

March 2008

## Morton D. Brooks oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, March 19, 2008

Morton D. Brooks (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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### Scholar Commons Citation

Brooks, Morton D. (Interviewee) and Hirsh, Michael (Interviewer), "Morton D. Brooks oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, March 19, 2008" (2008). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 34.  
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Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
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Digital Object Identifier: C65-00013  
Interviewee: Morton D. Brooks (MB)  
Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)  
Interview dates: March 19, 2008  
Interview location: Interviewee's home  
Transcribed by: Kathy Kirkland  
Transcription date: October 26, 2008  
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon  
Audit Edit date: March 9, 2010 to March 15, 2010  
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS  
Final Edit date: April 5, 2010 to April 6, 2010

[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

**Michael Hirsh:** If you could give me your name and spell it, please?

**Morton D. Brooks:** Morton D. Brooks, B-r-o-o-k-s.

MH: And your address?

MB: ...

MH: And your phone number?

MB: My phone number....

MH: And your date of birth?

MB: 1-6-26 [January 6, 1926].

MH: You grew up where?

MB: In my early years, New York City. Brooklyn, New York. Then I went into service and went from there to Buffalo, and came back to New York for graduate work for a few years, and then was offered a position in Buffalo with the university.

MH: Which university?

MB: University of Buffalo. At that time it was University of Buffalo; now it became State University of New York at Buffalo.

MH: The position was in psychology?

MB: As a psycho—I had gotten into rehabilitation work, that's what I initially was doing, in a center in New York, doing my graduate work. And then this opportunity came up. I was assistant director of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. The polio foundation provided a grant to the university to introduce behavioral sciences with the medical sciences and rehabilitation of individuals. And it was a post-graduate program where physicians came in from the area in western New York, and they spent a day—well, they received instruction and knowledge about what went into the total rehabilitation of an individual.

MH: How long were you with that program?

MB: Five years.

MH: Then what?

MB: Then I had to make a decision, and I saw a couple positions in rehabilitation at different health agencies in New York City. I didn't like the offers, and a friend of mine said, "Why don't you try psychology in the schools?" And I tried it, and ended up pretty much staying with that, and then I worked in combination. I was offered a position at a center in Niagara Falls, child guidance center, where I became—and they needed a licensed psychologist. And New York State had begun licensing psychologists, and I accepted that position and was with them and still continued with different schools. Spent my career there.

MH: Let's go back and start talking about when you were in the service. You were how old when you were in?

MB: I was seventeen, going on eighteen. I had passed an exam—I don't know if you're familiar with the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] program?

MH: Yes.

MB: Well, since I was eligible for that, I enlisted. My birthday is January; I enlisted in October, and November I was at Syracuse University. And if you're familiar with it, you know they closed the program down, and we ended up in the infantry.

MH: Where did they send you?

MB: First to Texas, and then I finished that and went to Oklahoma and was part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> [Infantry] Division. And we did training and went overseas.

MH: When did you go overseas?

MB: October forty-four [1944].

MH: Went first to England?

MB: Went right into southern France. And that was my combat experience, in southern France until I got up—it was about the time of the Battle of the Bulge. We were near Strasbourg, and they moved us—we were south of Strasbourg, and we got moved up north of Strasbourg, and had a very large battle. The company I was with pretty much was wiped out. I was, in a way, lucky to become a prisoner.

MH: Can you talk about that? You were a rifleman?

MB: I was a rifleman, right.

MH: With an M1?

MB: M1, right.

MH: Can you tell me about the combat experience before you were captured?

MB: Well, there were a variety of small skirmishes, and for a while we had a Free French unit on our right. I ran as a contact to make sure everything was okay and that kind of thing, because it was pretty routine. It was—

MH: What was your rank?

MB: PFC [Private First Class]. And, what else? Then we had this overwhelming battle, where we got—I know about it because we received a citation, which described it. If you want, I can show you that.

MH: I'd like to see it later. I'm really curious about your experience in that battle.

MB: My experience?

MH: Yeah.

MB: Well, again, I—

MH: In as much detail as you're comfortable talking about.

MB: Well, in a way I was fortunate. I was in a forward foxhole, and we were overrun. And before I knew it, the Germans were beyond us, hitting the town that we were controlling at that time, the town of Hatten, France. And those of us who were in the forward foxholes got together at the command post, CP, which essentially was a tank trap. We were fighting and got a couple German prisoners, and our artillery was beginning to fall in on us, and they asked if there was one of us there that could upright the telephone, connect it up.

So, I said, "I think I could do that," and I was always pretty handy mechanically. And so, I was given the phone, and I followed the phone line through all the breaks until I got back, and it was part of the Maginot Line, behind us. I found this bunker and went into it, and still couldn't make any contact with the artillery. There were a few of our fellows inside that bunker. I guess they had been under heavy bombardment through the night, and we were trying to decide what to do.

MH: This was wintertime?

MB: It was cold. Yes, it sure was.

MH: Snow?

MB: Yes, that was the beginning of January.

MH: Were you dressed for it?

MB: Semi. Just a few days before, they had issued us what they called "snow boots," so I was fortunate, because—to prevent getting frostbite. And that's how cold it was: snow. Otherwise, it was just a jacket, combat jacket. Let's see, what else I can tell you?

MH: So, you're in the bunker—

MB: We're in the bunker, and really trying to determine what our next move should be. Oh, there was a sergeant in there. And after a while, we were trying to decide whether we should go into town or where we should—we knew we couldn't stay there. He looked out, saw this Tiger tank coming up the road, and he said, "We gotta surrender." I didn't want to surrender, but he said, "Look, they'll just put the nozzle into this opening and they'll blast us to pieces." So, we had no choice, and the few of us that were there surrendered.

MH: It's daylight?

MB: It was daylight, yes. As I said, it was in the morning and just—it's interesting. When you're in training in the States, they tell you you're going to know what's going on: who's on your right, who's on your left, everything is kind of knowledgeable. But in a

combat situation, it's madness. You really don't know what's going on. And, as I say, he felt we better surrender. As it turned out, it was a good thing. I don't know how I even made it to that point, because I must've gone about 500 yards to get to that point from the forward foxhole.

MH: How long had you been in Europe at that point? Just weeks?

MB: Well, I guess a couple months.

MH: Had you been wounded?

MB: Not at that point, no. Not at that point. So, they marched us across the road into a trench, and just across the road was a machine gun nest. I don't know—I guess they weren't looking, because I was coming from the other direction; otherwise, I wouldn't be here. And they put us into that trench until evening. Things quieted down, and then they marched us back to a farmhouse behind their lines.

MH: When you say they "marched you back," you're marching with your hands on your head?

MB: I think part of the time it was. That is not fully clear. But they—a few of them marched us back, and we ended up at this farmhouse. They had a lot of Americans there—quite a few, anyway—and they were interrogating us. We were there a couple of days.

MH: Was the interrogation by the book or by the Geneva Convention rules?

MB: Well, pretty much. We were amazed—I certainly was amazed—at the amount of information they knew about our outfit. The German officer who was doing the interrogation, they knew who our officers were, the day we had left the States. It was amazing what they were able—of course, they fed you information in order to get information. And I didn't give them any information. I said, "All I have to give is name, rank, serial number." But some of the fellows—from just talking with them, we learned more and more about what they knew about us. And then they put us on boxcars, these 40-and-8s, and we went north from there.

MH: When they loaded you in the boxcar, what was that experience like?

MB: Like a bunch of cattle being shoved in until it was packed.

MH: They were hitting you?

MB: No, they didn't hit us. It was just supposed to be forty men and eight horses, but there were more than forty packed in. It took us about three days, I think, and we ended up outside of Frankfurt at this camp Bad Orb—the town of Bad Orb—and there was a camp up the mountain from that spot.

MH: How did you survive the boxcar ride? Could you stand or sit in it?

MB: Mostly stand, mostly stand.

MH: And it's cold.

MB: And it's cold, yeah, so you got a little body warmth.

MH: Food?

MB: I think they gave us something. I know I went at least three days without eating. That I recall, because I was wondering why I was getting so hungry. But I guess the excitement, what was going on, you just lost track. And we ended up at this Stalag IX B, and we were put there, and again, we went through an interrogation. There, they not only asked name, rank, and serial number; they wanted to know your religion.

MH: What did you say?

MB: I said I was Jewish. I wasn't going to hide it.

MH: No trepidation?

MB: Yes, much trepidation, because there was another fellow and I talking about this. We had heard that they were asking that question in this first barracks I was in. And almost

got killed, because there were some planes, I guess, in a dogfight or something, and a bullet came through the side. And I'm talking to Ed here, and I'm standing here, and the bullet just went right between us into the boards—you know, the floorboards.

MH: That increases your pulse rate.

MB: It does, yes. There were a number of situations, like being strafed on a road when you're—I say, "I crawled into my helmet." Those are very frightening kinds of situations.

MH: Did that happen before you were captured?

