- he already was, George Strauss, a detachment commander, which means you are your own boss, you have so many men, and you direct the unit. It’s very much in demand in the army to get ahead, to be the commander of a unit, which I was going to be, but when I went to Heidelberg, I was a staff officer, not a commander of a unit. But that was okay, too. I got into a position where I had a little bit of supervision. My boss had supervision over my friend George Strauss. But my boss, Colonel Skolie, was retiring pretty soon from the army, and he didn’t care any more about what’s going on, he didn’t want to be bothered, un there was something bad going on, and he always told me, “Willner, you take care of it.” And I would call j -- my friend George Strauss in Berlin, and say, the colonel said to do this or do that. He never did, he left it up to me to s -- act in his name. And it was a good arrangement, and I liked it, and George Strauss didn’t know that -- I told him afterwards, I said, “The colonel never said any such thing, I was making these up.” And he was m -- ma -- it was okay with him. And so, after I got assigned to Heidelberg, to Colonel Skolie, he had a habit of going every morning for coffee to the officer’s club at 10 o’clock, and he asked me to come along with him. And we sat down, had our cup of coffee [indecipherable] was little bit of exercise, since always sitting behind a desk, and then -- so Colonel Skolie, the first two weeks, he was watching me

like a hawk while drinking coffee. And I looked around the young women, and he said [indecipherable] to me, “Well, you probably noticed that I watch you.” I said, “Yes, I did.” “Well, there’s a reason for it. The guy you are replacing, we had to get rid of him, he was kicked out of the army. He turned out to be a homosexual officer, and he got caught in something. That’s why you were changed from Berlin, to -- to replace him here in my headquarters. And I’m very much pleased that you are interested in girls.” So he -- he was afraid he gets another guy who was a homosexual. It was not very common, but it -- it did happen. So Colonel Skolie had -- once before in his career had another homosexual. He was afraid himself that someone might think he might be ac/dc, that the army is going to check him. But he wasn’t, he was a Catholic, with a Protestant wife, and he had a good marriage, but except for religion. He insisted on going to Catholic church, and she insisted going with the children -- well, he was a very nice guy. So here I was in Heidelberg, and he was happy that I was not a homosexual, you know, I was very much interested in girls, and I started dating like mad. I met my wife after three months there. In those three months, before I met my wife, I had gone out with three different girls, and had a good time, and one of them was a -- woman was in the PX -- I don’t know you know what the PX is, sales girl. And when I got married she was a saleslady who advised my wife what -- what she’ll buy. Well, she knows I’m going to get married, but -- and she was just a girl, German girl that just want to get married to an American. And wat -- when I met my wife was in the headquarters in the office, a very interesting, I’m not going to tell the whole story, but I knew immediately, and I -- like I said I was in

meantime going from 19 to 31 years, 12 years a long time, and I had -- in the meantime, I had a couple of girls I might have considered, including my fiancée. But when I met my wife, after three months I ask her to marry. I was three months in Heidelberg, and another three months that I met her.

Q: Did you do the list for your wife?

A: Yup.

Q: Must have turned out pretty well.

A: Probably a hundred. No, no we -- but I was particularly interested in her opinion about the Nazis, and she was working in these headquarters, in another floor, in a big building, and I watch her once in awhile. And a lot of girls were dating American soldiers, and I looked, and she didn't date, or talk to any American soldiers. She wasn't one of those that just want to get married to an American, and to have a boyfriend. And so I said hello to her a couple of times, and she didn't seem to be interested very much. And I was, in meeting her, because she wasn't dating anybody, I know that -- well, she could have dated a German outside that I didn't know about, but you -- and so when she was working -- only when she wasn't studying, but she didn't have any money to continue her study in Heidelberg. She wanted -- she majored in foreign languages, and she knew Italian, and some Russian, and English very well, of course, and she had a job that she had to know English for, and so she interrupt her studies every time she didn't have any money, she s -- worked up there. And I could visit her in her office, but she couldn't visit me in my office, because that was cofe -- classified secret, the door, you couldn't get in,

somebody had to open up on the other side. So to meet her -- she didn't seem to be much interested meeting me. I figure I'll meet her. I ask her one time -- oh yeah, the first thing that happened, I -- there was a trial in Heidelberg over the SS -- who -- who was born in Heidelberg, they caught him after the war, he was a -- not -- not high-ranking, a simple guy, who had -- who was accused of having killed three people. They didn't -- didn't say Jews or not Jews, but he was an SS, but they weren't sure they could prove it, and the only one and the -- that they caught in Heidelberg, who was a native of Heidelberg. But when I read the story in the paper, I read that what he did before he became an SS. He was street sweeper in Heidelberg, a guy, very simple, no education -- very little educa -- and a guy with probably inferiority complex, who all of a sudden became an SS, with a nice uniform, looked sharp, but was dumb, not educated. And was somebody all of a sudden, and then beat up Jews, or whatever. He was a member of the elite in Germany. And I looked at it and said, "They ought to cor --," I said to myself, "they ought to catch the big guys, not a small guy like him." Some of the mass murderers, and n-not [indecipherable] people. And I decided I wanted to see a trial. I didn't know the guy, he was not in the camp I was in, and -- but I was just curious how the German courts were doing with a guy like that. So I told my boss I wanted to go that day -- I want a day off, I want to go to court, I need you okay that. And I went out the door. My wife started going out the door, too from a different [indecipherable]. I said, "Where are you going, Miss Suberchess?" And she has a Latin name [indecipherable] in Germany during the Middle Ages, only the doctors, teachers, and the pe-people who could read and write, they spoke

Latin, not German, educated people. And her family was a gen -- m-mainly a family of teachers. So I said, “Where are you going?” She said she’s going to court. “Oh,” I said, “I’m going to court, too.” I said, “What -- what kind of a crime did you commit?” I was trying to make a joke.[indecipherable] “I didn’t commit a crime, but I’m just watch a trial.” I said, “I’m watching a trial, too. What kind of a trial, are you a witness, then?” No, she didn’t want to tell me right away. And it came out she’s going the same place I was. And I couldn’t think of a reason why a German girl would be interested in SS, unless she was a relative, or something. So I ask her, “Why are you interested in SS?” And she gave me the -- a reason, the same reason that I was interested in it. See how justice is done in Germany today. So that got me interested in her, more than just for other reasons, and a young woman is interested in -- in Nazis, and [indecipherable]. And I said, “Okay, you want a ride?” She was going by bicycle, I had my car, and is that okay? She accepted a ride, and the -- excuse me [indecipherable]. So we got to the court, I parked my car, I -- like I said, I was in uniform, and came out with her, and there’s a -- a guard or some guy up there by the doors on the courtroom, and the courtroom is filled already with people, complete -- the guy said, “Can’t go in, it’s full.” Well, I figured I am an officer in the United States army, they lost the war, I’m going to go in, no matter what. And I -- and I spoke German. So I said to the guard, “Who gave you your order that you can’t let an American army officer in?” “Oh,” he said, “they didn’t tell me an American army officer, they said nobody goes in.” “Well, I -- I am sorry, but you will make a place for me. I’ll -- ,” and there was my future wife, left out. I couldn’t speak for her, that -- give her a seat,

but I, as an army officer had -- was considered maybe -- they -- they -- they figured we had -- we won the war, and we wer -- demanded certain things, but I wasn't normally doing that, but I was insisting here, in this case. Make a long story short, my wife didn't go into the court, and this guy told a German civilian to leave, that he had to make some space for some important people. But only me, and I sat up there, and I listened to an unimpressive to -- trial. The guy -- I almost felt sorry for the guy -- the former -- he was a beat up old -- well, not old man, but he was, at that time I'm going to see him an old man, because I was only 30 and something, and he was 45 or something. Well, they couldn't prove actually, any murder, but he admitted having been SS, having been in certain place, and had beaten up people, and to -- but not -- they couldn't prove that he murdered people. So he got a couple of months in jail. That was standard throughout Germany [indecipherable]. But I -- it bothered me. I said, "Here is a guy who probably had an inferiority complex. In the concentration camp he could beat up professors and doctors, and people who were more intelligent, and more educated than he was, because he had no education. And he got caught. But the big biggies, they were free. And I sa -- I thought that the guys who were over him should be sitting in -- in the docket there then. Well, I can't say I'm s -- I felt sorry for him, but I -- I -- I have -- didn't think that was -- he shouldn't be sitting there, that somebody else should be. Okay, that's Heidelberg. So then we come to a long story, and I do want to say -- to be [indecipherable] how I finally got to marry my wife, what problems there were involved, on the part of the Americans, on

the part of the Germans, on the part of her family, on the part religion, politics, east, west, combination --

Q: You did -- just to remind you, you did talk earlier on in the interview, just as a digression yesterday about the problems with the army, about how you weren't supposed to marry a foreign -- a foreigner, particularly a German, because of your -- your work with secret materials. So that part's been covered.

A: Th-That is ma --

Q: But the rest, it would be good to hear.

A: But i-it's a long story, with a rabbi involved, and a general involved, and a -- the Germans, because of Communism, and because of Nazism too. And also, not myself, I -- I wanted to make sure one thing, I'm not marrying to a big Nazi family, in respect to my parents, not that she would have had any guilt in this, her father, if he would have been a Nazi, but that would be a very odd thing. But I did have a secretary, or a -- he was actually called in the army, a clerk, for -- he was a soldier, who could type up my classified stuff. He was a Jewish guy, by the name of Ross Engle. He was -- had a master's degree in political science, he was drafted. Didn't have any desire to become an officer. He would have made a good officer, but -- little guy like me, and he was going out with a German girl that I also knew, and I just talked to [indecipherable] in the finance office, like a cashier, or something like that, military finance office. And his case is interesting, it was just the opposite from mine. He met this very nice, young girl, very lovely, and it turns out that she came from big Nazi family. So big that it was a famous

name in Germany. He was her -- the brother of her mother, of the Rice Youth Leader, with all the German Jews went into uniform, the Nazi party member. And -- like the boy scouts, but they wore little knives, and all that. I would have been one, I would have been Jewish, but -- the Hitler Youth. That's what it -- what -- Hitler Youth Leader. He was the Hitler Youth Leader of Germany. There were two during Hitler's reign, and he was one of them. So the mother was the sister of this guy. Well, that was during the war, and I figure well, after the war -- he figured the -- that the war is finished, that they don't keep their mouth shut, because they were Nazis, and anti-Semites, probably. Well, you didn't have to be a Nazi to be an anti-Semite, necessarily. You could have been Nazi, and have known some Jews that you liked, and still be a big Nazi, and -- and still like Jews secretly, or something. But in his case it turned out, the poor guy, he was very smart -- like I said, he had a master's degree in political science. He was only a company clerk, he was doing good work, and he -- he met this girl, and so it turned out her family's Nazi, and when he talked to me about this, he told me then that his father is a rabbi, and his grandfather was a rabbi, and here he was in -- marrying into a Nazi family. H-He was in love with the girl. Well, I said, "Well, I consider myself lucky, I also -- y- you know about my going out with Miss Dambotsios, and I found out from my wife only recently that he tried to date her too, one time, but she didn't want to go out with him. And so, he came to my wedding, and he took all the pictures. I have pictures of -- very nice guy.

Q: Do you want to go ahead and say something about your -- your wife, and -- and how that worked?

A: So I was very much impressed with her ideas about Nazism, and how much she knew about Jews. Not from her parents, but after the war, because they didn't have any Jews where she lived, in the countryside there. All she did, she thinks one girl that she befriended was Jewish, probably, but she wasn't sure, when she was a kid. And so [indecipherable] I did get married to this girl, and he got permission right away, in the -- in the army, you had to get permission, because -- not just for security, but they didn't want any bad elements to come into United States, girls who were prostitutes, or -- excuse me, or had other things, Communists, or something. And so they tried to get the -- the army required two things . In one, a form, a letter from your commanding officer, your boss, that he certif -- that he okays that so and so gets married to -- and there's -- he had to do some checking with the police, and then finally approve it. In a case of an officer, in my case, I had to meet Colonel Skolie, my immediate superior, but it was only a performer thing. I had the paper typed out, and I just said, "Would you please sign my permission to get married?" Because I was an officer, I had more of a privilege, let's say. And they -- they -- they assumed that an officer, which wasn't always true, had the common sense not to marry a prostitute, or -- but they did. Some of the best looking girls were prostitutes there. And they were [indecipherable] glad to get rid of them, send them to United States. And there were guys who knew their wives were prostitute, and -- and still want to marry them. But anyway, when I came with my paper to my colonel, he of course signed it right away, and he had known me for awhile already, so we had no problem. But then my -- the second thing that we had to get was permission from the

chaplain -- not permission, to have the chaplain signature on there. If you're Jewish, you go to the Jewish chaplain. That's the -- in the army they have chaplains who are catering -- catering wha -- providing the military with moral support, or religious support, who on Sundays have a mass, if they're Catholic, or they're Protestant, and on Friday night have a Jewish service in that army chapel, which is -- in the army serves all faith. So when the Jews have their service, they cover up the cross, usually, and the rabbi comes and talks from the chapel. In that time the Jewish community in Heidelberg was about 200 people. So we had a Jewish chaplain, in this case, Orthodox. So there is -- you never know what the chaplain, if he's Jewish, whether Orthodox, Reformed, or Conservative. The army took them in, and there were usually many Orthodox rabbis who didn't have a job because every o-orth -- there a lot of ri -- guys -- rabbis, who don't have a congregation here in the United States. And the army needed rabbis, and they went to [indecipherable] called the chaplain's board, or the chaplain -- they advised the army on who might make a good military chaplain. And they only re-recommended Orthodox people, which was wrong, because the majority of Jews are not Orthodox in the United States of -- United States Army. In Israel it's a different -- even there they're not -- they're not the majority. But the Orthodox chaplains are required not to s-say the prayers all in Hebrew, but to talk mainly English, and have the He-Hebrew. Whereas the -- the Reform rabbis have everything English, and I preferred that because w -- if I wanted to say a prayer or anything, I like to understand what I'm -- I could read Hebrew, but I didn't understand. I studied for Bar Mitzvah, and never was. Two weeks before my Bar Mitzvah, the war