MB: Before I was captured, yeah. But it's not like—well, it's like you saw in some movies, like "Sergeant Ryan" [*Saving Private Ryan*], what war could be like, but it's not playing games. You realize that you can get killed, and some of us were killed.

MH: Surrendering was something that was a frightening thing to do, I assume.

MB: Yes, it was. We were very frightened, because I knew that the Germans would not be kind to us. And at least I had heard that about their attitude towards Jews. I didn't know about concentration camps—

MH: That was my next question.

MB: —or anything like that, but I knew about some of the pogroms and things.

MH: You knew about that before you even left the States?

MB: Before I left the States.

MH: So you knew about Kristallnacht?

MB: I had heard about that, right. But I was not—I felt I was an American soldier. I had to be treated like a soldier. But what they did and when I refused, initially, I said, "Name, rank, and serial number, that's all." And they had some Americans doing some of the

interviewing and getting this information for the Germans. And he said, "We have to find out. You have to tell us. That's a requirement." So, I said, "I'm Jewish."

MH: You had no hesitation about that—I mean, at that point, saying Jewish?

MB: I had a hesitation about it. But in a sense, there I am, stripped, essentially, of anything, because they had taken everything from us. And I was under their power.

MH: At the time, your name was—

MB: Brimberg.

MH: B-r-i-m-b-e-r-g. Fairly obvious Jewish name.

MB: Right, at least it would be there.

MH: Is this on—did they have names on—

MB: Dog tags.

MH: Just on dog tags, but no name tape on your fatigues.

MB: No. They do now. No, no. So, I acknowledged the fact that I was, and—

MH: To this American.

MB: To the American who's writing it down, right. And then I found out they had a segregated barracks, and I was moved from the barracks. I was into the Jewish barracks.

MH: How did that experience happen? How'd they make the switch?

MB: They identified us and they moved any of us that were Jewish into this—

MH: The Germans came in and said—

MB: Oh, yes, the German guards. “This is where you go.”

MH: They called the Jews to come out of the barracks, or they called you by name?

MB: Well, I wasn't the first one in this camp, so they had already taken some fellows and put them in the barracks. When I got there, there were a few of us who had been recently brought to this camp, and we moved into the barracks.

MH: How big are the barracks and how many guys are in there?

MB: There were eighty of us in the barrack.

MH: In one barrack?

MB: In one barrack, yeah. They were like you've seen it—you know, the stacked-up bunks.

MH: So it looked like the movie *Stalag 17*?

MB: Yeah, essentially.

MH: And you're sleeping one to a bunk or two to a bunk?

MB: At that point—I think it was one to a bunk at that time. Later, of course, it was two to a bunk. But the difference in this particular barracks was we got the same food as the others, as far as we could tell. But they did things like having us come out and line up early in the morning. And then we had German dog tags that they gave us, prisoner of war tags, the number of which we had to call out as we—they went down the line, and they checked you off.

MH: You're doing this early in the morning; it was probably still dark out?

MB: It was just about light.

MH: And you're in ranks.

MB: We're lined up, yes. And they're calling us, you know, checking us off. And then for us, we felt, to the Jews, standing out longer than we had to in the freezing cold. It was—well, it was the beginning of January, and it was freezing.

MH: Did they let you keep your snow boots and your jacket and that sort of thing?

MB: The clothing, yes, I was able to keep. Right. And we had some—I guess it was occupation money, whatever, that was given to us. And I was able to take—I had a \$20 bill and got that into the lining of the jacket. I didn't know if it would be helpful at some point. And I had cigarettes that came in the K rations, which I later used. Some guys were desperate for a cigarette, and I'd trade that off for a bread ration. Let's see.

MH: How long did they keep you at that stalag?

MB: We were there until the orders came to ship out 350 of us. I don't know if you—did you speak to Fellman?<sup>1</sup> Did he tell you the same thing?

MH: Yes.

MB: Okay. Then the order came to ship out 350, and eighty of us who were Jewish were the first lined up, and then 270 others to make up the contingent.

MH: Did they tell you where you were going?

MB: No. They said, "It's overcrowded here, and you're being shipped out to take care of the overcrowding."

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Fellman was also interviewed as part of the Concentration Camp Liberators OHP. The DOI for his interview is C65-00042. Norman was also a POW at Berga.

MH: Did rumors start going around?

MB: Well, we had—wondering what was going on, but we thought we were just being transferred to another stalag. And then we were marched down to the boxcars, and here they were a little rougher and shoving us in, packed in so that you couldn't sit down. I mean, you stood against your fellow soldiers, which was only helpful in terms of some warmth. And rations were—they gave us a piece of bread, and I guess that was it.

MH: When you walked from the stalag to the railroad cars, was that through a town?

MB: It was the edge of town, and it was just through the edge and down to the railroad track.

MH: Were there civilians that could see you?

MB: Oh, yes.

MH: What were they doing?

MB: Just looking. That's all, as I recall.

MH: You were being moved along with—

MB: With bayonets, you know, on the rifles, and you moved and they piled you into these boxcars, which—I don't know if they were older. As I remember, it was worse than the first boxcar that brought us to the camp. What else?

MH: They give you any—they didn't tell you how long you'd be on the train?

MB: No.

MH: You get a little bit of food. Any water?

MB: I guess there was a little water initially, but then we were without anything the rest of the trip until we got to Berga.

MH: How long was that trip?

MB: Five days, as I recall.

MH: It's not that far a distance.

MB: It wasn't that far, but there were—they had to be concerned with strafings and that sort of thing that were going on.

MH: Were there attacks while you were on that train?

MB: As I recall, there was one, yes. I think there were English fighters that came over that were probably thinking it was a troop train.

MH: Were guys hit?

MB: I recall some were hit, yes, as I recall.

MH: But there's nothing that can be done for them.

MB: That's right, nothing. And then we arrived at Berga, and we're taken into these barracks, which—it was evident they were—

MH: You get off the train, and there's a sign that says "Berga." Is that how you knew you were there?

MB: "Berga am Elster," yes.

MH: Berga an Elster.

MB: Am Elster.

MH: That's the river?

MB: That's the river. Berga on the Elster River, right.

MH: What happened? They open the doors to these boxcars—

MB: Right, and they had enough guards to control us. And—

(phone rings) Excuse me.

MH: Sure.

***Pause in recording***

MB: Such news. Somebody I know was in a car crash.

MH: Oy. You get out of the train, and what do you see? You look around. What do you see?

MB: I don't recall a lot of that. I remember the station. I remember we were marched down the road, and we ended up in this barbed wire enclosure. And right away, we knew it was not the kind of situation we were in. We were just packed into these—looked like hastily constructed barracks. And we were stacked up three high and two to a unit, so we were really crowded in.

MH: Is this where they had the straw pallets on the—

MB: Yes, that's right. So, that was it.

MH: On the train, they never let you off for bathroom breaks, whatever.

MB: Right.

MH: So people dirtied themselves, and it's ugly.

MB: Ugly, right. And what else? Well, that was the barrack. And we were pretty tightly packed in. They had a little potbelly stove.

MH: Wood for it, or not?

MB: Well, that's what you burned was wood.

MH: But did they give you wood?

MB: There was some limited wood, yeah, that we had. But pretty quickly, we were lined up and marched down to the mines.

MH: How do they decide who's going to go to the mines and who's going to do other things? Or did everybody go to the mines?

MB: I'm not certain. I know that there were some fellows on other details. I think they were repairing railroad tracks or whatever. But I don't know. You know, it's—

MH: It's a long time ago.

MB: Not only—some of it is clouded, and from what my friends tell me, I remember more than they do. Some of it, they just blanked it out completely.

MH: When do they march you down to the mines, the tunnels?

MB: Early in the morning.

MH: You got there the night before, the day before?

MB: Day before, yeah, and I think it was the next day we were lined up, checked us off, and we were marched down into the mines.

MH: Did they tell you ahead of time what you'd be doing?

MB: Oh, no. Oh, no. You just went in. There were pneumatic drills, and you were put onto a pneumatic drill and you drilled into this—

MH: What do these tunnels look like?

MB: Like any tunnel you might see. I can show you a picture.

MH: Tall enough to stand up in?

MB: Oh, yes. Yeah. They had gone already into it, and we were extending the tunnel.

MH: Did they tell you what the tunnels were for?

MB: No.

MH: Did you ever find out?

MB: Found out, was it—I'm not sure exactly the date, but many years later—it must've been forty years afterwards—I'd learned more about it. One of the fellows from Boston got involved with this project where they were doing a TV program on prisoners of war, and they had prisoners of war from at the time Vietnam and Germany, and did have from Japan, I think so.

Well, they had a number of different prisoners of war talking about their experience, and this fellow had gone back to Berga. The producer of the program took them back to Berga, and he pointed out some things and talked about it. And I'd gotten in touch with

him then, and then we communicated a little bit, so I learned some things. He said that there was uranium not too far away, and the underground factory was involved with atomic power in some ways, that they were—

There always was a question. Why were they pressing us the way they were at the end of the war? What was going on that they were trying to build this underground factory in January, February, you know, of forty-five [1945]? And that's evidently what it was. They had this project. It was under the control of the SS, and I guess that's why the Germans who were involved were fearful of the SS and their actions. Because we had a civilian overseer in the mine tunnel who was very brutal. I don't know whether—

MH: How so?

MB: —Norm Fellman mentioned that. Well—

MH: Were you in the same tunnel with Fellman, or were you in a different tunnel?

MB: I think I was in a different tunnel.

MH: That's what I think he said.

MB: Yeah. And he carried a pickaxe handle and a rubber hose and didn't hesitate to use it. And we all were beaten on a fairly regular basis, because we weren't going to try and help them do it. We slacked off and goofed off as much as we could get away with.

MH: How many men are in each tunnel? When you go in?

MB: I don't know, six or eight.

MH: And they march you into the tunnel, and you go all the way to—

MB: Yeah, you go into where they've reached that particular point, a rock wall, and there are the pneumatic drills.

MH: Is there more than one in each tunnel?

MB: Yes. Yeah, two or three.

MH: And these are what, 100-pound—

MB: Oh, yeah. They're heavy, and—

MH: And the drill bit is several feet long?

MB: There's a drill bit, at least a couple feet, yeah. You'd drill into the wall, and then the—a German explosives expert comes in and sets the charges. You go out, they blow the wall, and you go back in, and you shovel the rock into—

MH: When they blow the wall, there's a huge cloud of smoke and rock and dust?

MB: Right.

MH: How soon do they send you back in? Instantly?

MB: Very quickly.

MH: So, you're breathing all that crap.

MB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I think that's what led to a good part of my hospitalization. There was markings in my lungs.

MH: Did they have to beat you to get you to go back in, or do you try and avoid? Or you just have to go?

MB: Well, you go, and he's standing there, and you know you're gonna get beat if you don't go back in. And there are guards, SS guards, on the outside.

MH: With dogs?

MB: With dogs.

MH: Do they have masks so they don't breathe this crap?

MB: They don't go in.

MH: But the overseer?

MB: The overseer? I don't know. He stayed back, but he could see where we were. But when the blast occurs, he's out, outside.

MH: Are you all the way outside, or do they keep you partway—

MB: Right up to the mouth of the tunnel. And then we go in first, of course, and then eventually he's there, and you take the rock and put it into the mining cars, and then push them on the rails out and dump it into the river.

MH: So, the same crew doing the drilling also has to load the rock?

MB: Oh, yes. Yes.

MH: And push it to the river?

MB: Correct.

MH: And these cars tilted?

MB: Then they tilt, and you'd dump into the river, and then you'd come back.

MH: Was there any point to dumping the rock in the river, besides getting rid of it?

MB: Just getting rid of it, as far as I know.

MH: Did they give you food or water before you went out to work?

MB: We got what they called “coffee,” which I guess was chicory and water. And pretty much that was it.

MH: Before—you had to drink that before you went in.

MB: Before we went down to the mine.

MH: Did you get a bread ration every day?

MB: When you got back.

MH: When you got back. How long were your shifts?

MB: Like twelve hours, I think.

MH: Twelve hours. If you can recall—I know this is like crazy detail to ask you, but how many times on a shift did they blow the wall, did they have explosions?

MB: That I wouldn't be sure of.

MH: But it's more than one.

MB: Oh, yes, it was more than one. It's a continuous operation. I mean, you drill, blow the rock, get rid of the rock, come back in and drill again. And just repeat.

MH: You have no protective clothing other than what you showed up in.

MB: I never had a change of clothing until I was liberated.

MH: So, certainly no gloves.

MB: No.

MH: What happens when your clothing starts wearing out?

MB: It wears out.

MH: It wears out. What about cuts and injuries?

MB: Too bad. We were young, and you heal pretty well at that point. I guess that was one of the desirous aspects of it. But—

MH: What did you weigh at the beginning of all this?

MB: I was 140-something.

MH: And you're how tall?

MB: Five [feet] seven and a half [inches], something like that.

MH: I assume weight starts falling off pretty fast?

MB: As I look back on it, it's just amazing to me how much and how weak. And when I speak to high school kids, sometimes I tell them—if it comes up—how quickly you become weakened without realizing it. Because after I don't know how many weeks we were there, maybe four to six weeks, one of the fellows had stolen a piece of bread or something. You had this—well, you can figure. There was initially six and eight on the loaf of the German black bread. Because I could cut it more evenly, I was given the task of cutting it up for eight, so six, whatever it was. So, you had this piece of bread, and then

you try to stretch it. Sometimes, if we had the potbelly stove going, you'd take the bread and try and toast it on the outside of the stove. And so, this fellow had taken it, and we went over to, essentially, attack him for doing that.

MH: Attack who?

MB: One of our fellow soldiers who had stolen somebody else's. Because you had this little piece, and you'd try to stretch it; sometimes you put it under your pillow or something and have a piece later, whatever, however you can stretch it. And I remember going to hit him, and it was like a powder puff, the force with which I hit him, and I remember, as you can see, how striking it was for me, the lack of strength I had at that moment. You just don't even realize how the strength disappears. And so, you have these events which really bring it out and tell you what's going on, and to me, it was a shock that I had lost so much strength. But that's how quickly we became weakened.

MH: How long after you got there did men start dying?

MB: I guess—I don't know, maybe a month. But some of them had attempted escapes, some of them [were] brought back, and if they were brought back alive, they were given the job of cleaning out the slit trench, which was our toilet facility. There were no other facilities, and the supposed coffee you got in the morning very often you used for cleaning yourself, because we didn't have any running water. So, that was used for wash-up.

If you had to eliminate, which we did because we all got diarrhea and then dysentery, you had to go out to the slit trench, and it was a pole from the limb of a sapling tree that set up on a post that had a forked piece. This pole was set in it, and you leaned against that in order to eliminate. And then there was nothing to clean yourself with. Very often, you took what straw was in the mattress, so-called mattress, and so that was the conditions.

MH: You said the people who escaped were given the task of cleaning this trench?

MB: Yes. Yeah, they would clean it out, be given the job of cleaning it out. And that led—the greatest fear, of course, was getting ill. And the commandant—maybe Norm Fellman told you—was a brutal guy, and if somebody said they were too ill to go down, he determined he was the physician, he would check. And he didn't hesitate, if somebody'd collapse, to take a pail of water and throw it on them. And then, if he didn't move, he allowed him to be carried into the barracks and stay there for the day.

MH: Is this the guy who said if your tongue was good, you're okay?

MB: I don't remember that, but maybe Norm Fellman—

MH: No, it's something I read in the book, not something Norm said.

MB: Okay. But it would be the same commandant, yeah. He and his assistant were miserable individuals.

MH: Did you have personal interactions with them or just as part of the group?

MB: Just mostly as part of the group, and watching what he did to my fellow soldiers there.

MH: Do you recall anything in particular?

MB: Well, pretty much what I described, yeah. And, of course, he would get the guards under him to do whatever was necessary to get us to do what they wanted.

MH: Did they ever say anything directly about you being Jewish?

MB: No. I think they treated us like we were all Jews, because it was part of the Buchenwald complex, and the political prisoners were there. We all got treated the same, I think.

MH: Did you ever see the other prisoners?

MB: Oh, yes.

MH: Were they also working in the tunnels?

MB: Yes.

MH: Was there interaction?

MB: Not in the same tunnel, but if you had to use the latrine during the day, there was a spot to go, and very often you got some communication. They had a better grapevine. They seemed to know what was going on in terms of whether there were troop movements in the area or not, or so they were—you know, they were close enough where you could share some information.

MH: Did you personally talk to them?

MB: Yes, I tried.

MH: English, Polish, Hungarian, what?

MB: Well, there was one man who said he was caught in France and spoke English, but you always had to be on guard, because you don't know whether they were a plant by the Germans to find out information that you might know. So, you had to be very suspicious of whoever you might be talking with.

MH: Did you ever think about trying to escape?

MB: Yes.

MH: Tell me.

MB: Sure did. Well, I thought about it, but I went down in my head with the possibilities, and I didn't speak German, and I didn't have the clothing. But on the forced march, another fellow, Seymour Fahrer—did that name come up at all? We became buddies. He was a medic, and I got him to stop smoking and trade off his cigarettes for what bread he could get.

MH: How'd you convince him to do that?

MB: I told him whatever food he got was better than the cigarette. And I said, “So, if somebody wants to trade off their bread for a cigarette that you might have, take it.” And we became good buddies. And on the march—you know about the forced march at the end—

MH: I want you to tell me about it when we get to it.

MB: Oh, okay. Well, we attempted an escape.

MH: On that forced march.

MB: On the forced march.

MH: But not before you—

MB: No.

MH: No.

MB: No. And what contributed to that was the passing of all these political prisoners along the side of the road that were shot through the head.

MH: Stay in the camp for the moment. How do you keep hope alive?

MB: How do you keep hope alive? (laughs)

MH: That’s not an [Barack] Obama line, it just happens to be a propos.