started, in 1940, and I was not Bar Mitzvahed, so -- but I knew how to read Hebrew, and I knew the prayers, but I didn't understand it. I was never much interested in it, but -- but when I did go to chapel, I wanted to make sure if I did say something, I want to understand it. So, with the Orthodox, we had no common ground, they -- they didn't do what the army [indecipherable] told them to, to say it in English, but they -- they rattled, and they shugon, and they went through the motions like the Orthodox do, and I didn't do this at ho -- in my hometown in Germany, and I didn't do this here, but [indecipherable] just went along, everybody chanted certain songs. So, the one we had in Hamburg that time was Orthodox, and I knew was going to face, going with my paper to have him sign it, he probably would say how about your wife converting before I sign the paper. And exactly what happened. But, before I went to the Jewish chaplain, I went to the cath -- no, to the Protestant chaplain. There were three chaplains there, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. And the Protestant chaplain was the head chaplain, he had the highest rank. He was a colonel, and the Jewish chaplain was a major. And like I said, I was a lieutenant, so I was even lower. They all had ranks. I went to the chief chaplain, becau -- you see, it just said chaplain's signature, but what they meant was of your faith. There wasn't -- we didn't have to do this, but I figure I'm going to get around this Orthodox chaplain, who is go -- not going to sign my paper, because he wants my wife to d -- to convert. And I went to the Protestant chaplain, and he said, "Well," he said, "yes, I could sign your paper, but I have to respect the Jewish chaplain, he is [indecipherable] your faith here, and I would feel better if you get his signature." And I said to the chaplain, "I tell you the truth, I

didn't go to the Jewish chaplain because the Orthodox. That's okay with me, but I am afraid he is going to ask me for my wife to convert before he sign the paper. And I'm not willing to let that happen, because although my wife probably would convert to marry me, but to me it doesn't mean a thing, and I don't approve of the Orthodox, I don't go around -- if we had a Reform rabbi, I would consider it, but we don't happen to have one." And he said, "Try it anyway." Okay, I went to see the Jewish chaplain. I knew him already. And he was a guy who was not -- not very nice. He was very Yiddish, if you say, and from he -- like he ca -- he came out of the ghetto, and he was telling me what to do, and that my wife or I should do this or that. And I said, "I am not Orthodox, rabbi, please. I respect your views, I want you respect mine, too. And I, if I consider myself anything, I am Jewish, and I'm not religious. And, as a matter of fact, I have questions not about Judaism, but religion in general, and my faith, because of the concen," -- he knew I was in concentration camp. "And I'm not sure about God, but in the respect m-my parents would have been alive, and they would have wanted me to marry in the chapel, Jewish. And they probably would have approved of a non-Jewish wife, but I -- I -- I would get married in this chapel, but not Orthodox." And I knew that the chapels in the army, even if they were Orthodox, if he did approve of a marriage, or a wedding [indecipherable] to perform a wedding, he could perform this in a way that was not approved by the army, was not completely Orthodox, but --

End of Tape Six, Side A

Beginning Tape Six, Side B

A: “How about converting your wife before I sign this paper?” I said, “I may -- no thank you, we’ve have talked about extensively. I just want your signature, so I can go ahead and get married.” He hesitated, he said he wanted to talk about conversion to my wife, and -- who was not with me. And I said, “No, ki -- rabbi, this is between me and my wife, not between you and my wife. And we talked about it plenty, and me -- don’t think -- I think my wife is a good -- will be a good wife, and had a good background, and I couldn’t require more than that. So please sign my paper.” And he said he wants to talk to her, he wants a conversion. I said, “No, I told you, we’re not -- she’s not going to convert. Not because she doesn’t -- I don’t want to.” And he was really upset because a Jew was doing this. But that’s mine life, not his life, or anybody else’s. So I said, “Okay, you’re not going to sign? I’m going back and I’ll see what we can do about this.” He said, “You -- I won’t sign til I talk some more to you.” He didn’t sign, he didn’t say til she converts, be -- he could not do that. And I said, “Before I leave your office, rabbi, I’m going to tell you, you are a bad rabbi. You are a bad military officer. Here I was, a lower ranking guy, and I’m telling you something that somebody should have heard a long time to you. Not because you don’t want to -- me to -- you know, give paper to marry, or my wife to convert, because in general, you run lousy services here in this chapel, and this is not just me who’s saying this. You are an Orthodox rabbi, and I’m not Orthodox, that’s not why I’m against you. Because the army requires you, as an Orthodox rabbi, to conduct most of your service in English, and that’s why you lost the congregation here, and there are about 200 Jews here, and you walk in here on a Friday night, you get a dozen people

here, you don't get anybody. And we had rabbis who were Orthodox, who had a lot more attraction to get Jews in here. Apparently you don't care. Y-You care about certain things about Judaism." And I -- finally, I shouted at him, and that was it, I walked out. And I was told I can get permission to get married without getting his signature on there. Okay. Two, three weeks later, I heard about a plane going to Israel for American military officers who were chaplains, or rabbis, for the clergy, military clergy. And it was a private trip, a German airplane, passenger plane, but somebody in the headquarters was arranging this, to visit the holy land, which is for Jews, Catholics, it's for everybody, Christian and Jew. So it was a very cheap price, 200 dollars, I believe, for two weeks in Israel, including the trip. This was in 1956 -- '57. And I heard there were two seats empty on there, they couldn't fill two seats. But like I said, all the people going were -- were clergymen, and I found out that my rabbi wasn't going, which was fine with me, but two seats were free, but you had to pay for it, just like the rabbis did. For the rabbis it was not paid for by the army, but it's just some time off they got that -- seeing the holy land. I had an uncle in Israel, who I'm -- talked about before on the tape, who went to Israel, became prisoner of war, fought for the briti -- with the British, and -- my mother's brother, and who broke the saber for the police, that's the story I have here on the tape. And I wanted to see him, and he was getting to be an old man, he -- he was a widow in the meantime, no children, and he was my favorite uncle, actually. And he also had done something in the war, fought against the Germans in the first World War, he was in [indecipherable]. Okay, so I went and I said, "If these seats not -- can I pay for one of

these seats and go to Israel?" "Sure." I put my name on the list, off I went to Israel. Who sits next to me? The only -- the only Reformed rabbi military we had in Germany. I had heard of him, but he was far away from where I was at. He is my -- he sits next to me, and we look at each other, and he didn't know who was I, I didn't know who he was. And I mention my name, and he said, "Willner, Willner. I got it. You are the one that gave hell to the Orthodox rabbi in the headquarters in Heidelberg where there's chaplain." I said, "How do you know?" You know, to -- word had gotten around in the meantime, there was this young officer who we called this chaplain of the doorma, and what happened, there was a -- a retreat for Jewish chaplains, military chaplain, and Jewish military chaplain assistants. Every chaplain had an assistant, a Jewish guy in the case of a Jewish chaplain. In the case of the Catholic chaplain, he was Catholic soldier. And they were the clerks, the secretaries, in fact. So our rabbi had the secretary, a Jewish guy, a -- a sergeant or something, who was also main career in the army, and when I had the argument with the chaplain, door was open to the next office, and there was the Jewish chaplain assistant sitting outside. And he had gone on this retreat, and he had told the other ch-chaplain assistants that, you know, "Some young lieutenant in Heidelberg, he really came in one day, and he gave my boss, who's a major, gave him hell, told him off in no uncertain terms, what a bad rabbi he was. I -- I -- I never heard anything like it." And so, he had all the other chaplain assistant. Then the assistant of the chaplain I was sitting next to on the airplane, he had heard it from the assistant from the Orthodox chaplain, the story. He said, "You are the guy I -- Willner, who wanted to get -- want to

get married, and," -- I say, "Well, that's the whole thing. I don't care about Orthodox, and -- but I just want to have him sign my paper, and if he didn't want to sign it, and didn't," -- I also said I -- I couldn't use the chapel, but maybe get some other rabbi to come. There weren't many rabbis in Germany, but -- to perform the ceremony. And I said, "Well, I don't get married -- I got married at city hall. I'd -- it's not required that I get married under Jewish law, or [indecipherable] law in the chapel, I just don't get married in the chapel." And so the Reform rabbi said, "You have a little problem there. I -- I don't really see it as a problem. I don't know your future wife. I think differently about these things, and I'm willing to marry you. Beca I -- if you want -- you want to get married in the first place in the chapel, why should you be kept out of the chapel because the rabbi doesn't agree? That's not his private property, the chapel," he said. "He should marry anybody wants to get married." I said, "Yeah, he -- he'll marry anybody wants to convert. Maybe some guy marries a prostitute off the street, as long as she c-converts to Judaism, he'll -- he'll marry her, probably," you know. And so this guy -- by this time we were finished with the trip. In Israel we separate, I'm going to see my uncle, they went sightseeing. In two weeks we met again to depart Israel, and on the way back, I sat next to him again, and he said, "You [indecipherable] Israel, and -- and by the way, do you still want to get married in the chapel?" "Yeah," I said, "yes. Because my parents would like to see me get marr -- and it's a nicer thing than just signing a paper in city hall, and I'll go for a Jewish ceremony, but nothing -- even Orthodox, you know, but -- but not somebody who require my wife to be a -- become a," -- he, "Okay, I don't require your wife to convert,

but after I meet her, I make up my own opinion I want to marry you." He wanted to see what kind of woman she was, and -- so -- "But you have to come to my place, get married in my chapel, I cannot do it in that chapel in [indecipherable]." I said okay. "But first you introduce me to your wife." So we went, and he secluded himself for about two hours in his office while I was waiting outside. And I said, "What are you guys doing in there? You -- you converting my wife now, when she comes out you say she is a Jew." And he -- he was asking her questions, and telling her. And he says, "Your wife, it seems to me she probably knows as much about Jude as you do, if not more." I say, [indecipherable]. "Well, I gave her a couple of books to learn some more about Judaism, see, because I want to -- if I marry her in a Jewish ceremony, I want her to know about Judaism, but no conversion." [indecipherable]. And as far as the actual date is concerned, we can make that later. I went back to Heidelberg -- and his place was a couple hours away from Heidelberg, and I -- he -- yeah, a-at that time, talking about luck, not his luck, the Orthodox chaplain was ordered back to United States before my wedding day came up, and I was to go to the other chaplain -- because he had a child that was -- mentally had a problem, and for personal reasons he was transferred back to United States, to another job in the army. And we had no chaplain in Heidelberg, and so the chaplain called me up, the -- he informed that, "Oh, you are lucky. You don't even have to come my chapel down here, I'll come to your chapel. You -- I'll perform the marriage in front of the Jews that you know, that live in Heidelberg, and so as we planned to do here, but you do in your chapel. I could not have done this if your chaplain was still there, that's

like hitting him in the face, you know, that's some -- making him look bad. But he's not there, and so we're not doing -- he's not coming back either, not [indecipherable] gone for sure." [indecipherable] fine. So he said, "Well, you know, we're not going to have a big thing." I said, "I don't want a big thing. Just a few friends from the office," or -- non-Jews, Jews, my boss is going come to the wedding, and we go to city hall, say -- in Germany you have a very f -- not fancy, but a more former wedding -- even in the city hall when you get your papers -- not talking about the party, or dinner, or something. But so he came to Heidelberg, and we went to the chapel. I took my boss along, my bosses boss, high ranking officer. Rosinger, the guy who was going to take the picture, and my -- and the only Jewish guy in my -- no, Rosinger was one in the military Jewish guy, and I had one civilian [indecipherable] for me, who was a GS 12, who was an expert on Intelligence some field, who was born as a German Jew in Berlin, whose father had been arrested in the Crystal night, going to Dachau, and the mother was Christian. The mother thought the father's not going to come back from Dachau, she committed suicide in Berlin. And -- and the father came back from Dachau, and his wife was dead. But that's just -- this happened. So Jerry Coats, who was also Jewish, then came along. He married a girl also from a Nazi family, a judge, a Nazi judge who didn't want any part of him, but he was the other Jewish guy. So we had Jerry, and Rosinger, and my boss, and the boss' boss, and that was it.

Q: Johanna's parents didn't come?

A: They asked to come, and the father was retired already, by ’65, and they said to him when he applied, “Only in case of death.” [indecipherable] allowed to go to y-your daughter’s funeral in Heidelberg. And he said, “Then I don’t have to see her any more,” when she died, and -- you know, ridiculous, but they -- what they wanted to do, people who were drawing social security in East Germany, which he was, as a teacher, they were hoping they were staying in the west then, then the west will have to pay social security [indecipherable]. But they didn’t -- they couldn’t come. They did come one time, but not for our wedding.

Q: So you hadn’t met them by the time you got married, or had you?

A: After I got married. They stayed a couple of days, and then went back. So we went to chapel, the day came [indecipherable]. He performed a Jewish ceremony, breaking the glass. It was pretty much -- just wasn’t very Orthodox, he did other thing. He gave us a Hebrew certificate, Hebrew and English, signed officially by him, so that we had a Jewish marriage, and our piece -- people there at the altar with me. And he made a little speech, and then he said, “We’re going to go for a snack downstairs.” They had a social hall downstairs, that they had in all the chapel of the churches here, and you meet for the ornek Shabbat on Friday night. And said okay. I actually planned to take them to lunch every -- the -- all these people. And we go downstairs, and very quietly -- this is a big building, right across from the headquarters. Very quietly, a lot of the Jews that knew me, or didn’t know me, they had passed the word around, have had the wedding very quiet, I should have a surprise. We come downstairs to the social hall, there are about 150 - 200

people there, not just Jewish, for our marriage, and the food, and everyth -- they had done this -- our wedding was upstairs in the chapel -- very quietly through the back door. And somebody stood in the street, and they said, “Be quiet, don’t talk, this way,” and so. Not only did we had the rabbi, and these other people there, I had a second rabbi there. And the rabbi whose wife was a woman who knew my family, was born in the same town that I was born in Germany, who knew my family, he’s still alive today. He died since. He was con-Conservative, but he had just been assigned to Germany, and he’s been assigned to fill a chaplain job, but he didn’t want to intrude on my chaplain, and he waited til I came down. So we had two rabbis at my wedding, one rabbis wife, woman from my hometown and knew the family. I didn’t know her then, but [indecipherable] little boy. And so they knew about my family. So Rabbi Vidall remain a rabbi for 25 years in the army, and she settled out in California. So, I had a nice wedding, and then I invited the same people that were initially in the group, for dinner in a -- a restaurant in Heidelberg. So, I was lucky. [indecipherable]

Q: Mm-hm. Ah, hold on one second.