MB: I really—people have asked this, you know. “What helped you to survive?” I really couldn’t say. It was—I felt I was gonna just make it back, and the desire, I guess, to make it back contributed to it. It was talk about what kind of meals, what special things that our family made, food that we enjoyed. And talked—

MH: What was the food you dreamed about the most?

MB: At the time? At this point, I'm not sure I can tell you accurately. I don't know, like kasha varnishkes or something that each parent might make.

MH: For Kathy, who's transcribing this, it's kasha varnishkes. I'll spell it for you later. I was not a POW, obviously. My last six weeks in Vietnam, every letter home was nothing but food, and on the envelope outside was all the food I forgot to put on the letter inside. I still have the letters. It was an obsession with home cooking.

MB: Yes, well, that's pretty much what it was, whatever specialties that our parents made for us. It could be a particular kind of French toast, or whatever it was, and that's all we talked about. What we didn't have.

MH: You didn't talk about girls.

MB: Not very much. I had a girlfriend at the time, and I talked a little bit about getting back together later on, but a lot of in terms of seeing the family. And I have a sister and brother who are twins, and I had concerns because it was their bar mitzvah. They also were born in January, and I thought about them and I didn't know what they might know of my existence at that time. And I learned later that all they knew was that I was missing in action.

MH: That's all the families knew.

MB: That's all the family knew.

MH: They didn't know you were captured, they just knew you were—

MB: Missing in action, yeah.

MH: Your parents were alive at the time?

MB: My parents were alive at the time.

MH: Did they make assumptions?

MB: All I knew is that it was a big strain, because a cousin of mine who was a pilot had been shot down and killed. And when I wanted to go into the Air Force, when the ASTP program was ending, they carried on. "Oh, no, not the Air Force." They didn't tell me why. But then here I am missing in action, so they had feelings at that time as to what happened to their son. I didn't know. My sister mentioned that when they got the telegram, my father didn't say anything about it for a couple days, but he was, like, white.

MH: He didn't tell your mother?

MH: I guess he didn't initially. He didn't tell her.

MH: They're in Brooklyn?

MB: They were in Brooklyn, right. So, that was the effect on the family, and I guess they got that news just prior to my brother and my sister had a kind of bar mitzvah. Of course, it was his bar mitzvah. She talks about her second-rate status in the situation. (laughs) But so, that was the family events at the time. And my father was not a talker; he was a very quiet man, so I'm not sure what was going on in his head at the time. And, of course, my mother, I guess, carried on a bit. But that was the family situation. Until I think they got dollars when I—I think they got a notice that I was a prisoner of war just before I was liberated.

MH: When you were in this camp, did you ever just contemplate what kind of people could do this to other human beings?

MB: Well, this has been a lifelong thing in terms of the kind of human beings—what they could do to others, and that's why, as I say, I spend a lot of time speaking to high school kids. It's one of my volunteer activities. Yeah, and I talk about religion and race and color and people's feelings toward others because of that, and how it can lead to this kind of behavior. And it does boggle my mind that that supposedly an educated community could behave the way they did. The general population, of course, just went along with it. Those who were afraid of the regime, I guess, out of fear, but others supported it.

So, I mean—Hannah Arendt's book in terms of the whole community supporting this. I'm not sure if I could go with total collective guilt, but there was enough of it, enough of

it in terms of people's behavior. And you have to credit those who had enough strength within themselves to stand up and say, "Humanity is humanity," and try to be helpful. Occasionally, there were those who did, those who hid Jews and took in Jewish children and hid them, that sort of thing.

MH: But in the camp, you saw nothing of that.

MB: No, absolutely no.

MH: The guards ranged in age from what to what?

MB: I can't be certain. A number of them were older, I guess, and maybe had—because it was the Home Guard—

MH: Like the National Guard?

MB: Like a National Guard, yeah. I'm not sure of the exact relation between a Home Guard there and our National Guard. But I guess those who couldn't be in the German army for whatever reason, and could qualify for Home Guard, so some had, I guess, minor physical disabilities that kept them there.

MH: Were they all equally brutal?

MB: No, they weren't all equally brutal; there was some who seemed to go along with the flow, doing what they had to do. I know some people did talk with some of those, those who spoke enough German or Yiddish to communicate. And I think even some of them traded off things if they had something to trade off.

MH: What would you still have?

MB: I don't know, but some were able to trade something to get cigarettes. The power of wanting to smoke taught me something, anyway, about motivation. And I guess—what do I want to say? A compulsion to do a particular thing.

MH: When you were in the mines, you talked about slacking off. Was there any attempt to sabotage the effort?

MB: Yes. Some people did, and they suffered for it.

MH: What happened?

MB: There were a couple fellows who, when they were dumping the rock, dumped the carts into the river, and boy, they suffered for it.

MH: Did they have to go down and get the cart?

MB: No, there were just—I would think you couldn't retrieve it easily.

MH: This is off a cliff?

MB: It was a kind of a cliff, yes, with the river below. But they were beaten severely. One of the fellows that—he's passed away now, Gerry Zimand; he lived down here. He was involved in one of those situations where they dumped a cart, and he would recall the beating he got as a result.

MH: Did a point happen during the day—you're working day shifts or night shifts?

MB: All day.

MH: Day shifts, all day. Did a point come during the day where you didn't think you'd make it through the entire day? Your energy was just gone?

MB: There may have been, but I never let that enter into my thinking. I never had the thought that I wouldn't make it, and I was going to get out of this situation. You knew the war was coming to an end. And we saw the American Air Force flying overhead.

MH: Did they ever bomb where you were or strafe where you were?

MB: No, they never did, but I know they were—the very vast armada that went to Dresden, because we weren't that far from Dresden.

MH: Did you see them going overhead?

MB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

MH: What are you feeling as you see this armada flying?

MB: Oh, it was wonderful. The Germans weren't happy, but we were thrilled.

MH: What do the Germans do to you when they see that?

MB: They didn't take any particular action, but they saw what was occurring.

MH: Did you find out that they had bombed Dresden?

MB: Later on.

MH: But not when you were still in the camp.

MB: Not in the camp, no. We knew that there was a big target that they were headed for. I mean, you just can't imagine seeing the sky filled with planes.

MH: This is hundreds of planes.

MB: Hundreds of planes, yes.

MH: Bombers.

MB: Right.

MH: And you hear them.

MB: Oh, yes. Yeah.

MH: And there's no anti-aircraft in the area trying to shoot them down?

MB: Oh, they had some, yes, but they encountered most of the aircraft right at Dresden and surrounding Dresden. But that was one big event I recall. You'd see that, and you're hearing things about the military, the Russians or the Americans coming closer.

MH: How are you hearing this?

MB: Just some people would come into the camp, maybe, and say something to one of the other Germans.

MH: Did new prisoners come in who had information?

MB: Not that I recall. Not during the time we were there.

MH: There've been, over the years, people saying that the bombing of civilian population of Dresden was not a moral thing to do. You're in a camp such as you were in, watching these planes go over. Did it ever cross your mind afterward whether it was or wasn't the right thing to do?

MB: Well, I remember talking in a school during the Kosovo situation, and some youngster said how terrible it was that these civilians were being killed by American bombs. And I'll tell you what my response was: They support the regime, so they're not innocents. That's my feeling. Everybody's involved, everybody has a part to play, and war is immoral as far as I'm concerned, and that's part of it. A lot of things go on in war which are not desirable and not human.

MH: Even the notion that there are supposed to be rules in war, like the Geneva Convention or Red Cross card. How did you feel about having a card that supposedly—

you're out here to kill people, they're here to kill you, but there are rules. Did you react to that while you were in the Army? Or just sort of go "Eh"?

MB: At that time, it's a nation at war, and they're out to kill us, and that's what we have to do.

MH: In Vietnam, we used to call them the "I fight clean" card. That's what we referred to the Geneva Convention card as.

MB: Well, Vietnam was a dirtier kind of situation. At least in Germany, it was a more clear-cut situation; in Vietnam, you really didn't know who was with you or against you.

*MP3 file 1 ends; mp3 file 2 begins.*

MH: One of the things Norm told me that's sort of a vivid image in my mind is he said when people would die, they just stacked the bodies up, and you'd often be standing in line to get food next to the bodies of guys you served with.

MB: Yeah. That's it. That's it; it was the nature of it.

MH: Do you cry?

MB: Well, I don't think I had the strength to cry at the time. It just—it was so miserable, and I don't know, it was the nature of the situation we were in. You know, it's like unreal, and as I look back on it, it was just a different totality. It's not like sitting here and thinking about it. You're in that situation, and your behavior's determined by the situation which you're in.

MH: How do you deal with—I mean, all the niceties of civilized living: taking a bath or a shower and having toilet paper, being able to wash your hands after you go to the bathroom or before you eat. How do you deal with adjusting to the fact that there's no such thing as that anymore?

MB: That's what I say. The situation determines your behavior. And, say, it's a crazy situation, your behavior is crazy. That's the way I look at it. And so, to understand someone's behavior, you have to understand the totality of the situation, and the human

capability of coping with that situation, so you cope with a crazy situation. And whatever comes out comes out.

MH: Do you pray?

MB: I never did really pray. I don't know why. People have asked that. I guess—I don't know, maybe I'd never thought in those kinds of terms, that there was some God up there that would be protecting me or could do anything for me. I can't say I'm an atheist, and I go to a congregation and participate in the congregation, but I don't see some God out there who will do anything for me. I don't have that kind of relationship. There may be some force in the world that has some effect on evolution and some of the development of things on this planet, but I don't see it as, as I say, somebody who could—that I could talk to and say, "Do this," or "Protect me," or "Help me in this situation."

MH: Did others around you pray?

MB: I suspect so.

MH: Nobody tried to organize any kind of service.

MB: No, no.

MH: Did you hear anything going on with the Jews in the other part of the camp, not the American soldiers? Did you hear torture, screams?

MB: No, no.

MH: Nothing like that.

MB: No.

MH: So, you didn't know, aside from seeing them working, anything other than that was happening.

MB: Right. I didn't see any ovens.

MH: Were there ovens at that camp?

MB: I think there was nearby, because Buchenwald had a crematorium. So, I'm not sure exactly, because it was a sub-unit.

MH: When did it become apparent that the plan was to work you to death?

MB: It never—that was something I learned afterward, that they had the “work to death” programs. We didn't know it then. And, of course, when they marched us out at the beginning of April, we knew that either the Americans or the Russians were getting too close, and that we felt it was the Americans, and that they didn't want us to be found in this situation, which was not according to the rules of war.

MH: Let's talk about the end of the camp, then. What were the final days in that camp like?

MB: We got the word that April 1, we were gonna be moved out.

MH: (sneezes) Excuse me.

MB: Gesundheit.

MH: Thank you.

MB: That we were going out. We didn't leave the first. I think we left the third. But initially, we weren't sure if it was an April Fool's joke or not. But then they did march us out, and they said they were taking us to another camp, which wasn't so—we were just being moved, and we were marched on this forced march.

MH: Your boots were still good?

MB: Well, I think the socks deteriorated to the point where, during that march, the skin on my feet was rubbed off, and when I was liberated, you could see the bone in my toes and that sort of thing.

MH: You still had boots?

MB: I still had boots, yeah. They were shot, but I still had boots.

MH: And the weather is warmer?

MB: It was getting warmer. Yes, it was getting warmer. As I say, I never had a change for six months or whatever it was.

MH: One morning, they round you up and say, "We're not going down to the mines or the tunnels"?

MB: "We're marching out, we're going out."

MH: Lots of guards? More guards than before?

MB: I don't think so. I think it was about as many as we had: those who were there in the camp.

MH: When they march you out, you're actually lined up and marching?

MB: We're lined up to march, yes.

MH: But it's not left-right, left-right. You're just moving.

MB: We're moving, right.

MH: And so you go out through the barbed wire.

MB: We go out, right, and go down a road, and through the town.

MH: What are the townspeople saying?

MB: Well, some were throwing things at us, and I don't know what they knew about us or they didn't, but we were the dregs from the mines, and—

MH: What's your weight at this point? What do you guess?

MB: I'm not certain. I can tell you what it was when I was liberated.

MH: What was that?

MB: Between seventy and seventy-five pounds.

MH: So, you lost half your body weight?

MB: I lost half my body weight. I was like the pictures you see, and didn't—you know, I mean, I guess I couldn't look at myself very much. I can tell you that after liberation, we were taken to—I think it was Cham, Germany. We were liberated by the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored. Do you know that?

MH: I don't know what unit it was.

MB: The 11<sup>th</sup> Armored liberated us. They were headed to this town, and they took over a community building and took our clothes, so we were nude, on stretchers, and the clothing was so lice-infested, that was destroyed, burned, whatever. And they tried to give us emergency medical care. I know they tried to give me blood, but they couldn't get the needle into the vein; it'd constrict itself. And whatever—they deloused us [with] DDT, sprayed us with DDT. And then I think it was a couple days. We moved to a field hospital, and from there to—I was, to an ambulance plane and flown to England.

MH: Before we get there, let's go back to the march. You were saying the townspeople were throwing things at you.

MB: Yeah, and somebody said that there was somebody they—I don't know how they'd know they were a schoolteacher, but they thought the person was a schoolteacher, who had some sandwiches and I guess surreptitiously tried to give it to one of the fellows. I don't recall that, but there was talk that that happened.

MH: You never got any of the sandwich?

MB: I never saw it, no. No, I saw things thrown at us, that's about it, as we went through. And then we were out on the roads, country roads that we were marched on. All I could tell is that we were going south and east and west to avoid being liberated.

MH: When did you start seeing bodies?

MB: There must have been about ten days to two weeks into the march.

MH: How long did the march last?

MB: Over three weeks.

MH: Okay.

MB: Yeah.

MH: Are the German guards who were marching with you being replaced?

MB: I don't recall them being replaced. I pretty much saw the same people, I think.

MH: How many hours a day did they march you?

MB: All day.

MH: At night, what did you do?

MB: We were bedded down, usually in a barn. I learned later that some of the fellows were left along the road because they couldn't go, but there was a wagon that supposedly accommodated those who collapsed. And some of those fellows, they just piled the bodies on top, and some of them suffocated on that wagon.

MH: Did you ever have to push the wagon or pull it?

MB: No, I didn't have to. It followed; but I carried guys, you know, supported fellows on the march. So, I guess I was strong enough.

MH: How do you encourage the guys that are not strong enough?

MB: You just say, "You gotta keep going. We're gonna be freed soon. We're gonna make it. We're gonna be freed," and so on.

MH: Do they argue with you?

MB: No. No. Those who didn't believe it usually died.

MH: That's one of the things that Norm Fellman said, that if you thought you were going to die, you did.

MB: Yeah, the psychological effect was there. People gave up, just went. Some went earlier because they had given up; they just felt, I guess, so weak that they surrendered to themselves.

MH: When did you begin seeing the bodies of the Eastern European Jews, the prisoners?

MB: The political prisoners who apparently were marching down this road, and they were lying with a bullet through the head, just two days. And that's when—

MH: At this point, you're eighteen years old, maybe nineteen?

MB: Nineteen.

MH: How do you take that in?

MB: I can't speak for everybody. I can tell you my feelings. It hits you, and that's when I said to Seymour, "This is gonna be our end. Let's see if we can get outta here."

MH: Tell me about that.

MB: So, we agreed that we'd make the attempt, and the following day, we just kept falling behind, falling behind, like we couldn't keep up. The guard who was at the end didn't bother too much, and we just sort of like struggled along until it got dark. And then he and I took off and went into the woods. And—

MH: The wagon wasn't all the way at the back?

MB: No, I don't recall it being there. I'm not sure where it was that particular day, as a matter of fact.

MH: I assume you're in excruciating pain because of your feet, if nothing else.

MB: Oh, yes. Yeah, that's right.

MH: Taking off running is not as easy as it sounds.

MB: We trudged, we didn't run. (laughs)

MH: You took off at a fast trudge.

MB: We got off the road and away. The next day, we attempted to—we saw this farmhouse and tried to get—there was some, like, vegetables on the porch, and we tried

to get it. The farmer came out with a shotgun, and we were taken into the town, and for that night—

MH: Do you remember the town?

MB: Don't remember the town, no.

MH: So they take you into—the farmer's got the shotgun.

MB: Got the shotgun, and we're taken into this town and put into a dungeon that—an underground hole. The following day, there was some sisters of some order who attempted to do something with my feet. But then we were taken and brought back. They apparently knew—they found out where we were, where the group was, and we were taken back to the group. It was just a few days later, I guess, that we were liberated.

MH: I'm surprised you weren't beaten for the escape attempt.

MB: Well, I guess we were pretty—what you could call it?—sad-looking characters at that point. They didn't have to beat us; they just put into this incarceration and took us to rejoin the group.

MH: How'd you feel? You thought you'd made it away.

MB: We thought we'd made it away, and—

MH: Did you try pleading with the farmer?

MB: There was no pleading. The guy is standing there with a gun and telling us what we had to do.

MH: In German?

MB: In German, yeah. Just move on and took us into the town, and that was—then taken over by the authorities and put into this situation, and then—

MH: So, they kept marching you?

MB: Then they—yeah, the group was still marching, and just a few days later, we were in this—

MH: Before you get to that, did they ever shoot any of the Americans on the march?

MB: Not that I'm aware of, no, they didn't. They didn't. I know the German guards were talking about whether they would be taken over by the Russians or Americans. They would want to be taken by the Americans rather than the Russians.

MH: Because you could put in a good word for them.

MB: Whatever. No, I guess they knew the Russians were brutal, and they were, from what I heard wherever they liberated people, to the Germans. They just didn't hesitate to kill them. So, what else?

MH: How did the liberation come about?