A: After I got married, everything was finished -- finished ralb. I didn’t know this, but they had considered me, before I got married, to be assigned as a liaison officer to the German CIA, as a army liaison officer, US Army, because I spoke German fluently, and they require that. In the meantime I got married, and they said -- the Germans said, “If he’s married, the officer, his wife must be an American, but to also speak German fluently.” Well, I -- I just happened to fit the bill, and the -- in the first one I was not

married, and then I was married, too. So when I then got called in and was told I get the job, and my wife was cleared, and our general G2, he's the chief Intelligence officer of the command for Europe, he called me in and said, "Well now, you are on the way to occupy a very important job. We picked you because we feel you fit the bill, but I know your background, concentration camps. You do not go there to find out who the Nazis are. You find -- you go there because you have a job to do for the United States. I can understand if you have any feelings, you find Nazis in there. We know that, but your job is not to uncover them, your job is to see that we get all the report that we're supposed to get, that the people that we interview, and so on, that they're not -- they don't keep the information from us." Former Nazis, or whatever. "But not for -- because of what happened to you, that you are getting revenge." I said, "You don't have to worry about it. I know what job I have to do. But, I will not associate socially with the guys I know who previously had been big Nazis to all of a sudden cater to us, and," -- "That's okay," he said, "but like I said, you're not going there to stir up trouble in the German agency." They all had ph-phony names, and there were war criminals who were hired after the war, but soon gotten rid of later, but they came in there. So I went to the agency, and everything wound up very well, til one day -- they had three liaison officers like myself, British, French, and ger -- and -- and American, with the German agency, and everything went on fine, and -- til one day the French liaison officer asked for a meeting with me outside the agency where we were working, to have lunch someplace in the countryside. And he wants to talk to me about something very seriously, that he felt that I understand

more than anybody else, about Nazis and the German CIA, specifically one man, who was an SS officer, and Gestapo member, and you know, had committed a war crime in Czechoslovakia, who was working with us, but who is working really against us, because he is one who will not give us all the reports, who looks down on us, who probably still a Nazi, and who -- who really doesn't cooperate with us. "If he had cooperated, I probably wouldn't have said a thing," he said, "but here's his file," and he gave me a file about two inches thick, in a briefcase, and he say, "Take it back with you, look it over yourself, and we, the French government, want this guy out of this job. And since he's in the American occupation zone," wh-where we were located, "I feel I should go to the American liaison officer, and have him take care of it." And I just -- with a smile he said, "I know, because of your background, you'll do something about it." I said, "Well, frankly, you're right, but my general told me that I'm not here to find out who the Nazis are, who the war criminals are. You know what my job is, same as yours. But I know we," -- somebody like this, who was sentenced to death twice, in absentia, in Czechoslovakia. After the war, they couldn't find him. They knew him as a worker -- they knew he was alive somewhere, because he had submerged in a German agency under a different name. So the French officer, "Here's the file, Eddie, take it home with you. If your general decides to do nothing about it, we will do something about it. But I'll leave it to your judgment." So he said -- I said, "What will you do if my people say no, they don't want any part of that? Like I said, the general told me, I'm not there to find out the SS or the Gestapo man." He said, "Very simple," he said, "and please convey this to your general. We will

give it to the local newspapers, we will make public that in a new -- in the west German government, in the newly created Central Intelligence Agency of West Germany, you have a guy who was condemned to death by the Czechs, and you employ him. Not very good for the German -- the new west German government." I said, "Good." I said, "I'll take care of it. I don't think you'll have to go newspapers, but I don't know, but I cannot promise." I took it to Heidelberg. Right away I ask for -- I get into the general's office, sometimes very difficult. I said, "I have something of utmost importance." Okay, I was let in. I said, "General, I remember what you told me, my job is not to find out who the Nazis are, but I found something worse, I found a war criminal in our midst, who is also probably against us, Americans, and I did not go after him. Here's what happened, the French asked me to speak to them, and gave me a file for you to look over, and make a decision. We hoping to get him out." And that actually took place. He said, "Okay." He had no problem with that, that I was just passing it on. I said, "Frankly, I -- I -- I read the whole file, and the man, on a high level, he was retired early -- they said retired, but I think he was transferred to another place, under another name." But that's all I could do, but I did something where I could do. The director general of the agency where I was, one time told a young officer, a naval officer West Germany [indecipherable] was working temporarily. He didn't know I was in a concentration camp when I got to his agency, but one day I was -- it was very hot in the office, I took my jacket off, I had a short sleeve shirt on, and somebody saw the number on my arm. Apparently he knew right away what that was, and the word got around to the director that -- that the

American liaison officer probably was in concentration camp. And he never talked to me about it, the boss there, but the naval officer, a young guy, who was not [indecipherable] young guy, after the war, he became a naval officer, the guy was about 30 years old, married. He in -- I invited him -- he invited me to his home first for dinner one time with my wife, and I invite him to my house. And we didn't talk about business, because I figured that was improper, that they probably think I'm going to li -- hear him out, see what he knows about them, and digging up things that they didn't want us to know. And after the social visit, the two social visits, he came to my office. He said he'd been told by the director not to soci -- socially associate with me. They were afraid I was going to find out there were a lot -- a lot of the guys in there who -- so that's the story about that I was --

Q: Well, we're about at the end of the side here.

End of Tape Six, Side B

Beginning of Tape Seven, Side A

Q: Okay, one second. This is tape number seven, side A, of an interview with Eddie Willner, and -- and what we're going to do, since we're pressed for time, is we're going to skip ahead, and -- and talk about some really contemporary issues on -- Mr. Willner is going in -- to say something before we introduce this -- this videotape.

A: On the introduction, it's very short, I served for 21 years, selected by the city council as a member of the public safety and human relations advisory commission. A normal assignment is three years, or two years, we had extended, and I've been re-selected by -- by the city government, which of -- whi -- there are seven councilors, and -- plus the mayor. And at city council meetings, people get sworn in for various long term job. And I had volunteered for 21 years, to be a member, and also a chairman of the public safety commission, which we -- we used to be called the law enforcement commission, which has overview the police, the fire department, and the ambulances, yeah. But my interest was the police, because I served as criminal investigator, and I felt I had something to offer, maybe advice, and also because the name was added to public safety commission, prob -- human relations commission, which I'm very much interested in. And which -- and there were cases to cover, and discuss in the -- first in our commission meeting, then brought up to the city council, and so withot -- and I resigned, like I said, because of my physical disabilities, and I felt I had served enough. And of course this volunteering, and without pay, and took up a lot of my time, and I was physically [indecipherable], I thought I -- and all felt I should resign, and I had served long enough, longer than

anybody ever served before [indecipherable] on any commission. And I was the first one with the police who were -- also [indecipherable], who was named with a badge by the police as a honorary chief of police of Falls Church, and which was very nice, and the city of Falls Church [indecipherable] 50 years, then we became independent from the county. So this was first time they assigned anybody, and gave him a badge of po -- poli -- police chief.

Q: So --

A: And without further ado -- and -- and what I like to mention is that when my son, my youngest son was still living at home, was studying at Georgetown, and become a foreign affairs officer in the State Department eventually, that he thought he also should do something for the city. He still lives at home, and the other children are married, of course, but he's volunteered then, that after I resign, or asked not to be reconsidered for this job, he came to me [indecipherable] and said, "Why don't I go in your place, and also do something for the city?" I said, "It's fine with me, if you have time to do this, you have to study a lot, but they have meetings at night, but maybe you can handle that." He applied, and there were four or five people applying for two jobs, two of them, there were seven -- there seven commissioners, and two p-place for [indecipherable] and another. So he got selected [indecipherable] by it's usually three -- three city councilors, who review, your -- why -- your -- your knowledge, to a we -- whether or not you could add anything to this. And I -- I didn't think he had too much to offer, but he's young, and he can ler -- he heard a lot from me what goes on in the city, and the problems, so he is somewhat

familiar. And he did get selected, and then the day came when he was going to be sworn in, in the front of the city council, and the cit -- in the city hall, publicly, and [indecipherable] people were there. Well, it was a regular city council meeting, not -- not for him to be just s-sworn in, was part of it, [indecipherable] many things going on, and the part that deals with his swearing in is on tape, and the mayor made an announcement, and since we were there to watch him, the mayor recognized us, and asked us if we want to stand with him while he's being sworn in. And we went up the podium, and we thought that was it, the oath of office, and then the mayor started talking about the Willner family, and first of all it was the father, it was son is really taking his place, and then the mother [indecipherable] family, and this was completely unexpected by me or my wife, or my son. We thought we just going there to watch him being sworn in, in a public meeting. And -- and what you see here, you can also hear, you don't have to see the picture. This a time they walk up to the podium, and he is sworn in, and the rest of them you will hear.

Q: Okay, I'm going to --

[Tape plays]

-- before, which is the ad-administration of the oath of office. We -- I think we have our people here, and once again the --

Q: Okay, this is the mayor speaking.

-- people from the neighborhood, thank you very much, and we'll be working on this item. Appreciate that you brought it to our attention. Now, we'll first call for an administration of the oath of office to Jackie Druzinsky.

Q: Is this the right part of the tape?

A: [indecipherable] the first person [indecipherable]

Q: He's talking about calling [indecipherable]

-- I, Jacqueline Druzinsky do solemnly sw --

-- but all the Willner family that's here, please, if you could come forward. You know, I wonder if the clerk and Michael could come over here for the administration of the oath? Anyone else who is with Michael want to come forward? Anyone? Okay. Okay, Eddie? I, Michael Willner do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the ordinances of the city of Falls Church, Virginia, and that I will faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all the duties incumbent upon me as a member of the public safety, and human relations advisory commission for the city of Falls Church, Virginia, according to the best of my abilities, so help me God.

Thank you. Congratulations. [indecipherable]. If we could get a picture, why don't we line everybody up here, and maybe we could -- come up. Councilmember Fitzgerald I think is out of town on other business, anyway, this opportunity -- great. Thank you. Before the Willners leave, here in front of us for a minute, I'd like to make a few remarks. The Willner family has contributed literally hundreds of hours, if not thousands

of hours to the welfare of this community. They represent what our citizens are all about with their voluntary participation in government, and this is a rare circumstance, to have two generations providing leadership to the city on the same board, that is a public safety and human relations advisory commission. And it's an important commission, it's important work. It's probably, in addition to education, the most important function that our government performs. And you've helped to perform that in the past, and we look forward to Michael helping us as well. Again, congratulations to the whole family, and thank you very much.

Q: That's nice.

End of Tape Seven, Side A

Conclusion of Interview

Interview with Eddie Willner
October 11, 2000

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, volunteer collection, interview with Eddie Willner, conducted by Gail Schwartz, on October 11th, 2000, in Falls Church, Virginia. This is a continuation of a post-Holocaust interview conducted by Arwin Donohue on July 12th and 13th, 2000. This is tape number one, side A. Before we continue with the interview, I just wanted to clarify some chronology. When were you married? Do you remember the actual date?

Answer: We were married in Germany, in Heidelberg, which is a famous place for getting married, but I was stationed there with the headquarters US Army. And we married on the 21st of August, 1958.

Q: And you did discuss the c -- the conditions before.

A: We got married in the city hall, in the Jewish chapel.

Q: Yeah. You had talked about that previously. The other date I wanted to ask you, is do you know when you became a citizen of the United States, approximately?

A: I don't remember exactly, but I can -- probably 1951, because I went to officer's school after I became a citizen, I couldn't go before. And that was in '52. I graduated in August '52. So it must have been in '51 or '50. Of -- maybe '50.

Q: Was this a very significant moment for you, becoming a United States citizen?

A: Yes, it was a very significant moment that I wa -- became a citizen not in a big ceremony, I -- I was the only one, and it was an American female judge, and she was trying to be funny. I was in uniform, I was a sergeant of the US Army, and she's asked me three questions before becoming a citizen. Lift up your right hand, and answer my questions, that you tell me the truth, and nothing but, and so on. So she said, "Who's Uncle Sam?" I said, "I work for him." Okay, that was [indecipherable]. Then she asked me for other questions I'm willing to pay tax in this country. Yes. And the third question I don't -- I don't remember.

Q: Okay. Let's now just talk a little bit about your time in army, which again you've gone into a lot of detail in the previous interviews, but my question was, when you were

stationed in Japan, did you see any evidence, or did you feel any of that -- o-of the Japanese being the United States former enemies? Did a-any of that enter into your experiences?

A: No, because the Japanese way of life -- we were looking as the people, the conqueror, the people who are better maybe, we won the war. And they're very submissive, the Japanese, when they don't win. And they become prisoners, and -- so I -- I didn't have any problem with that, or -- I don't know if anybody else had, after MacArthur, who most people feel had the right type of occupation in Japan, for Japan. In Germany it wouldn't have worked that way, had a different type of occupation. But in Japan, the Japanese became very pro-American right away, because the policies MacArthur -- and the democracy, which introduced into ja -- Japan right away, and they fell right in line. And they changed over very quickly, whereas in Germany, I feel, they didn't change over so quickly, if they change over at all. Compared to the Nazis, I think there is no comparison, except the Japanese themself, compare themself during the war to the Germans. They called themself Germans of the Far East. But they didn't do all the things the Germans did. So -- and after the war, they also felt that had something in common with the Germans. They lost the war, both of them. So the big thing that I can state, the difference, when my wife and I took a taxi in Tokyo, and we spoke in English, there was a distance between the taxi driver and us. This was in 1950 -- after Korean war, in 1958 - '59 - '60. And they were still repairing all things from the bombardment. And the Japanese taxi drivers, for instance, if we talk German in the back of the cab, he will listen, he will say

after awhile, “What nationality are you?” And I had this thing, I was an amer -- an American, of course, but they respected the Germans, even though they both -- because like I said, they felt they had something in common, they also lost the war together. They felt they were very hard working people, clean, and also ruthless in war. So they called themselves, rightfully so , the -- the Asians -- the Germans of the Far East.

Q: What did you mean that they didn’t do what the Germans did?

A: Well, they did no -- also, we didn’t do what we did to the Germans. Prosecute people who committed war crimes. They prosecuted some, but not -- they didn’t have concentration camps, although they killed a lot of Chinese, particularly. But they didn’t have concentration camps, they had POW camps, where they treat the people just as bad as in -- in a concentration camp. But on the whole, they did not -- as a matter of fact, they did not have anything against Jews, Japanese. They let the Jews come into Shanghai, 5,000 of them re -- and a girl that was in my class in Germany went to -- to Shanghai, and I met her later in Florida, so I know how they were treated. But Japan was, for most Jews, a -- a country to wait til the war ended, or a place to go through to some other place. But they didn’t bother Jews.

Q: Did you see any evidence with other Americans, of anti-Japanese sentiment?

A: Did the Americans were anti-Japanese, or the Japanese anti-American?