MB: We were bedded down in this barn, and the word went through the group, "We can't continue on this way," that "When morning comes, we don't move." So, when morning came, we heard the guards yelling, "*Raus, raus!*" and the word went through—"Don't move"—and we stayed still. And then we heard some shots, and the guards took off. We waited about maybe ten minutes, fifteen minutes, and one of the fellows looked out the back end of the barn and saw the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored coming down the road.

MH: Tanks.

MB: Tanks, and trucks and whatever. And when they said, "Americans!" the door back there opened up, and we went down this hill, and they couldn't believe who we were. That's how we looked. But they saw who we were, and they pulled us up onto the tanks and trucks and whatever, and the group went on to their destination.

MH: Did they give you food and water?

MB: The guys tried. I remember I had a K ration, gave me a cheese thing that was in this K ration, and I tried to eat it, and I couldn't get it into my mouth, really. I was so hungry, and yet I couldn't eat, which was lucky. Some guys ate and then became violently ill.

MH: They took you where?

MB: We went with them to this town. I think it was Cham, C-h-a-m, Germany. And they took over this building. We were put on stretchers and given emergency medical care, deloused, and stayed there until we were moved. At that point, I was just so weak, to think that I was alive and liberated, that was—

MH: When did you first try and get word to your family?

MB: Immediately. Some Red Cross people came through with toothpaste and toothbrushes (laughs) and I had gotten—

MH: What was the sigh? Just thinking about it?

MB: I guess so. I mean, it was just so inappropriate to what our needs were. (laughs)

MH: You hadn't been able to shave anywhere in the camp.

MB: No.

MH: So you have beards.

MB: I don't really recall, exactly, what we did at that point. But what I do recall is when they took the clothing, I took that \$20 value bill—

MH: I was going to ask you what happened to that.

MB: And I have that. And I—this Red Cross worker, I said, “Would you please send a telegram to my family and let them know I’m alive?” “Oh, we’ll take care of that, no worries, sure.” Takes the information, and they never heard.

MH: Did she take the twenty?

MB: She refused it. I don’t know whatever happened to it, whether I lost it or what.

MH: When did your family find out?

MB: I think when I got to England, I was able to send a note, and they had an APO [Army Post Office] number. And they learned that I was alive.

MH: Where they did take you in England?

MB: It was a field hospital near Manchester, Quonset huts that were set up, and, fortunately, they started me—they saw I couldn’t eat, and they started me on a liquid kind of diet, almost like milkshakes, that I could sip out of a straw. I had experience—maybe that’s why I became interested in psychology, because as I saw, I would get food, and I would gag. And after a while, I was looking at myself in the mirror, and I said, “You gotta do something about this. You’ve got to control it,” and gradually, it improved. And I learned what the power of thought was.

So, they treated my feet. As I say, they were in terrible condition. All the skin and tissue around the heel bone and toes was gone.

MH: When you say you “learned what the power of thought was,” just elaborate on that.

MB: Well, that I could determine that I had to do something about that situation, and I would looking the mirror and say, “Look, just calm down, and get over that gagging.” I would talk to myself, essentially, and say that I had to improve, that was not a tolerable situation. Gradually, I got over that, so it improved. And as I say, the food started coming back.

MH: How long did they keep you in England?

MB: Got there—it was the beginning of May, I guess it was, end of April, and it was mid-June, about six weeks. And then was sent to London, they interrogated us, and went on a train up to Scotland and got on the ship there.

MH: They sent you home by ship?

MB: By ship.

MH: When you say they “interrogated” you—

MB: They took a statement as to what the Germans had done, what the experience was. I figured that would be used in some future legal action. Didn't know exactly, but they took the statement. I tried to find out about that afterwards, but could not find out anything as to what happened to it.

MH: So you never formally testified against them.

MB: I never formally testified. That's one of the things that bothers, when they have the Nuremberg trials, that we were never called to testify against the commandant and the assistant commandant. But they were—you probably heard that they were sentenced to death, but then the sentence was commuted after a few years.

MH: So many of the sentences were commuted of the Nazi war criminals.

MB: Uh-huh.

MH: There's nothing I've read that explains why, why they just didn't hang them.

MB: Well, I was in Buffalo, and Wernher von Braun was there at Bell Aircraft, working on rockets. I believe it was a question of whether Russians were going to get the German scientists, or we were gonna get them. It was part of what went on. And so, Germans were taken care of by commuting sentences, and we got certain German scientists that would come to the United States. That's the only thing I can think of.

MH: They put you on a ship. A regular troop transport or hospital ship?

MB: As near as we could determine, it was the *Queen Mary*. It had been there in Glasgow for refurbishing of the engines and whatever at the end, and this was their initial trip after being retrofitted. And we were told that, as prisoners of war, we were gonna get special accommodations. We did, all the way down, but we had places, at least, what you call it, like a hammock arrangement. We didn't have to switch, like some of the fellows who were on the decks. There were fellows on the decks, and then they would switch with the guys in the bunks for—

MH: The “hot beds.” You'd get into a warm bed from somebody who just got out of it.

MB: Essentially. Essentially.

MH: So you didn't have to do that?

MB: We didn't have to do that.

MH: You came back in style on the *Queen Mary*.

MB: We came back in style, but—

MH: Did it come into New York harbor?

MB: Came into New York harbor.

MH: What was that like?

MB: That was the most exciting thing, seeing that Statue of Liberty, and we had—you didn't have that as a Vietnam veteran. It was very exciting. The fireboats spraying, and they had a band on one of the boats, and what do you think it was playing? The popular song of the time, “Don't Fence Me In.” (laughs)

MH: Oh, shit! (laughs)

MB: But we ended up at Camp Kilmer in Jersey.

MH: You're not a stretcher case; you're walking?

MB: At that point, I'm walking, yes. Yeah. I had a cousin who was in the Air Force and was able to track down where I was through the APO number, and showed up just shortly at the hospital before I left, the first day I was out of bed. And so, he communicated with the family, and they knew I was alive. He was able to give a verbal report.

MH: Did your family come to Kilmer when you got there?

MB: Yes. I had an uncle who was a major working at a desk job in New York, and he was able to get the family, when they found out where I was, disembarked, came over, and welcomed me. I think he got me out a few hours before I was gonna get a pass for a short period. So, that was nice. I had the uniform they gave me, and he said, "That's the only thing you have?" and I said, "Yes, that's all I have." So, he took me and had a shirt and slacks made for me in the officers' quarters. It was a very nice outfit, and he got me some ribbons to put on with the Purple Heart so he could invite me up to the office where the armchair generals were sitting and say, "See the fighting man in my family?"

MH: How long were you at Kilmer?

MB: Not very long. I was put on a recuperation furlough, and—

MH: What rank were you at this point?

MB: They made me a corporal.

MH: They couldn't even give you sergeant stripes? You'd think after all this, they'd make you a sergeant.

MB: And I was reporting to a dispensary in downtown Manhattan, Whitehall Street.

MH: Tell me about the reunion with your parents and your brother and sister. You have the twin brother and sister?

MB: I have a sister and brother who are twins, yes.

MH: And that's—those are the only siblings?

MB: Only siblings, yes.

MH: So what was the reunion like and where was it?

MB: Well, they came with my parents to Kilmer with my uncle, and I guess he was able to get a pass so I could leave with them, because they were going to do that anyway, I guess, twenty-four hours later or something. So, that was very exciting.

MH: Did anybody warn your family what you looked like?

MB: Well, I was glad that I had spent the six weeks or so in the hospital in England, because at least I'd come back to about 100 pounds at that point or close to it, and didn't look as bad as I had before. My feet had healed to a great extent, and I was able to put on shoes.

MH: You weren't walking with a cane or anything?

MB: No, no. But my uncle took me into a supply outfit, and they got a pair of shoes for me that were more comfortable, and then I was able to go.

MH: What was your mother's reaction to you?

MB: Oh, my mother was a very emotional person. She carried on a bit.

MH: And this is in public.

MB: In public. (laughs)

MH: Yet you were thoroughly embarrassed.

MB: No, I—it was kind of an overwhelming situation, just seeing the family and that sort of thing, and I know what my mother was like.

MH: At what point did the realization strike you that had actually made it, when many of your friends didn't?

MB: Well, it came slowly. There was this fellow who had died in the camp. His uncle was an attorney in Manhattan, and he contacted us to come to his office, and he was getting depositions to bring forth to the military, I guess, or on behalf of this nephew who was killed or died because of the treatment. And I got to talk with a half a dozen of the other fellows who had made it—

MH: Who had not made it?

MB: Who had made it.

MH: Who had made it, okay.

MB: Who were invited to his office, and I had contact with Seymour Fahrer.

MH: You said F-a-r-r?

MB: F-a-h-r-e-r.

MH: That's the guy you tried to escape with.

MB: Right, right.

MH: So, you saw him.