Q: N-No, in -- in -- when you were there in the army, with the other American soldiers, did they evidence any anti-Japanese sentiments?

A: Not very much, no. Because the Japanese very friendly, very nice, and I must say my

own job, which was in military Intelligence, and we were not in uniform, we were documented civilian. I was commanding officer of a small unit. They -- they -- we had no problem whatsoever, and when they found out that I had been in a concentration camp, that interests them, but they ca -- always came out with the same thing, “What about the atomic bomb?” That we [indecipherable]. To them I was not a German Jew, I was an American civilian, and they felt very bad about us dropping atomic bomb there. I didn’t feel so bad about it, and I had problems with them -- with Japanese. They took me once to Hiroshima, to the famous museum, just like the Holocaust museum here, and in the museum were life size pictures of what looked like right after the bombing. And you saw people there burned. People like you c-could see in the Holocaust museums. And they took me through this museum for about two hours, and I was the only American, there was three Japanese, they all spoke English. And after two hours, it was about lunchtime, one of the Japanese said to me, “Mr. Willner, where we going to eat lunch?” “Oh,” I said, “any -- any Japanese restaurant will do, it doesn’t make any difference.” And he said to me, “Mr. Willner, you can eat lunch now, after seeing this?” And I said, “Yes. I’ve seen stuff like this before, not from one bomb, but from many bombs. I’ve seen people dead from bombings. I’ve seen -- I’ve seen thousands, probably. And where I worked in a German synthetic [indecipherable] factory, it was bombed by amer -- by the Americans, but not by one bomb, but by hundred or 200 bombers at one time. And s -- and even one city in Germany, city of Draisin, was bombed by the British, and during one bombing raid more people were killed than by one bomb here in Hiroshima. Most people don’t

know this." So -- well, they got to be a little funny about this, they just [indecipherable]. They wanted me to feel sorry for that. And I couldn't feel sorry for them, because they continued the war, they were warned, and the only thing that stopped our conversation, there was dead silence, was one man's name was Mr. Maneeshi, and he was the only Japanese I disliked in my six years in Japan, because he was doing certain things that I disapproved of. He also lied, which is accepted in Japan, because if you don't know the answer to something, you make it up. But Mr. Maneeshi, I said to him -- after he said about you can eat lunch now after seeing this, I said yes. And there was silence, and I said, "By the way, did you ever hear of Pearl Harbor?" And then there was dead silence, and then we went to lunch. Not one more word was said about the atomic bomb, or Pearl Harbor.

Q: So you -- so you spent six years in Japan in the army?

A: I spent six years in Japan. I went two -- two tours in Japan. After the Korean war, when the Korean war was over, I was sent with my unit to Japan, and we stayed nine months. So I was as a bachelor the first time. The second time I went to Japan, I went voluntarily, the army asked me, I didn't have to go. And if I could take my family, I said yes. They said yes. And three of my children are born in Japan, three out of the six. And one of them has a Japanese name. I had very good friends, and we still have Japanese visiting us here. I ca -- became a friend of a general, whose daughter learned cooking our house, German cooking, Jewish cooking, American cooking, and her daughter, the Ph.D., not married, still lives now in United States, comes here all the time, and she lives in

Pennsylvania, and the mother is about -- that's the daughter of the general, she is teaching English, she speaks fluent English. She had a master's degree from Columbia University. She never lived here, she [indecipherable]. So they a very fine family, and they became in close touch all the time.

Q: Speaking about her being in America, let's go back a little bit in time. What was it like for you? How did you feel when you first put your foot down on American soil?

A: Well, it was -- everything was new, of course. And I didn't know, really, what to expect. Well, maybe I did, but I -- I just didn't expect anything. Because I came here with 10 dollars in my pocket. I didn't have a job, although somebody I met in Europe said, come and see me sometimes. But a lot of people said come and see me sometime. But he did give me a job. And I was told that because I signed what I think are called first papers, at that time [indecipherable] were the papers that you want to become a citizen. You apply for it, and you -- your -- your sponsor. I was completely separate from him, he -- he was just a guy that lends his name to my -- [indecipherable] that my papers will come over. That's all. Once I was here --

Q: Y-Y -- Yo -- now you -- I know you had talked about that, what my question was, was when you put that very first time, do you remember putting your foot down on American soil? Was that an emotional experience for you?

A: Not very emotional, but it was something that I had to see, that I was very happy about, even though I didn't know what to expect. A lot of my friends went to Israel, and I had no intention of going, I mentioned it before, and --

Q: Did you come -- did you come by boat?

A: Boat.

Q: What boat?

A: By boat. I don't remem -- it was -- it was a cattle ship. I think it was third or fourth class, down in the hole, and I didn't pay for it, some Jewish organization paid for it. I think it was about a hundred or a hundred and 10 dollars to come over. And to my name I had another 10 dollars. So I came over. And I was told that I would maybe be -- I might be drafted, because the draft didn't stop right after World War two, so they were still drafting people, and s-sign papers to become an American citizen, there's -- they had a good chance, that I was healthy, and so on.

Q: Did you see the -- did you see the Statue of Liberty when you came in?

A: Did I what?

Q: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you arrived?

A: No, unfortunately not. There was a -- it was -- everybody was all inside, and we didn't -- you didn't see the Statue of Liberty, because there was a lot of fog up there.

Q: All right, let's talk now a little bit about your sharing of your Holocaust experience. How much of it did you share with your wife? You had talked about some very painful times in your previous interviews, and I was just wondering, did you share these extremely difficult times with your wife?

A: I share [indecipherable], yes.

Q: An-And when did you?

A: Not immediately, but later. I had to insure myself that she didn't come from a family -- I had to know about their thinking, and whether they approved, or didn't approve. In this case, they approved of me in every way. I had no problems with my in-laws, and on my side there was nobody left. So with my wife, particularly, I found somebody that not only felt deeply with me, she -- although she had no experience of her own, but she did have experiences between democracy and Communism, because she lived in East Germany, and not very far from where I escaped, and she left also, illegally, East Germany for West Germany. Her father was a teacher, and he decided on the -- well, even before Communism, under the Prussian rulers, that all his children are going to be school teachers. And my wife was not willing -- she was not willing to become a school teacher, and be taught where to taught, and what to teach. She also wanted to become a teacher. So she left when there was still time, and crossed the border illegally. There was no war up here in Berlin, that was early in the game. And it was very interesting, her town, and her territory was about -- was Russian occupied for -- no, I'm sorry, was a -- American occupied, but first the Nazis were there, then the American troops owa, and then Eisenhower signed some papers where the demarcation line on the border would be, and the part that she was in was turned over to the Russians. So the Americans went in first, occupied it, and then turn over to the Ru -- so she didn't like it under Communism because of the teaching experience, and she left for Heidelberg. Now, in Germany at that time, there was lack of worker people, and she could only stay if you came from the east, if you found a job. So she found a job on a farm. When she had money -- when she had

[indecipherable]. Michael? Must be my wife. I thought my son was there. [indecipherable]. So she left for Heidelberg, got herself a job -- oh, she's going someplace. I'm sorry. I didn't know it. She worked, and she studied. When I met her, she didn't work on a farm any more, she knew enough English, and she attend the Heidelberg University's English Institute, where they taught English, proper English. So her English was very good, and she wound up at a job in the American headquarters where I was working in Heidelberg. And she worked as a clerk, and then when she had enough money, she went back to the university. So when I met her, she was working of course, beca -- and we dated.

Q: Yeah, you had talked about that, but my question was, when did you tell her about the very difficult moments of your war time experience?

A: [indecipherable] that is very interesting, your question. And also the way it went. At first I appeared to her in American officer's uniform. And nobody expected me to have been in concentration camp. As a matter of fact, only one time I was called in front of a general in Heidelberg, they plate -- and they were doing a parade, when some German generals came to visit the American headquarters, all the officers and staff, on the general's staff, had to be outside, and watch the parade, and when the American flag came by, and we had to salute. And when the German flag came by, we had to salute. That was no problem for me, but when they played the German national anthem, I'm sorry to say the German national anthem today, is not the same words that -- that exist under Hitler, but the melody is the same, and I could not salute while they were playing

the German national anthem, because in the concentration camp one time, I witnessed a -- hang a couple of people, and they played the German national anthem. So there was a photo taken of the officers saluting, and someone said, “How come Willner is not saluting?” And some officer said, “Oh, you’ll have to excuse him. He knows why he’s not going to salute.” He knew the reason. Well, the final outcome, I was called to the general’s office, and he said, “I’m not going to dress you down. You were supposed to salute like everybody else, but next time -- I know your background, we not holding against you. I can feel your feelings. Just don’t show up. We have to do this, whether we like it or not, and I don’t feel -- to make you do it would not be the right thing.” So we got some very good understanding there. Far as my wife is concerned, it’s a lot of long story. She didn’t know my background, and I actually met her in Heidelberg, there was a trial of an SS.

Q: Yeah, you had talked about that.

A: So we know that. After that, I think that the question of Nazism, and anti-Semitism -- in -- where she lived, she didn’t know any Jews, so they couldn’t -- would not say anything about that, but my wife is today more Jewish than I am. I coo --

Q: M-M-My question was when did you then tell her -- when did you finally reveal to her the very painful moments?

A: About three months after I met her. And we met probably, on most evenings after work. And that means [indecipherable] three months I wanted to marry her, because of this -- that she didn’t know who I was, or ba -- and I questioned her, what she thought

about all these things that happened during the war. And every one was very satisfactory to me. And they were not made up by some -- as some people did that liked to tell you what you like to hear.

Q: Well, let's get onto your children now. When did you begin to tell them what happened to you during the war? Did you wait for them to ask you?

A: No. They were told when I -- when they going to Jewish Sunday school at Fort Belbar, which is a military Jewish Sunday school [indecipherable] was a rabbi, and a military chaplain. And some that were Orthodox, sometime Reformed. They went 10 years, each one of them to Fort Belbar, which is near Washington. So each one of our children had 10 years of Jewish education, but somewhere during that time, when they were old enough -- not when they were six years old, or five years old, I told them about the Holocaust, and my background. And so they all found out, I would say, n -- in the range of seven, eight years, or nine years, and more and more I told them all what they wanted to know, and they always questioned, and I gave some talks in the Sunday school, which they also listened to. But they were fully aware of my background, and their mother's background, and the fact that my children would not believe, when Bar Mitzvah time came along that the Orthodox rabbi would not recognize them as being Jewish, because the mother was not Jewish. I explained that. And they could not believe it. They believed the Holocaust, but they could not believe that the mother was not Jewish, and -- because she went with -- with us to the synagogue. She knows how to read Hebrew. As a

matter of fact, she knew more than the average Jewish wife, which was not at my request, she did on her own.

Q: How did your wife -- or did she -- educate the children about the Holocaust? Was it different than the way you did?

A: No, I did that. I did all that, because I was a f-first witness to this, she was not, and she -- she knew about concentration camps, she had heard about it, that's about all. Like most Germans had, my age or older. I cannot accept, for instance, that the Germans tell to me, somebody my age or older, that they didn -- he didn't know there was such thing as concentration camp. Because they themselves were afraid of going to concentration camps. It wasn't just Jews that were in there. And as far as my wife is concerned, before she met me, she knew about concentration camps from reading the newspaper, not from [indecipherable]. I was the first one she met that was there.

Q: So it was you, you said, who was the one to educate your children about this, rather than your wife?

A: Right. And to some extent, some of those teachers in school [indecipherable] in school, but they didn't give a good account of it, because they only told them what [indecipherable] was. So my -- my children, all of them, have a very deep understanding of the Holocaust by now of course, they're much, much older. As a matter of fact, I don't know if I mentioned this before, but my oldest son, who is a lieutenant colonel, and who -- it's something I didn't mention at that time, because it didn't exist, he is now a professor at West Point, teaching young cadets. And I'm sure he talks about the

Holocaust too, because he -- that's not his main subject, his main subject's for international relations, foreign affairs, and politics. And he's very mach -- much aware of the Holocaust, all his children are, and he has marched, in the deep winter, for 14 days, all by himself, the same march that we called the Death March, from Blechhammer to Gross-Rosen. He marched that. That's the one that's at West Point. I am glad to have somebody like him up there. If he is going to be asked any question, he knows all the answer.

Q: Wh-What is his name?

A: Albert Willner. And I have some more information I want to tell you about him, because I'm real proud of him. I -- in a way, not -- not more proud than the other children, because the others didn't have the chance to do what he did, and Albert, I like to maybe elaborate a little bit later about Albert and his past, not just about the concentration camp, but how he fared in the military so far. And he just moved from Washington a couple of mo -- two months ago, to West Point.

Q: Before we get to your children, and I do want to ask you about that later on, after you finished with the army, you were in the army for 20 years, I understand, then you worked for -- was it the federal government, and if so, what position did you occupy?

A: Yes, I worked for the federal government for another 20 years -- 20 years in the army, and you have a possibility when you -- you get your 20 years credit, then you go into civil serv -- or you take separate [indecipherable] for 20 years in the army. I decided to f -- retire from the army, go into the reserves, and -- which I did, and then -- then working

for -- in federal civil service for another 20 years. I applied, I took a test, what they call a mid-level test to place you someplace. It was a 10 hour test, plus the fact that I was an officer in the army, they give you extra point per the -- the schools you went to. So [indecipherable] point, so finally I retired [indecipherable] from the federal government, also after 20 years.

Q: What department did you work for?

A: I worked in an outfit that's not well known. It's called the International Statistical Program Center. It's located with the Bureau of the Census. Now, most of the people are statisticians, who are borrowed from Bureau of the Census for this organization. And there was an organization, couple of hundred people, still exists today, and it's called the International Statistical Program, ISPC.

Q: So do you have a statistical background?

A: No, I don't. That was my problem. I don't have a sta -- and I really don't care about statistics, but I did have a language [indecipherable] and I put that to good use. Th-There was the French needed in there, Spanish I didn't know. German I didn't know, and I handled all the correspon -- correspondence. And all the incoming mail, and all the incoming newspapers from foreign countries, they were wanted by the US government, and I distribute them to the people that had a need to know. That's open information, newspaper. So people who saw me in the morning, sitting at my desk, reading newspaper for two hours, they always felt I had the best job in there. How can he get away with this? He doesn't do any work, he's reading the paper. That was part of my job. It's very

interesting, I had some very interesting people I worked for, and part of this work, I must -- to be frank about it, I think [indecipherable] part of this was paid for by the CIA. And there was what you call contract work. So the Bureau of the Census has this section I was in, ISPC, which was not a -- not a CIA organization, but like I said, there are statisticians there, and people -- demographers, and people who are very familiar with international commerce. And so th -- it was a study writing organization.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in this position with the government?