MB: Yeah, he lived in New York, and we communicated. And, let's see. But I really couldn't talk to other people about it. I attribute it to some extent to walking down the street shortly after I got home, and someone said to me, "Oh, yeah, I heard you were there overseas," and he said, "Those pictures we saw in the newsreels"—as you know, at that time, the news was newsreels in the theaters. "Those things didn't really happen. That was propaganda, right?" So, how can I talk to people who believe that these pictures of the camps were propaganda, American propaganda? And it wasn't a pleasant thing to talk about, so I didn't talk about it.

And a matter of fact, not too long ago, a friend of mine who was declared 4-F during the war because he had a damaged hand from some accident and wasn't taken into service, and he remembers coming over to the house, and he says, "I remember your sitting in the chair in the living room and you were like a blank stare." I couldn't tell. I had to take other people's reports of what it was like and how they saw me, and gathered information that way. I just—I guess I was in a kind of fugue state for a while. I knew what I had to do and build myself up.

And the military was very nice. I mean, I reported to Whitehall Street, and they took care of me as well as possible. I had some back pain, and they strapped me up. And the only thing is, one day when they unstrapped me, I guess—I don't know what it was, but I just passed out on them, right there at the dispensary. They had to bring me around again. But at that point, I knew I had to do things, and I had to get myself back. And then that recuperation furlough, I got extended, and then came to an end, and I was told I was gonna report to North Carolina to Asheville, where they had a recuperation center. I went down there, and they checked me over, and as I say, they saw whatever was going on in my lungs, and I was re-hospitalized right there in North Carolina and stayed there. That was what, September, October? And I think at the beginning of November, they sent me up to a hospital on Long Island, and I was eventually discharged from there.

And then by that time, I found out I was gonna be discharged. I was very strongly desirous that I could get back into college, and I could maybe get in in February. Buffalo accepted me for February. Most of the other schools were being crowded with discharged veterans, and for whatever reason, they told me I couldn't get in until September. And I had a friend of the family who was up in Buffalo at the dental school, and he said, "That sounds good. I'll go there," and in the beginning of February, I was back in school. Discharged the end of December.

MH: Going to school with a lot of other returning GIs?

MB: A lot of GIs, yeah.

MH: Did that make it more comfortable for you?

MB: I think so, yeah. We could talk about our different experiences.

MH: When they discharged you from the Army, do they put any conditions on it such as Norm told me about, that you couldn't talk about your experiences?

MB: See, I don't recall signing anything. At that time, I wanted to get out. Whatever they gave me, I didn't look at.

MH: Trust me, I relate.

MB: (laughs) I couldn't wait to get out of uniform. I got a blue suit. And—

MH: But nobody told you, "Don't talk about your experiences."

MB: I don't remember anybody saying it specifically. As I say, it wasn't something I wanted to talk about. And really—

MH: You became a clinical psychologist.

MB: Well, I went to college and became a clinical psychologist, yes.

MH: At what point did it strike you that maybe talking about it could be a good thing?

MB: I don't know. I guess it was just—I focused in on my future and what I would do. And as I say, initially, I went—when I was in Columbia, I got into rehabilitation and worked at a rehabilitation facility in Manhattan. And so, that would be my future. Actually, as I say, from there, I got this opportunity at the University of Buffalo with the medical school, and went up. I was assistant director of the department and responsible for integrating the behavioral sciences with the medical. And life was better.

MH: I forgot to ask: Why did you change your name from Brimberg to Brooks, and when?

MB: At the end of my undergraduate program, I was applying to graduate school, and I was able to complete my undergraduate program in a little over two years. That was one of the nice things about Buffalo. They had these inter-sessions where you could take credit. So, I got there in February; by the end of August, I finished two years of chemistry. And so, I got out in a little over two years. I got my bachelor's degree. So, it was June coming up. May, I saw I was going to be short a couple credits, so I'd have to go during the summer session.

But I wrote letters asking for applications to graduate schools, and I wasn't getting a response just asking for the application, and someone said to me, "Maybe it's because of your name." I said, "Well, I had written letters." I got postcards and sent out postcards to the same schools under "Brent," "Brandt," and "Brooks," and I got immediate responses to the postcards. So, I said to my wife—and her brother was planning to change his name. I guess he was a salesman, and I guess he felt it would be helpful to him. And I said, "Maybe it is the name. How do you feel about changing it?" She says, "Fine," so I put in for a name change.

MH: It's irony to the nth degree. You were put in a camp because you were a Jew, and now you have to come home and deny that you're a Jew.

MB: That's right, it's an experience. Well, I learned about camouflage, and I felt if this is helpful, the hell with it.

MH: How do you control the anger?

MB: It's dealing with the situation, and I guess that is what got me through. Just doing something to cope and deal with the situation.

MH: When did you get married?

MB: I got married in forty-seven [1947].

MH: While you were still an undergraduate?

MB: I was still an undergraduate, yeah, but I was getting close to finishing up.

MH: Is this the girlfriend you had before you went to war?

MB: No. I had met her—it was an interesting story. This friend of mine I told you about, who had a damaged hand and didn't go into service, said he had arranged to go to this adult camp during the summer. I got back in June, and he wanted me to go in July.

MH: Like in the Catskills?

MB: In Connecticut, Milford, Connecticut. And I said, "Gee, I don't really feel like going away." He talked to my mother, and she said, "Yeah, that would be a good idea. Go with Harold." So—

MH: At that point, you're, like, twenty-one years old?

MB: No, not yet.

MH: So you're wenty years old, going on fifty.

MB: I don't know. At any rate, I went with my friend Harold. On the train, there were many GIs around at the time, and we were looking for a place to sit, and we're walking through the train, and it was crowded. And we see two seats at the end of this one car, and we walked down and there were a couple of sweaters on one seat. They faced each other, and my friend Harold and I looked, and I said, "Gee, nothing on this seat. Why don't we sit down, and if somebody comes in, we'll move." So, who walks in but another soldier and his girlfriend?

We start talking, and it turns out they're going out to the same place. She had a number of friends up there. She was a girlfriend to the soldier, and they were planning to get married. And while we're talking, we found out we're going to the same place. So, when we got up there, there were a bunch of girls, and one of them was his sister. I guess from what she told me, he said, "Be nice to this guy, he's been through a lot." So, we had a pleasant week talking and doing the things that we could.

MH: Did you tell her?

MB: Well, I don't think I made much of it. I don't remember really talking about it, just that I'd been in the hospital and I was up there. And she said later on she wondered why I didn't play ball or do anything. Of course, I wasn't up to it at the time. But we had a pleasant week, mostly because he was a fellow soldier, and we were talking about going to reassign to Japan, and he said, "I don't think I wanna go." What're you gonna do? He said, "I don't know, but I'm not going to go." He had been—I don't know if he was in the Battle of the Bulge or just alongside of it. So, we talked about our future plans a little bit. And then we enjoyed the week, and I got to like his sister, and I guess she had some positive feelings toward me, and we communicated and then—

MH: The sister of—

MB: Of the fellow—

MH: The soldier's girlfriend. And her name?

MB: What?

MH: Her name was? The woman you married.

MB: Toby Schlissel.

MH: Schlissel?

MB: Yes.

MH: S-c-h-l-i-s-s—

MB: S-c-h-l-i-s-s-e-l, yeah, that was.

MH: How long after you met did you propose?

MB: About a year, I guess.

MH: At some point, you told her what you'd been through.

MB: Oh, yeah. Yes. Well, I guess her brother told her, because we had talked about it on the ride that I'd been in a prisoner of war camp. He asked me about the ribbons I had, and I don't know whether my friend Harold had said anything. But I don't remember it being any kind of issue. Really, we were in war, and that was it.

MH: Could you shut it off that way, or did it come back to you?

MB: Well, I didn't talk about it. I was dealing with my own dreams and nightmares and body discomforts and that sort of thing.

MH: When did the dreams and nightmares start?

MB: Oh, pretty soon, pretty soon.

MH: Still in England or after you got back?

MB: Yeah, I think they started in England, and when I got back, then it was something to deal with.

MH: Was there any help dealing with it?

MB: No.

MH: Did you tell anybody?

MB: I don't think I really made an issue of it with anybody, no. I didn't think—that was life, and I had to deal with it.

MH: Was there a point at which, later on, someone asked you to recall these things?

MB: Well, I know I was doing graduate work, and I was told I might get psychiatric help at the VA, and I saw this psychiatrist who I felt was a total zero. And I gave up on that. I just dealt with it myself. Again, it's something I had to deal with. Life.

MH: Now they have a name for it.

MB: PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder], yes.

MH: They didn't have a name back then, not a good name.

MB: Correct. Right.

MH: Do you recall—you're a psychologist.

MB: Well, I became a psychologist.

MH: You became a psychologist. So, at some point, you realized they'd now put a label on you, what you have.

MB: Yeah, that was much later, much later.

MH: How does that affect you? When you suddenly realize, there it is, that's me.

MB: Yeah, that's me, but I guess it's different when you've lived it and you have to deal with it. I still go to an ex-POW group at the VA hospital, and all have PTSD. But—

MH: These are the vets from World War II, Korea and Vietnam?