A: No. My boss was Jewish one time, [indecipherable] for 10 years. He was a nice guy. And actual anti-Semitism, no, I don't think so. I had no problem there.

Q: Did you stay in this one position for the 20 years?

A: No. I stayed for 14 years in the same position. There was a big riff. 800 people got riffed. And I was supposed to get riffed, and lucky for me I spoke two foreign lang -- there was a provision made in the riff orders, anybody who speaks two or more foreign language -- many people could speak one foreign language. Anybody who speaks two or more foreign language fluent -- and is a language that being used, they will be placed in another position, they will not be riffed. I was the only one that wound up in the po -- in -- in -- not being riffed. But I was placed in the position for the next six years -- like I said, I made the 20 years civil service, and 14 in one position, and after I got riffed, I was put in another position, where I wouldn't have to be a statistician. And I pushed the statistician out of his job [indecipherable] riff procedures, who knew all about it, and then had to work under me, at one grade less, and was a terrible situation. I tried to get out of

it, you know, the poor guy, he knew I was not at fault, but people were understanding. After two years my big boss said he didn't want me to leave the civil service with a bitter taste in my mouth. He meant statistics. It wasn't my fault I didn't know anything about them. And anyway, I finished my next four years in another job, which I had [indecipherable] statistic, as supervisor.

Q: What -- what languages did you speak?

A: French and German. I also know Dutch, some Spanish.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Eddie Willner. This is tape number one, side B. And we were talking about your government career. So then you stayed in the government for 20 years, and when did you retire?

A: I retired in 1968 for the first time, '88 the second time, from the civil service. The first time from the military, in '68, after 20 years, and I stayed another 20 years in s -- regular civil service, and --

Q: And then what did you -- did you do anything professionally after 1988?

A: No, I volunteered. I am very proud to say I served the public, in the city of Falls Church, mainly. We have several organizations here which are selected, or appointed, or elected by the city of Falls Church, and I got myself into an organization that was called Law Enforcement and Human Relations Advisory Commission. And I was selected by

the city council. Three people interview you, and you either get the job [indecipherable] and you make it to be appointed. I have been the s -- longest serving member of that organization in Falls Church, and I recently -- I was going to say retired, it's a non-paying job, of course. And I felt I should do something for the city, they were good to me, or to the United States, and I did that, too. I taught peop -- foreigners how to speak English. At 7:30 in the morning, people that were employed otherwise here, and the main job, like I said, was public safety with that commission, and I served for almost 21 years on the commission. I resigned from it. I'm happy to say my youngest son took my place. But unfortunately, he has to change schools pretty soon, he's going to [indecipherable] back to Georgetown for foreign affairs for a Master's in foreign affairs, and he [indecipherable] to be the recipient of a scholarship for one year for another Master's degree in national security affairs. And he goes to that place paid for. You get a regular salary, but you're going to school for a year, and he's just started that.

Q: And his name is?

A: His name is Michael Willner.

Q: You had touched on in a previous interview, some thoughts about food and what it meant to you. When you were in the army, I think you had mentioned some -- you don't like to see food wasted --

A: Oh yeah.

Q: -- because -- can you talk a little bit about that?

A: [indecipherable] only one thing that comes to my mind, a little -- the almost [indecipherable] I created in the army. I -- I don't like to see foods wasted, and one time in the army, when I was a lieutenant, the mess officer got sick, he had to go in the hospital for a week, and some superior officer came to me, and said for -- he wanted me to fill in for one week til this guy gets back on, as a mess officer. And this was a huge mess hall cona -- called a consolidated mess hall at Camp Killmer, New Jersey. And it fed about 2,000 men, so it's a real big operation. And I saw the food that was being wasted there. So I hung up some big signs, take all you want, eat all you take. In other words, you didn't have to take the food they were giving you on your plate, they went through the line. And it didn't work, so the guys were still -- I told the cooks, "Don't put so much on their plates, they can't eat what you put." And if -- so some of them paid [indecipherable]. And I told the men, "Don't take it, even if they want to give it to you, say take some off." Well, it didn't work, so I -- I came to a concl -- I -- I was very -- it really bothered me, all this food being wasted.

Q: Wh-Why did it bother you?

A: Well, because some people were still hungry in this world. Not because I saw people hungry only, but there were still many countries -- even in our country. I arranged one time here in Washington, at the officer's club at Fort Meyer, to send some food that was leftover to the old people's home. You don't say old people's home any more, but senior citizens, or whatever. So we can all just do something about it. In the army it was just well, when I asked for some leftover for my dogs, they packed up a whole roast for my

dog. Well, I -- I said, that whole roast could be -- there are no meals at night, people who work night shift, they don't get fed, the mess hall is closed, only in the day is open. You can cut up some sandwiches for them, and help themselves. And you have some leftovers spoil, then you can throw it away. But they had refrigerators, and just everything was there. But anyway, it bothered me because I saw so many people hungry in the war, and I was hungry. And the final outcome was that after trying everything else, I stood at the end of the line when they cleaning their plates. They just shove their leftovers into a big vat, and then put into a machine, and machine cleans their tray. I made guys go back who had too much food on their plate, I made them go back to the table and eat. And somebody said to the officer on duty that they had in Camp Killmer, New Jersey, and he came over, and he took me aside, and he said, "Lieutenant Willner, I understand why you are doing this, but you cannot do it here. This is -- this -- this one of the freedoms we have, they can take it or leave it, like many other things. And besides, we have so much food, we're not hungry. I know there are hungry people in the world, n -- but not right here at Camp Killmer. And we -- if they want to waste it, that's up to them."

Q: Were you more sensitive to this because of what you experienced during the war?

A: Oh yes. Of course I was more sensitive. I just couldn't see it, th-the food being wasted. And I -- I did get some comments from some people who were maybe foreign born, most of them, who came to me and they said, "I like what you did, Lieutenant, and the [indecipherable]." But the majority had no understanding, th-they just didn't care, or they were never hungry. There were a couple of people from maybe some -- Montana or

pl -- some out of the way place, who didn't have all this nice, solid food, who ate poorly at home, who didn't have much money. They had a little understanding for this. They were more appreciative. But if you were -- if you are never hungry in your life, you always had plenty of food.

Q: Did this affect you when you were raising your children, your attitude towards food?

A: Yes. But I had no problem with my children. I said, "You have to eat what is in your plate." I always made my children eat everything on the plate. And all that would say, "I don't want so much." I don't [indecipherable]. So we took it back, or eat it the next day. But we had no problem.

Q: Did you ever make your children go hungry, to experience what you did?

A: Yes. Against the wishes of my wife, who was also hungry during the war, I not -- the first time I did this was I made them go to school without breakfast.

Q: Why?

A: Because the night before, and a couple of nights before, I bought pictures home of hungry people, skeletons walking around, children in Africa and some other place. And I showed these to my children, and I said, "That's why I want you to eat everything. These people would be lucky if they could lick your plate after you're finished." And so I was very strict on that, and I did that one more time, I did it at suppertime. Let them go to bed hungry. I figured the only way you can understand what is -- but I decided later on that's not going to work. They know they're going to get a meal the next day, and the people who were hungry don't have that advantage.

Q: What was your children's reaction when you did this?

A: They -- they understood. They understood why I was doing it. There no problem, there was no problem. They were of an age that they understood, and they had -- they a- average readers, they look at the newspapers, and I always brought home pictures of people that were hungry, always, for probably years.

Q: When you first got here to the United States, did you feel that people understood what you had gone through? Did you feel they respected you for what you had gone through?

A: The people I worked with, and the people I --

Q: The people you came in contact with when you first came to the United States.

A: No, there wasn't that much [indecipherable], occa -- in the military yes, there was more of an understanding than the civil service. In the military we much closer to each other. And there were people that went through combat in World War two, who saw some of the camps. Or people in -- were in Japan, prisoner of war. I got much more understanding sa -- from the military. The older ones, the ones that stayed in, not the draftee World War two, he was out already, but people who were professionals, either officer, or enlisted men, didn't make any difference, there were many -- oh, there was even one that I remember who came from a family, he was very poor, Italian family, and he said, "I -- I -- I like what you're doing lieutenant, cause I -- I grew up hungry." So that was the extent of the conversation, but --

Q: Did you, when you got here to the United States, did you search out for other people who were survivors?

A: No. When I found out occasionally that somebody was, I would say hello, and Mr. Kernic probably is the only one, coincidentally, we met, found out we were in the same camp. We didn't know each other in camp. And as -- outside him, I've met one or two that I knew in Heidelberg. I met one one time from Poland, and --

Q: When -- when you would get together, would you talk about your -- y-your experiences to each other?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: When you met these people, would you talk about your wartime experiences with each other?

A: Yes, Mr. Kernic, yes. Mr. Kernic is an exception because he does not look at only the bad things, which -- I'm the same way. We can laugh together about some experience we had. How we got away with something. There was one particular instance, there was an SS officer, who was from the Rhineland, from -- near Cologne. Now that's where I came from. And he asked me something one day, he didn't hit me. And he asked Mr. Kernic one time [indecipherable] just ow -- he told me this after the war, here in Washington, and -- that he was called -- we didn't know his -- not by his real name, but they called him Tom Mix, because he's wearing his pistol cowboy style, a little bit to the side, hanging down. And he shot people. And Tom Mix was a guy about, I don't know, 25 years old maybe, but he hated Austrians, particularly Viennese, with a Viennese accent, and Mr. Kernic has a Viennese accent. And every time he saw him, he asked him something, he answered with a Viennese ac -- he hit him in his face. I said, "Oh you -- I

didn't have that problem," maybe cause I he -- where I came from, but that wasn't because he liked Jews that much, maybe [indecipherable] a boy, and I grew up very strict, my father disciplined, and when he came I stood at attention. Maybe Viennese people, they didn't have so much discipline like German Jews. And I think Kernic agrees with me, that's probably was it.

Q: What is Mr. Kernic's first name? Which camp was he in with you?

A: He was in Blechhammer, which was also called Auschwitz three, which he told me, I didn't even know -- never knew, a -- but he did a lot of research.

Q: Did you have any kind of language barrier when you came here to the United States?

A: No. I spoke English before I came here. English, French and Dutch.

Q: How did you know the English?

A: Little bit in school, most of it in -- in the army, when I was liberated, and I stayed with the army for six months. That's where I picked up most of my English.

Q: Do you --

A: And by the way, Kernic's name is Ernest. I call him Ernie, I was thinking about it w -- it's Ernest. Ernest Kernic.

Q: Do you think you are a different person because of what you went through in the war, and the losses --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- and the losses that you've had.

A: I don't know what I would have been, or become, what profession. I think I really was too young. I could say, well, like some people say, I wanted to become a doctor. I never had that in my mind, and you go by maybe a member of the family. I was too young, I think, I was -- I left, actually, my parents home when I was 11. I went to Belgium, I was without my parents. My father just put me on a train, got me out of Germany, after the Crystal Night. So that question never came up, even when I lived with the Dutch people. I -- I don't --

Q: W-Was there a time in your life when you resisted thinking about what you had -- when you tried to put it away from your life, resisted thinking about what you had gone through, and the losses that you've had?

A: Oh, I tried it several time. You have to l-live -- learn to live with it, and to the -- your experiences, some are even valuable for the rest of your life, some of them, you forget about it, and there's some things the b -- I learned in the camps that are certainly not usable on the outside.

Q: Such as?

A: Well, little things -- making things, for instance. I make a lot of little things, I invent a lot of little things. I am outside [indecipherable] upstairs [indecipherable]. I cannot lift up my leg because I have Parkinson's very much, so I build something. All these little thing I learn because of the camp. But they have very little use outside.

Q: Are you more comfortable around other survivors than people who have not gone through this?

A: Am I more comfortable with what?

Q: Are you more comfortable-ble around people who are also survivors than people who are not?

A: No. No, no. No, no. The only problem I have with people who continuously cry about who they lost, and -- and who I don't want to be exposed to. I lost also, by official count, by official document, there were 28 Willners, tha -- my father's name, who went in, I'm the only one who came back. But I don't continuously talk about it, but I made up something that's sitting up there for anybody who doesn't know, but they can read on the pa -- I don't want to tell the story each time. So I have the names, birthdays, birthplace, and where they lived. So I -- I don't want -- frankly, I decided, after your interview, probably, not to get interview again, because it's enough. Enough is enough. I -- it's like opening old wounds, and some of them, I -- I don't want to be reminded of it all the time. I want to live a normal life. I want my children to live a normal life. And I think I gave them enough to -- not to forget, to be very conscious of it. My oldest son -- my father had an iron cross which he won during World War one, in the German army, and I gave that to my oldest son because he's an army officer, but besides that, he has stuff -- things hanging in his office that -- has his grandfather iron cross, and some other stories about him. One particular story is not about him, but is about me, a one page thing. And it's written up by the federal government here, and it's a very short story, but it tells my story. And I don't want to go into big story, but he has that framed in his office. And he was, for awhile, the commanding officer of a heli -- attack helicopter p -- unit. Cobra

attack helicopters, before he went to the teaching business. That's what a young officer has to do something to get ahead maybe, and he wanted to be combat officer. And he had young pilots come into his office, they had problems with their nerves, they were shaky after certain flights. Not combat flight, but helicopter not working properly, being up in the air, trying to get down, save your life. And jumping out of a helicopter, and five seconds later it was on fire. So these guys had problems dealing with this. And most people who go into this know that, that that might come up. Well, I'm sure my son had problems, but he doesn't let it get ahold of him too much. He had a young officer come in, and one day told him that he had a problem, that he doesn't know if he can go on flying. He's not sure of himself any more. And he said, "Please go over there to the wall, read that story." He didn't tell him that was his father, and the guy read the story, and my son said to him -- he t-told me this -- "You think you have problems?" He said, "No, sir." He said, "Okay, if you re -- you really have problems, you come and see me again. I don't think you have any problem."

Q: You said that -- that this will probably be the -- you're not going to be interviewed after this, and my question to you --

A: Excuse me [indecipherable]. Yeah, I need something. Yeah, please [indecipherable].

Q: Do you have any special kind of dreams, or have your dreams changed since the war time?

A: Well, I used to have a lot of dreams in about -- a couple of years ago, about the concentration camps, about some serious pictures of people hanging themselves, so --

because where I was in last camp, Langenstein, that happened very much, people gave up. And so I used to wake up in a sweat, thinking about it, but because I got so busy with my children, all kind of activities, I started slowly getting away from the dreams. And at this time, the dreams were, let's say about 10 - 20 years ago, about three times a week, on the average. Dreaming about camps, sometimes even more. I dream now once or twice a month, and not so bad, because I had, two months ago hallucinations, but not about the camps, that's because of Parkinson's. And they giving me too much medication, and I was losing some weight, and I was overdose. So I two nights -- one time, one night was the -- I had to go with ambulance, but that turned out to be nothing serious, except that they reduce [indecipherable] medication. So, coming back to the camps, I got used to it after awhile, but I lost a lot of sleep over it, but I wake up, and then -- but the main thing that happened, getting away from there is my wife, keep me busy, doing a lot of things for me, and our children. My wife knowingly why she was doing this, and I didn't want to involve my children, getting something for the -- they -- I -- I also keep away from them, and I want them to keep away from me things. If I have something bad happens for the day, something's -- maybe, let's say something -- something which says something about being a Jew, or -- or being anti-Semitic, that would hurt me. But it depends who it comes from. If it's from a private citizen, I don't give a damn, frankly. He can go and I -- I'll be very blunt, and I -- and if it's somebody intelligent, who is maybe my boss, or somebody higher up, or in the papers, I get upset about it. So my children come across something like that, they want to tell me about it, they know not to tell me that evening

they come home, or when they used to come home. Next morning, that's okay. I don't want to hear anything bad in the evening, same thing for my wife. If she got a phone call, I was supposed to see somebody next day for a new job, or for something important, an investment, or something like that, I am -- wa -- she wouldn't know -- don't -- if it's good news, you can tell me, if it's bad news, you keep it to yourself, tell it to me morning at breakfast time. And it worked pretty well. Because you tell me in the evening something bad, I can't sleep. It's unfortunate, but it doesn't have to be about anti-Sem -- it could be about anything, any bad news.

Q: As you've gotten older, do you think more about your wartime experiences?

A: No. I -- I tell you why. I'm trying to think why I'm saying this. I do occasionally, in a free moment, think about the [indecipherable] that's the way it was, or the way it went. It's because my children, they keep me so busy, with all their good news all the time, that I can't think only bad news. That's really a fact. And really the pleasure, they grew into this. My youngest son, who is back to school now, he comes back home, he usually has good news in the evening, had a good day. If it's a bad day, he won't say anything about it [indecipherable].

Q: When -- when your children turned 11, which was the age that you left your family, did that bring -- was that a painful time for you? Did it bring back memories of the time you left?

A: These were not painful times for me, no. You mean at this time, to think about it?

Q: I was just saying when your children turned -- became the age that you were when you had to leave?

A: No. Not at all. I think it strengthened my children in many respects. I'm [indecipherable], and it's not on purpose, but in -- in a way, it's my doing, they look up to me. I -- there are also some things in my life I haven't told them. Little things, no -- not very important things, not about concentration camp. Little thing that happened, and I don't bother them maybe an -- an older age. For instance, one of my sons, I hit him a couple of times, just with my hand, I never hit him with a stick or a belt, or anything like that. And if they did something that I punished one, and I punished the wrong one, another guy did it. I would never hesitate go to my children, even 11 years old or something, and say, "I'm sorry I hit you, and you didn't do it, or you did it, but I -- I still -- I didn't want to hit you in the spur of the moment, I did. I apologize for it." And I never thought myself too big to do that. And I think the children appreciated it, too.

Q: Are you angry that you had to go through the terrible war experiences that you did, and other people, for instance, over here, didn't have to?

A: No, not because other people didn't have to, but my wife tells me -- matter of fact, we've talked about this morning, I'm somewhat still angry, in -- in my background, in my deeper -- inner -- inner -- in the -- I don't know how to word this. There's some things in life that made me angry, and other people do, probably because of my co -- on prejudice, for instance. Any kind of prejudice. And -- doesn't have to be anti-Semitism. I witnessed

some prejudice in officer candidate school, Blacks, who were thrown out just because their color. Jews also, but you -- but you couldn't prove it.

Q: But my question was, there were people your age in this country who didn't experience what you did in Europe. Are you angry that you had to be the one to experience it, and not them?

A: Well, I'm still angry at some things that have -- not really related to the concentration camp. I get angry at my wife at something, maybe, that went wrong. And I said, "You should have known better." Has nothing to do with the concentration camp, but down deep is -- it goes back to the concentration camp, where I didn't want to do anything wrong, because it will cost me my life, or a beating, something like that. So there's an anger there. So we had something come up, a -- something very normal, and I got angry about it. And I know that's the type of anger that my wife objects to, because it's not -- I don't have to be angry about it, but I am. It's not the -- anything earthshaking. Maybe not something [indecipherable], it may be just statement. May -- I don't want to be specific about something, but my wife makes a statement about something, and she doesn't know much about it, maybe politics, or something, and then my son is disc -- discussing with her poli -- I'm just listening. And I said, "How can you make such statement? You don't even know this guy, you don't know about this guy." And that's the anger that I get, that she shouldn't say that because she doesn't know this. The same thing [indecipherable] my children.

Q: Well, how does that relate to your camp experience?

A: Like I said, it's -- it's something -- it's an anger that's still there from the camps. That's why [indecipherable] Dutchman, and we made a hell of a life. We thought alike, very much alike. But unfortunately I have to say in his case, it showed on the outside, not on the inside, he beat his wife, I found out. She told me, and I -- I told him that he shouldn't do this, and he never gave me an answer yes or no. So he did had -- did have an anger, too.

Q: Did you feel that you lost part of your childhood that you've never gotten back?

A: I lost part of my childhood, and what?

Q: And -- and you've never gotten it back?

A: No. I don't -- I don't think about that. That's true [indecipherable], I did. I lost a good part of my childhood. But I -- there -- best friends of my parents were German Jews who were -- escaped to Israel, just before the war started, and the daughter of these best friends of my parents, is -- the name of Inga Snitzler. She lived in vi -- in Vienna. The first [indecipherable] then they came here, after the parents died, she and her sister came here. And I had a great childhood with her, because the parents were good friends. Babysitter babysat for both her and me, and when you went in -- we were invited to Germany one time, she came also with her husband -- unfortunately he died recently, and he -- he didn't want to go to Germany, and I didn't want to either, I -- I was in Germany stationed, couple of years in the army, but the last trip was invited at the expense of the like [indecipherable]. And frankly, if I had to do it again, I wouldn't do it, not because I didn't get a good reception.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Eddie Willner. This is tape number two, side A. And you had said that you wanted to talk about your children, so this is your chance.

A: Well, first of all I really should talk about my wife, who came before the children. The -- not the extraordinary children, but the extraordinary wife, which I feel she is, and our oldest son -- first of all, we have six boys and -- no, I'm -- six children, three boys and three girls, and they range from 30 to 40. So we had all of them within 10 years. And they all accomplished already something in their life. They all went to college. Some of them have two degrees, some of them have Master's, and one of them has -- the one in the army, the oldest one, has a Master's, and a Ph.D., and is now teaching at West Point. Now, Albert, that's Albert Willner, th -- is 40, but I really don't know where to start with his extraordinary accomplishments, and unusual interests, as the oldest of our children, like I said, three boys and three girls. But before I start bragging about him, I should start at the source of all these, my wonderful wife, Johanna, a German born Protestant, without converting to Judaism, has been the most supportive in raising our children in the Jewish faith. All of our children have had 10 years of Jewish education. As for myself, any [indecipherable] believe in God, no matter what religion, is fine. The most important thing is what's in your heart. Because of my past, and in memory of my parents, 28 members of my family, and so many who had to die just because they were Jews, I would always remain a Jew. In summary, after my life -- after the concentration camps, the best

rita gud machoum, if you understand what means. It means restitution. It's not really the right word. Was not much success, but the fact for the millions of people that perished, I was able to make up for the losses, if only one to one million. Six million Jews -- some people ask me jokingly if I'm trying to make them all up again. So, all I could is six. And the -- like I said, the summary of my life after the concentration camps, the best [indecipherable] good amount of restitution was not my success, but the fact that for the millions of people that perished, I was able to make up some of the losses. [indecipherable]. My anger with God, and we talked about anger before, and this with God, being the only survivor of the Willner family, out of 28, has changed to thankfulness, permitting me to forgive God, and not the other way around. I can truly say that my mission in life has been accomplished, and I will be able to peacefully rest some day among some of my liberators at Arlington National Cemetery. I feel very strongly about that. And that's past life. I can truly say that really, some of these men a-are known to me by name, but I know th-they died during World War two, that Arlington Cemetery, who paid with their lives, so that others like myself might live. And every time I walk through Arlington, I know occasionally on some holiday, I put some flowers down, and some [indecipherable] of World War two soldier, and my oldest son does the same thing, we just go and [indecipherable] and we -- he was also married in the chapel [indecipherable] military by a non -- I forgot what they call it -- non-demonush -- demon -- denominational chaplain, army chaplain. I feel that America is blessed with many things, and I think particularly -- I'm particularly thankful for the freedoms of speech,

which has been especially meaningful for me, the freedom of speech. I'm not talking about [indecipherable] but the most impressive thing that I still think about all the time, is freedom of speech. I can say anything I want, and not have to worry, even when I had my government job. I can say I don't like this president, and I don't have to worry about somebody standing at my door, and arresting me. Well, now to Albert's military career. Albert, the oldest one -- and by the way, my wife and I agreed before we got married, that we would like to have probably four children, and soon, because we got married, both, at an old age. I was 32 almost, and she was 30. And religion was going to be no problem. I only stated that I want my children to grow up with the Jewish religion, not because I'm so s -- going to the synagogue, keep all the things my faith asks of me, because my parents died as Jews. In their memory, and my wife agreed, I felt if I had met another wife, who said, "Well I'm a Protestant, or a Catholic, but I got to [indecipherable] my faith," she would have become Jewish, I would have asked her to, but -- but I felt that's not necessary, like I said before. What's in -- what's in your heart, that's what's important. In her case, I knew particularly what was -- so Albert was born in Germany, then went to American schools, some overseas in Japan. And finally he went to college here in the United States, and he got an ROTC schol -- ROTC scholar -- scholarship. And he happened to come out as the number one man in his class, and the first man that the -- top man who gets the scholarship at that time -- not gets a scholarship, c-comes out on top, the first guy in his class, is offered a regular army commission, which is you can become a professional army officer. And I told him to take it, if he didn't like it, he can

always leave the army later. So I wasn't aff -- afforded that opportunity, I came out a harder way, through officer candidate school. I'm sorry, I have to drink some water first. My voice is going out. So, to make a real, real long story short, after I finish the ROTC, and he -- he majored in political science, and he went into the army, got a regular commission, then became a paratrooper, became a ranger, studied Chinese for three years, went to China for one year on an educational tour, just traveling around for one year. Then became a -- what they call a foreign area officer, studies foreign areas, they must know the language. And then he didn't think that he should be just a soldier at a desk, he should be a combat soldier. And I must say also, frankly, that I feel what happened in World War two, when Jews were not able to defend themselves, I didn't want my children to be in a position -- you don't know when it's -- could happen. There are people who would -- don't like Jews, and I -- I think German Jews particularly have been criticized why they went to the places of killing, like sheep. Well, nobody had a gun. In Germany nobody owned a gun, my father didn't own one, although my uncle owned a saber, which he brought back from World War two, but -- so I was very particular s -- I felt very strongly about getting a military education, in the same time serving your country, and seeing to it that we remain a democracy. And the army can be responsible, to a certain extent, provided we have the right leaders. And Albert went in, and then, since he wanted to become a combat soldier, not sit down and some -- somebody telling him, oh you're just a desk officer, he went to attack helicopters, and he was -- he was taught to fly Cobra attack helicopters, which were very successful during

several wars. And then he became commander of -- of -- of the unit. Then he got promoted to major, and then every officer who wants to stay in the army, ma-make the career today, must have a Master's degree in one field or another. So the army gave Albert 18 months to go to the University of Virginia, and get a Master's degree within 18 months. Well, again, to make a long story short, he finished his Master's degree in foreign relations in nine months instead of 18 months. So he -- one professor was Chinese, one of his three professors that he got close to. He said, "Albert, you finished [indecipherable] what are you going to do now?" "Well," he said, "go back to the army. Take whatever job they give me." "Well," he said, "you are Ph.D. material, you know that. So," he said, "why don't you stay on and we'll be your sponsors." But he had to make request to the army, and the army said -- no, first the professor wrote the army. We have a young officer here, who finished in a -- in eight -- in -- in nine months, when most people have 18 months to finish it. Can he stay here and go on to a Ph.D.? Well nobody can finish a Ph.D. in nine months, they knew that. So he was told then, if he studies on his own afterwards, they'll let him stay another nine months. So he stayed another nine months at UVA, and he didn't finish of course, but he studied very hard. He was married already at that time, and his family left him alone at night when he was studying. Well, make a -- he finished his Ph.D. in three years, and then the army send him to China, like I said, and then he went again into hel-helicopters, and when he finished that job, he needed a job th -- for further promotion, he got that in Germany for three years, and his -- then the next assignment was in Washington, the Pentagon. He was the war plants officer

for the Far East. In other words, he was responsible for the planning if there was any attack in the Far East, in Japan, Korea, China. That was the area of responsibility. And he's now a lieutenant colonel, and two years ago he was interviewed for teaching at West Point. And it's very difficult to get a professorship there, and there are two ways. You can stay just for two years, on a regular assign -- or you can be -- ask to make it rest of your career. If you do, you get a further promotion, you're assured to leave the army as a one star general. And so he went to West Point. He loves it, his wife loves it. They are living one block from the river, and his teaching is very nice, he likes it, he enjoy -- he always wanted to teach. And I'm glad he did it, with his background. And I mentioned to -- him before, in another part of the interview that he followed my Death March in Poland for one week -- for two -- for two weeks, and he retraced everything during the winter. And he has many o-other endeavors that he did, pertaining to the Holocaust. So it's very close then he -- I don't have to tell him. He will -- he has now all of my papers that he will organize, and go through, and he [indecipherable] source with my family, if any [indecipherable] for the Holocaust, he has the records, and he will get the -- the interview tape, too. So I'm very proud of Albert, he has accomplished enough, at a young age, and he's a great guy, and he has done many things to his -- my -- for instance, for as far as mother's concerned, on his birthday he delivers -- or has delivered flowers to his mother for having me born. And they have a very good relationship with both father and mother. And the worst thing that I am concerned with, that if ever I ha -- anything happens to me [indecipherable] children are good hands [indecipherable] why I was taken

care of, but I am worried about having to go to an old people's home one day. I don't think that will happen unless medically, it's impossible to keep at home, because I have six children who will fight over having me in the house. So anyway, that's a good thought. Whatever happens, now that's another story. And they will take care of their mother.