MB: They could be, but we don't see the Vietnam or Korea people, and we wonder about that. As a matter of fact, we have concern about the Vietnam veterans that are homeless,

and I guess experiencing whatever they experienced as a result and now find themselves homeless. We were speaking to the powers that be at the hospital and found out that they do have a program, and we thought they didn't. But they do have some social workers who are assigned to seek out homeless veterans and see what they could do. We feel that there's a crime that there should be any homeless veterans. So, we discuss these things—and some of the fellows are still having much more difficulty than I am, you know: the dreams that come back.

MH: Are there other guys in this group who were put into the slave labor camps or only POWs?

MB: No, no, I think they were just POWs. I don't know any of that. I think I'm the only one that really had that kind of experience.

MH: What was it like? I mean, it was probably what, fifty years from the time, from after World War II until this group came about?

MB: Maybe. It was about fifty years when I heard about a group at the Buffalo VA hospital. The Buffalo VA hospital, that's right. They started a program where they were contacting ex-POWs, and they had a day where they invited us in and talked about the services the VA had for ex-POWs. And there was a group formed up there that I started to go to, and I had a friend of mine who was a Navy lieutenant who had to go into the hospital. He had a bleeding ulcer, and when I went to visit him, he said, "Why don't you make use of the VA? You're entitled. You had a terrible experience." So, that's when I started going to the VA a little bit.

I never thought much about it. I went to private physicians because I had intestinal—a lot of intestinal difficulty afterwards. That was one of the tough things to deal with while I was going to school, watching what food I ate and having all kinds of problems. But I never thought of the VA. And then, of course, they built a new VA hospital across from the med school in Buffalo, and it became a little bit more prominent in the area in terms of facility that would be available. But I had a number of medical issues, and I just went to private physicians.

MH: Do you remember the first time you sat down and told your story in your group?

MB: Well, I'm trying to think in terms of sequence. I think it was the fifty years that the war was over. I saw an article in the Buffalo papers that somebody had written in about his experiences as a military person, and I'm not sure exactly what motivated. I said,

“Gee, I should write a story,” which I did and sent it into the newspapers. Got paid for it, too. And I had a lot of contact at that point with other guys, because they saw the story, and a number of things came together about the same time, with the VA having an aggressive program to bring in ex-POWs and provide services. So, that’s about when I started using VA services. I had some—I went up there, I know, for dental work, and that was terrific, because they had some people from the dental school working there, and helped save my teeth.

MH: But sitting down and telling the story?

MB: Yeah, that—I did when I found out about the POW group, and I guess my story, of course, was so much different than all the others. But when I was introduced to the group, one of the things you had to do was tell your story. So, that’s when it came out.

MH: Did everybody believe you?

MB: I think so. I think so. I don’t think I—I never elaborated on the story to make an issue over some of the events. They did know that it was unusual in that 350 of us ended up in a concentration camp; that was most unusual. But I never really made the issue about the suffering that was experienced. I really didn’t talk about the weight loss and that sort of thing.

*Mp3 file 2 ends; mp3 file 3 begins.*

MH: You seem accepting, adjusted to whatever happened to you. Norm makes no bones about the fact that he was filled with rage and he still is very angry. And when he agreed to talk to me, he said, “Every time I talk, maybe a little bit of the anger goes away, so I’m happy to talk to you.” But what he said to me is the notion that somebody had control over him that way, has essentially cost him a normal life for the rest of his life, and impacted his wife and his children.

MB: Yeah.

MH: And you don’t seem that way.

MB: Well, when Roger Cohen talked to me, he also said that I don't have these strong, angry feelings.<sup>2</sup> I guess, I don't know, I must have worked them through or something. As I say, war is hell, that's the way it is. It's not a human condition. It's—and I became very anti-war. I don't see it really solving problems, but if you're attacked—

And my father was a person who said to me growing up, "If there's a fight, get away from it. Don't involve yourself in it." I think my mother was a little bit more of a fighter about things. And I would really avoid any fights. We lived in Brooklyn in some tough neighborhoods for short periods of time, and I knew a guy who was a kind of bully, who picked on me, and one day I lashed out, and I hit him. Fortunately, hit him in the nose, and he started to bleed. And he took off, and I wasn't bothered anymore. And I guess that was a learning experience for me, that I guess you have to stand up for yourself sometimes. And that's been my life. You cope with the situation, and if you have to stand up, stand up and be a person.

MH: Did you have children?

MB: I have two daughters.

MH: You passed on that lesson to them?

MB: I don't know. (laughs) I don't know. I never made an issue of it. I never really talked to them for many years about it, but they learned about their father's experience.

MH: From you or from your wife?

MB: I think a lot from my wife, and then when I became involved with things, it was about the fiftieth anniversary, and there was the school putting on a program in the schools. Now I'm blocking. The girl who was—Anne Frank. The book came out, I guess, and there was talk about Anne Frank, and they had a whole ceremony regarding Anne Frank and her experiences. In the schools, they put on a remembrance, I guess, of World War II and how Jews were treated and that sort of thing, for the community. And the Holocaust Center contacted me. I don't remember how they got my name, but they asked me if I would participate, and I said yes, I would. They had films showing the German years, World War II, and they had the Anne Frank exhibit, and they had a number of people speaking. They had a woman at the university whose family helped American

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Cohen is the author of *Soldiers and Slaves: American POWs Trapped by the Nazis' Final Gamble* (Knopf, 2005).

flyers get back to England across the Channel. They had a fellow who was a youngster on the *Spirit of St. Louis*, the ship that got sent back, Holocaust survivors, and myself.<sup>3</sup>

MH: This is here in South Florida?

MB: No, that was up in Buffalo. And they took over a gym of a school and invited all the schools in the area to send students. And they had us speak to them, and I was asked to tell my story, and it was very difficult. Emotionally, I broke down, but it was therapeutic, and I really began to talk about it at that point. And I think that's what contributed to my writing the story to the newspapers, because they started printing some stories at that point. So, as I say, it was a therapeutic experience for me.

And I had a friend who was a virologist at the med school, originally from Canada, a terrific guy. I forget how he learned that I had been a POW. He started pumping me about it and said, "You know, you've gotta tell your story," and he kept after me. He said, "Tell your story." And so, I had a number of things occur to me, and I found it very helpful. And I began to realize that people should know about these events, and it's well to come from somebody who experienced them. And it could be helpful for young people to really understand history from this. (phone rings)

### ***Pause in recording***

MB: That's pretty good.

MH: These are amazing. You were in a very elite group. The subtitle to the book I'm writing is—at least, I hope the subtitle will be *The Final American Witnesses to the Holocaust*. After our group is gone, there are no more Americans who can say, "It really happened. It happened to us. This is what it did. You can't deny it."

MB: Yeah.

MH: Are you concerned that people will forget it?

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<sup>3</sup> Brooks means the MS *St. Louis*, a German ocean liner; in 1939 it sailed from Germany to Cuba with 937 Jewish refugees, who were refused entry to Cuba and then to the United States. The captain, Gustav Schröder, refused to return to Germany until the passengers were given entry to some other country: ultimately, they were dispersed between the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. This is the subject of the 1976 movie *Voyage of the Damned*, based on the 1974 book of the same title by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts.

MB: Well, in a way, that's why I have become so involved with the speakers bureau at the VA hospital and the Holocaust Center that operates here in Florida. They cover Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties, and they arrange for students to come and participate in programs. I get out to speak to classes. At this time of the year, I'll have a lot of them, because apparently this is when the history programs get into World War II or something. And there's so little in their history books, like a sentence maybe, that there was a World War II. And the teachers seem to be appreciative, and realize that the teachers weren't—they didn't experience it, and so we try and give them a flavor of what the times were like. So different than the Vietnam War times or the Korean times or—at least we knew who the enemy was—it was quite clear—and that the United States was really threatened with existence at the time, and that so much of the world was involved in war at that time.

So, as I said, I began talking a little bit about it, and gradually became convinced how important it was that people like myself get out and speak and let people know what our experiences were. Of course, when [Charles] Guggenheim did the film—the documentary—that and then Roger Cohen doing the book, I learned how significant it was that people like myself get out and speak, because they hear it directly.<sup>4</sup>

MH: Have you run into people who, in this day and age, say, “It's nonsense; didn't happen”?

MB: On occasion. And I say, “It's too obvious. I don't understand why you feel that way,” that's all. I mean, there's too much evidence.

MH: If you hadn't been captured, there's a good chance you would've been in the unit that went on to liberate Dachau.

MB: That's correct. My unit liberated Dachau, did you know that? The 42<sup>nd</sup>.

MH: I was just at their reunion in Mobile [Alabama].

MB: That's right, that's right. Larry Rosen—yeah.

MH: It dawned on me that, had that not happened, you would've been on the other end of this business.

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<sup>4</sup> *Berga: Soldiers of Another War*, which aired on PBS in 2003.

MB: That's correct.

MH: What haven't I asked you about that you wish I had asked?

MB: What