Q: Wh-What about your other children?

A: Okay. We come to Nicole, our oldest daughter. Our oldest daughter was impressed by older son's beginnings in ROTC. She didn't have ROTC when she started college -- and by the way, I must explain about education. I was a male chauvinist, I must admit that, coming from Europe, from Germany. German, and whether Jewish or not, most men were sh -- male chauvinists. And when I came to United States [indecipherable] start in having children, I thought, not having too much money, that the boys must go to college. Well very soon my [indecipherable] by my wife, and m-my daughters, and I felt in -- marriages sometimes don't last very long here. The women have to have profession, too, so they can make their own living. And I said, "Well, the money's not going to have me split three ways to go to college, it's going to be six ways from now on." So how do I do that? Well, I know how much money was avail -- and I had no experience with college, because nobody had st -- had started yet, and Albert was going to start. So I said, "One thing I'll assure you of, the first year's assured, for everybody. I -- I pay for it. After that you're on your own." So I want to put a taste in their mouths what college is like, not to say I go to work first, and like I have a lot of people that let their children go to work for

a year, and they make so much money, and they don't want to get a college degree. You know, why should I go to college, I can make more money not going? So I didn't want that to happen, since I like -- like the education. I picked some up in the army, picked up a degree in the army, but not like my oldest son. Because my main interest was a family, not -- not studying. So some of them wound up with scholarships, or part scholar -- and I made sure that, of course, they started first year, that was on me, and anything else later on will have to be scholarships, or borrow money from a bank, or from me, if -- if -- if nothing -- if you don't -- couldn't get the money, but you pay me back, because we have to get some money for your mother to be on her own someday. I don't want her to be dependent on you. I -- I want her to have enough to live on if something happens to me. So they all agreed. And I said, "If you need any money at the end of your college time, the fourth year, and the third year, and you can't get any loans because your dad makes too much money, or whatever, you can borrow money from me, and no interest. And you pay me back when you can, when you start working." And that's what happened every one of them. The three last ones owed me each -- I don't know how much they owed me, but somewhere around 10,000 dollars each. And I -- I agreed that -- like I said, no -- no interest. If they can pay, they pay me back [indecipherable] hundred dollars a month. And if they good -- good at it, paying back the money they owe me, said they owe me no interest. I will let them off when I can afford to. So as it turned out, the last three owed me about six, seven, 8,000 dollars, and I was at a point in time when I was making good money with the government, I said you all paid me back, what you could every month,

and y -- I -- I wrote it off, you don't owe me any money any more. Because I could afford, there was nobody else going to college. So they all understood, and they all were helping, and they were -- and they continue to do so. So we go to Nina. Nina, or Nicole, who is 39, the oldest daughter, is a terrific girl. After she saw her mother doing these things in the military, and getting paid for it also, she volunteered after two years in college, to go out to ROTC. In the meantime, her brother was a battalion commander, not really, but like -- but that the ROTC battalion commander. And she got also a commission as a second lieutenant, and they gave me the honor to -- if I can appear in uniform, to be at the Pentagon, or at the college, and pin the bars on my daughter. And so one side was her brother, and the other side was me, pinning second lieutenant bars on her. So she became a captain in the army, then she met her husband, she was Intelligence in Berlin, very interesting career. She was, since she studied psychology, they put her in Intelligence too, and she was dealing with the Russians in Berlin. We visited her, we went to east Berlin. She went in uniform, because the Russians had an agreement, they don't touch Americans. The east Germans wanted to, but they were not allowed to touch us, it was a very interesting experience. But anyway, Nina became a captain, then met her husband at the advanced Intelligence school in -- and she married a guy who was Catholic, but he agreed that the children were now Jewish. So she got out of the army, he's now a lieutenant colonel, he was -- his last job was -- he was military attaché -- defense attaché in Belarus, which is white Russia, or the city of Minsk, where a lot of Jews lived, and still live. They have three synagogues there, and my daughter used to go

with her husband to the Dubabitchka synagogue in Minsk. And he finished his tour last year. They live here in Anendale, and she still brings her children up the Jewish way. She has one boy and two girls. And she educates them a very nice way, play the violin, play the piano, and so on. And her husband has been offered now, the next assignment as a military attaché to Czechoslovakia, to Prague. And I said, “Take it, take it. That’s a nice place to go to, Prague.” We -- my wife and I have been there one time. And so Nina is very successful in many ways, particularly bringing up her children the proper way. And she did the right thing to leave the army. She was a good soldier, she’s a good mother, particularly sh-she studies ecology, which [indecipherable] in the army, no, she was near the mother. So, we come to the third child, Marcel, who is money-wise, the most successful of all. He worked for a congressman, for our congressman as an intern. Well, first of all he went and he -- he got an appointment to the Air Force Academy. After two years, his eyes were turning bad, he wanted to become an engineer, and a jet pilot. But in this -- when he almost finished his second year, he was told by the air force that he’s not going to fly, because eyes were getting bad from reading too much, but he was going to become an engineer, besides being a pilot. And he said, “Well, what I g -- what am I going to do, I’m not going to fly?” “Well, you go to missile silo when you graduate.” He said no. I’m not going to missile silo and be stuck two years the underground. And he said, “I’m resigning from the academy.” Which he did. And I had told him, “Well, you’re on your own. You had a [indecipherable], you had to stay four years afterwards, so five years. And you going to go do something else, but you’re putting me in a -- in a bind with

money, whi -- I was hoping you would get -- I wouldn't have to pay a penny for you at the academy, but you quit." He said, "Don't worry, Pop, don't worry." He went to the Virginia Polytechnic in He was good at math, and he got a -- first of all he got his two years credit from the academy, because h -- if you leave after two years, you have a commitment, and he left when he had two years, just in time. So he didn't have to pay anything back, and he got his degree in Applied Mathematics. Short story that when he came out, he worked for the congressman, like I said, and then he applied -- and -- and -- at the high school that his -- his high school as substitute math teacher. Well, then he became -- he was also winner in north -- northern Virginia wrestling matches, that's why the academy was also interested in him, besides other things. Well, then he want his first job, he wasn't make any money with the congressman, that was free for the congressman. But he was getting half a day at the school, he was getting paid for that. He said, "I gotta make more money." So, he applied for a first job, and he gives a reference the congressman, one of the Beltway bandits, if you know what that -- people getting contracts from the government. And the person interviewed him said, "Do you have any references?" Well, the school, and the congressman. Well he called both of them, and the congressman took the phone himself, and he said, "In my 10 years as a congressman, I never had a better intern."

Q: Which congressman was this?

A: That was --

Q: It was Wolfe?

A: Wolfe. Congressman Wolfe. And so upon Wolfe giving him a nice reference, he was hired by BDM corporation. And he moved up very quickly, and since then, again to make a long story short, in order to get ahead you have to change companies sometimes. He went to work for Merck, big pharmacirculated company. And so Merck, he was a director at Merck, and he moved about -- well, he moved from Merck to Brussels for two years. He was the European representative for Merck, and he got a big computer system started over there. And his -- he made a name for himself. He is now listed -- I don't know -- even know what this guys name is, big -- the biggest guy in computers, who in the news all the time, young guy who made millions and mill -- he is listed as the guest speaker with him, on something that's coming up. But again, he's changed from Merck. He was recruited by Squibb -- by what's that firm, has three names? Another pharmaceutical company who is in Princeton, New Jersey, and it has the name of a British city. Anyway, it doesn't make any difference. He also is going out with a young lady that is very nice, spoke fluent French, which I love, and was good. He went out with her for nine years. She wanted to marry him, he also wanted to get married, but he said, "I don't get married til I make at least a salary of 100,000 a year." Well, when he made it, he got married to her. But since then he moved up, and he became the executive director of Bristol, Meyer, Squibb, which also a very big fa -- he -- he's a wonderful son, not because he makes a lot of money, he is. And I could s-say many things, [indecipherable] two boys, wonderful wife, who came here yesterday while her husband's flying to Brussels. So that's him. They live in Princeton, New Jersey. After Marcel comes Marguerite, and she's 36, and

Marguerite just got her second degree, [indecipherable] also a Master's in ec-economics and marketing. And she just got married, and she's the first one that got married to a Jewish guy, who doesn't care a bit about being Jewish, and she is more Jewish than he is. His parents were here, they're very Jewish, from New York, and he's a great guy. They all married -- they have all great partner, every one of them. And their -- their philosophy, or their desire is, if he doesn't fit in the family, I'm not going to marry him, or her. And they all fit in. We have the best all of six -- one is not married, the last one, of course. They all -- we all get along, just not the in-laws, and they get along with us, and they get along with each other. And they all kind -- we have three of them living nearby, they wanted to be sh -- be sure they take care of their parents, some of them, so one of them lives in Princeton, Marcel, and Albert at West Point, and the rest of them live around here.

Q: Is Marguerite working?

A: Marguerite is working, and don't tell me what company, I -- I can never. She's working for a big firm that is taking contracts, and that re-organizes people personnel-wise, and marketing, depending on the market. And she's what you might call a -- a woman that takes care of problems for the company. She's a very strong woman, and then we come to the next one, shall I finish the children?

Q: Yeah, just a moment.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Eddie Willner. This is tape number two, side B, and you were describing your children, and we're now up to number five.

A: Okay, I will pick up some of the in-laws that I -- I don't mention much about them, about who they are. Albert's wife -- her father was a naval officer on an aircraft carrier, he was also a pilot. He's a very nice guy, he is also retired, and lives in Alabama. Nicole's husband I mentioned, is also military, is also lieutenant colonel, recently in Belarus as a military attaché. Great guy. And he and Albert are probably the -- the two [indecipherable] that are close together of all the kids because they in the military. Marcel's wife speaks fluent French, was working for a big advertising -- not advertising firm, people who deal with money, and making up taxes for a big firm [indecipherable], I forgot the name. She does not work, she takes care of the two boys. Marguerite, I said, was just married to a Jewish guy, who is also in finance. They don't have no children, they live 10 minutes from here. Now we come to Satcheco. Satcheco, of course, was born in Japan. She is my daughter, and my wife's daughter, but we gave her a ja -- a -- a Japanese name, because we liked living in Japan. She's 33 now. She has an unusual job. She is a adjudicator with the Virginia employment office, but actually she deals in unemployment, that's her specialty. She is in charge of a group who handles cases that have been rej -- routinely rejected. And she gets a second opinion on it, and a decision whether people should get unemployment or not, depending on whether they quit their job, or they were fired, or [indecipherable]. So the n-name of adjudicator is not the real

name, that is the professional name. She's also -- she called a -- I forgot what it -- it's like an administrative judge, I -- I -- I can't think of the name right now. Satcheco has the Japanese name, is named after a friend of ours. I mentioned the general and his daughter, who come -- who -- who had a daughter who still comes to see us here once a year. And she likes her name. She doesn't look Japanese, which surprises everybody when she goes -- they always look for Japanese [indecipherable] call her name. She's 33, and she married a guy and he's of Chinese descent. He is a engineer, working for the U.S. patent office. And he is only Chinese in looks, a typical American boy. His father's already born here, he's a [indecipherable] engineer. His mother was born in China, came here as a young girl. And she had a li -- a very big marriage, of all Chinese people, about 250 of them, less -- a ye -- about a year ago, and she's now pregnant. And she keeps on working, and her husband, like I said, works for the patent bureau, and he does everything we want. He is not religious in any way, but he'll go to synagogue if you want him to, but he does not -- [indecipherable] synagogue. But they both think cooked Chinese food is very good. I think that's how they got together. But she's pregnant now, so she has to watch herself. And he is a great guy, as an in -- son in -- we -- we don't call them son-in-laws, we just call them -- they call me Pop, and I -- I call them by their name. So his name is Darren, and the last one is Michael, the youngest one, who is really outstanding in a different way. He's a big -- a real scholar. He went to UVA, and College of William and Mary for one year. He also had a military scholarship, but he didn't take advantage of it. It -- the military were not for him, and that was okay. So he got himself a degree in

foreign affairs. He is now working on the Master's at the Georgetown University Foreign Service School, and he will graduate as a diplomat, I guess, up there. And he -- in the meantime, he was awarded by the Department of Defense -- he worked this summer, he borrowed all the money to go to Georgetown, because I wasn't willing to pay for Georgetown, he's 30 years old, he can do some work in the meantime, which he did. He got himself employed by Department of Defense, in the Pentagon, in the Joint Staff, as an analyst for National Security Affairs. And he was picked, he didn't know it when he started that two people get picked in the Pentagon, but he had to go to a new school. They gave out regular degree, and Master's degrees in National Security. And there was an article in the paper, he told me down there, I didn't read it, Washington Post, about this new university, or -- if it's called university, I don't have the name right now, but it's in -- and the school gives out is -- is -- is qualified on the national whatever, to graduate people Master's degrees in national security affairs. [indecipherable] just started a school where you finish in one year, get his Master's. In meantime he gets 35,000 dollars, in addition, for his living expenses. But he lives here, but he will move out with a good friend of his into an apartment in December. So he doesn't have to pay anything here, food is free, the good food of his mother, which he will miss, and he lives in the basement, that's his territory. I never know he's here, not here, and I don't have to pay a penny for his upkeep, or for -- he takes care of all this himself. He's terrific son, he's our baby, a mother's baby. So that's the children, I don't think I left anybody out.

Q: Well, that's a wonderful family, that's a wonderful family. Let me just ask you before we close, on a previous comment you made in an interview. You said that you were German, that was in response to some incident. Do you still feel German after all these years? Would you describe yourself that way?

A: It's a good question. I have to make a distinction, if somebody says, "Are you German or Jewish?" Some people come with the question. Well, I'm German. That's my nationality, or was, was. Jewish is my religion. There's a big difference. Do I feel German, Jewish? I would say both. Because there's some traits in my character that's definitely German, not Jewish. And there's some of them may be Jewish. Now, I think I have the advantage of taking the best of all three of these things, German, [indecipherable] take poetry, or some, and there was a German poem that kept me alive in the camps in the war.

Q: Can you s -- can you say it now?

A: [indecipherable]. Well, I can say it in German, but I will give it to you, it's in my wallet in English. Or my wife can send it to you, make a copy of it.

Q: Can you say it in German now?

A: Yes.

Q: Why don't you do it?

A: Unga vontzen trotsashaldin. Mira deshpoink kraftisi sang, houfidi amadai gotaiba. It's from Gerta. So that's definitely German. It means something basically -- the translation's very ba -- not -- you cannot translate -- it's you are countin -- all power -- all bad powers

that be. You never give up, you show yourselves in strength, not down being, and well, which also, I like to add something which I used in the army in a different way. When you are a commander, or in charge of men who go into combat, you don't want to show that you are scared. But everybody is scared. That doesn't make you an officer, or not an officer. They're all scared the first time, or second or third time. There's no such thing, you heard, as an atheist in a foxhole. Well, I -- I -- I -- my motto was, keep your fears to yourself, and share your courage with others. And that's why I teamed up with this Dutchman in concentration camp. Sure we were scared, but we didn't show it to each other, and that's why I succeeded eventually, with lack of co -- now let me see about the other part. And in -- in spite of all this, you are staying alive, you're keeping yourself alive, by all means. And this German poem was -- really had a large responsibility in keeping me alive.

Q: Did you know it as a child before the war started?

A: Yes, I knew it before I went in the camps. And actually, it's a lot li --

Q: W-When did you learn it?

A: It's a la -- probably in fourth, fifth grade. Very early. It's a very serious poem, [indecipherable]

Q: Was this a poem that all the children --

A: -- just took that part that -- that applied to me.

Q: Was this a poem that all children had to learn in school?

A: All children in Germany, yes. And then later on, I changed to a Jewish school, because Jews couldn't go any more. I had a Jewish teacher, and he was more German than the Germans. And I -- he was so strict, my father was very strict, that when I found him living in the United States, in New York, after the war, he had not escaped to New York with his wife, no children, but he had been hidden by two German f-families who were both schoolteachers like he was, and hidden throughout the war. It would have cost them their lives if they were found out. That was my teacher, my strictest teacher, a guy I probably hated at the time, who hit me a million times, and then I got it when I came home, from my father, I got double dosage. So when I finally found him, he was 75, or 80 years old in New York, I went -- I called him up first. I found out coincidentally, in a German Jewish newspaper which I read, and in a announcement of somebody die -- oh yeah, the people went Shanghai, I mentioned to you before, the girl that was in my class. She said, "You know, our old teacher lives in New York?" I said, "No, I didn't." "Mr. Damon lives in New York, he came after the war." I said, "You got his number? I want to call him." I called him up same evening, and Mr. Damon said, "Oh yeah, Willner, Willner, I remember you." And I said, bull, he can't remember, he had thousands of kids. And he doesn't remember me. Maybe he remembers me for some of the bad things I did. So he said -- I said to him for a joke, "Well, Mr. Damon, I remember you, too, very well. As a matter of fact, my rear still hurts." And soon after my wife and I went to New York, we went to see him, and he -- we couldn't have done a greater pleasure to this guy. And he was supposed to go with us to Germany, to receive some honors, in the city where we

were invited for two weeks. He couldn't go be -- his heart -- his heart was not strong enough. He has died since.

Q: You had s-said that your --

A: Oh yeah, before he died, I wanted him to write a letter to address the German people inviting us, and say whatever he wanted to say to the Germans. Well, he was very nice about it, he didn't insult anybody. And he -- I read the letter to a group of about 500 Germans [indecipherable], and maybe 100 Jews, who came back from different -- from Brazil, from Israel, or -- and I could -- I became so emotional during the -- reading his -- his letter that one German came up to me, a newspaper guy, he said, "Would you read it in front of German TV station?" I -- I said I would. That was the greatest thing, I read it for my schoolteacher, because he bared himself, and he took them to task, but in a nice way. And he also didn't suffer, he was hidden, he could say something good, and not just bad about the Germans. The two teachers hid him, and their wives, were not caught, and then sor -- the part that you asked me about Germany, that's good and bad. And [indecipherable] able -- I -- I tell you s -- one thing, far as that is concerned, hate, or what do you call it, when somebody -- guilt -- oh, collective guilt. I don't believe in collective guilt, never have. I don't think that all Germans are guilty. There are many Germans that are guilty, who knew about it, who didn't lift a finger. I'm not talking about the SS now, the real bad guys. So -- as a matter of fact, I would not be alive today if it wouldn't be some German, who was somehow -- gave me a piece of bread, extra piece of bread, or [indecipherable] something. So, I said to my wife after the army, what are we going to do

by going in a civil service job. Well, there were many jobs open in Germany that time, for Americans, and civilian. I said, “I go back and get a job.” “You would?” Johanna said, “I won’t. I’m finished with Germany.” So I changed my mind since, I th -- I think my wife was right. So that part of Germany, so you ha -- you have some good, and some bad, and some people -- I think if you hate people, all people like t -- you believe they’re all guilty, it eats you up eventually, not the other person, the other person didn’t -- probably don’t give a damn. And people are sensitive. I -- I never -- I don’t love the SS or somebody like that, I don’t say that, but that some people were good Germans. So there’s good Jews, and bad Jews. Maybe there were more Nazis then. But I believe today -- for instance, what goes on in Israel [indecipherable] watch TV, I -- I think the Jews have a point. The Arabs who cannot deny them certain things. Unfortunately it’s a situation that is very difficult to solve, if at all. I -- I must -- I made a speech, and I haven’t made many speeches here, about the Holocaust. One was at the high school that our children went to, and the principal was of German descent, not Jewish. He invited me, and he said -- and I couldn’t turn him down. And he -- he not -- not -- he didn’t take the ger -- the history class, at that time [indecipherable] World War two, is -- he took 700 kids into the auditorium, and he said, “I want you to listen to Mr. Willner, Albert’s father.” They listened to me, and at the end of my talk -- so I talk about some of the experiences World War two -- at the end of the talk one boy stood up, had a question, and he said to me, “Mr. Willner, you think it could happen here?” I said, “It’s a very good question,” I said, “yes, it could. But we have a democratic government. But Germany had a democratic

government too, when Hitler came to power. It can be turned around like you never know what's going to happen. I don't think it's going to happen here, not in my lifetime, I hope, but these people, bad people exist here, too. Who hate, who don't like Jews, don't like Blacks, or whatever. And the same people that I saw in SS uniforms in Germany, I have seen them, I'm sorry to say, in our own army. Just put an SS uniform. People who would kill Vietnamese women and children, think nothing of it. Gooks, they were gooks to them." And people were shocked, particularly the principal, he took me to his office later on, I won't -- he was shocked because he felt, as a German -- he was born here, his father was German, he said. And I told him, "Dr. Toombs, this is ridiculous that you even think that way. What responsibility could you have had in what the Germans did because your father is German himself? There's no such thing as collective guilt, not in my book." Well, we really became very good friends, of course, we were already. And so these -- and I must add that the same people, some people like that, exist even among the Jews in Israel, who would go kill Arabs just because they're Arabs. I'm sorry to say, but it -- that's the way I feel. So these bad people exist in any country, given a chance to do it. I have seen my own army, Lieutenant Calley, who -- who killed women and children in his [indecipherable]. He should not be in -- jailed, his superior should have been jailed. Why? Because they knew he was a killer, and what he was eventually going to do. They should have made him -- his commanding officer should have made a supply officer in the back, where he can't do any harm, shoot women and children. So these people

existed. And here, in peace time, the types exist and if they do something bad, they wind up in the penitentiary. In war time they get away with it.

Q: Do you think the current interest in the Holocaust with the museums, and so forth --

A: The current interest [indecipherable]

Q: The current interest in the Holocaust, and people coming to museums and so forth, is something that will be permanent, or is it a passing interest?

A: That's difficult to say. Depending how much we -- we -- we have to put a lot -- we Jews have to put a lot into it. And other people who are not Jews, who think likewise, that if you don't protect certain things, or that people go [indecipherable]. Like yesterday I was discussing the NRA. I got an application to apply for NRA, for the membership. And I talked to my wife about it, and I said, "Throw it away." And she happened to listen to an NRA interview of this guy who is in charge, LaPierre. I wasn't here. And she told me about it. Well, as long as we have people like that, we have to be active doing something about it. And we have to keep going. [indecipherable]

Q: Mm-hm. So you feel it's important to have museums dedicated to the Holocaust?

A: Yeah. I think it's important. But it's not important maybe in some little town where nobody takes a look at pe -- it's the passing thing. And recently the name came up, Holocaust industry. I got a letter now they -- they -- th-they -- they -- they are -- they are elevating a wall in Paris, just like the Vietnam Wall here, with all the names on it. They want my parents name on it, they want me to contribute money. I will not contribute any money, my parents don't have a grave, that's true, but I'd rather give the money I have to

give away to living causes, where it's -- well, I can tell you, I feel very strong recently about certain incidents that had happened. And then I can think [indecipherable], which upset me very much. I was a contributor like most of -- most Jews, to the Jewish appeal. They now write this letter that a Russian Jew, who came to Israel with his father, was drafted, became a sergeant in the army, was killed in Lebanon or someplace, and they couldn't bury the guy, because his mother was not Jewish. That's the Orthodox. No, I could not live in Israel with people like that. I tell you very frankly, they make me sick sometimes. Some of them don't fight for their country, let some other people fight for their country. And when this happened to this guy who killed -- was killed for Israel, and they couldn't bury him because the Orthodox wouldn't let them do it, and he had to be shipped back to Russia, to his mother. I thought [indecipherable]. At that moment I wrote a letter to the United Jewish Appeal, I'm sorry I don't have it right now, I don't even know where I put it. And th-the president or executive director answered it personally. I said, "I will not contribute any money because I know some of your money go -- go to Orthodox Jews, I don't support Orthodox Jews." And he wrote me a nice letter. I said, "I'd rather give the money to the Holocaust Museum, and not -- not the United Jewish Appeal, where I know some of the people, recipients, and just to run their schools, or whatever." Let them do it themselves, I -- I don't approve of it. When they can't let a guy be buried in the cemetery, even if he was buried in the corner, but they just said no for some reason. [indecipherable]

Q: Is there any message you wanted to give to your grandchildren when they're a little older. Do you have anything to say because of your experience?

A: Well, I'm sure my grinch -- grandchildren will be instructed by their parents. And they're -- they have available all my tapes, and my -- no, at this stage I would say no, they're too small.

Q: No, I don't mean now, but is there a message to them when they're older, that you would want to leave for them.

A: They can see what I have to say, what their grandfather had to say on all the tapes and videos, and they're a little bit different, but I think it drives home some of the things we're interested in, in seeing continuing. So -- oh, they get -- they will also get some things in writing, and they have written poems. If you go to the next room -- I don't know if I can [indecipherable], I'd like to just read you one poem that my oldest son wrote when he was 11 or 12 years old. You wouldn't believe it, and that's how the grandchildren will think, too, I hope.

Q: Would you like to read it? Okay.

A: I'll let you read it, if I can get up [indecipherable].

Q: You said there was a poem that your son Albert had written that you'd like to read.

A: Albert wrote this when he was 12 years old. "They were invited to death, and didn't know it. The Nazis told them that there was a shower. Well, in a way it was. A shower of death. They were put in there, death started to rain about them. Cries, shouts, screams, prayers, and then death rested on their souls." He was 12 years old when he wrote that.

And that's very deep. And we have a few others that some of the other kids wrote, but this, it was the one impressed me the most. And this is the kind of education he got mostly through my wife, poetry. She likes to write, she's writing a book, too. And she wrote lot of poetry. She has stuff accept by Hadassah, the Jewish newspaper, printed. And she had several other things. So, she must take credit for that. Not for writing this, for putting this kind of spirit into him. And when you ask about the grandchildren, I'm sure his children will continue to feel like he does. He's very quiet about it, but he speaks out when he should. So --

Q: Is there anything you wanted to add for the tape, for the interview that we haven't talked about? Anything you wanted to say before we close?

A: [indecipherable]. I have not forgotten anything, but I would say that in general, we don't disagree on any of the things I said, the children and I, because they have seen all the videotapes that have been made, the things that I've said. And in talking to them, I've confirmed, or reinforced some of the things I've said. And the grandchildren I cannot say. I really cannot, to be honest. Some of them frankly will not grow up as Jews, but it doesn't bother me, as long as they have in their heart, and they know something about their past, that I don't want the daughter to say, "Well, my husband is Catholic," -- and in a matter of fact -- well, that's another story. I'm not going to -- she teach them how to be Jewish, and she can do it. She takes it serious, so does Maggie. So the -- out of the girls be -- the mothers being the ones that's really educate the children, because they're home, or because the Jewish religion, the Orthodox say so, that's fine with me. But I would say

definitely two [indecipherable] know right now, Marguerite and Nicole are educating their children -- Marguerite doesn't have any children yet, but she was going the way Nicole goes, and her children, particularly the two daughters, getting a good Jewish education. They belong to a synagogue here. They don't go much to synagogue, but they go to the re-religious education. And they did the same thing in Minsk.

Q: Do you think that the world has learned the lessons of the Holocaust, or will it ever?

A: No, I don't think so. They -- they aware of it, but why -- why would the Blacks in Africa care about all [indecipherable] their own. Why the many Chinese have been killed in some of the wars, millions. And they -- they don't think that the way we do, that Jews were killed only because they were Jews, and there were different reasons. For the moment, that's all still in people's mind, people are still alive, they experience it, but I think another two generation, it will peter out somehow. It -- because they have the [indecipherable] with television now, I -- I will say one thing, or my wife at least thinks so, that if we had a television, it wouldn't have happened. Not in -- in that -- that way. So I think television will do a lot in the future to prevent things. Well, I-I -- I-I -- I'm very si-sim-simplisistic [indecipherable] as far as that goes. I think the United States, I always felt, we don't have ma -- many problems as Jews, but other people have, the Blacks. So in a way, if they didn't have any problems with the Blacks, they probably would have somebody else [indecipherable] would be more. Might be Jews, it might be an Asian, Korean, Japan -- whoever. Or Blacks from Africa. But I don't think we have too much to worry about here, not in our lifetime.

Q: Well, that's a nice note to end it on.

A: I hope -- I hope -- I hope it's the -- it's the right thing I believe, but who knows, you never know, but I na -- I think dictatorships hopefully on the way out, we just happened to have another one go in Yugoslavia, and I hope it continues and we can make the world better by example, by keeping the Holocaust story alive. I think it's very important, but how much do you keep alive in 50 years from now, I -- I don't know. Because there other concerns in the world.

Q: Well thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: You're welcome. It was a pleasure.

Q: This concludes the interview of Eddie Willner.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview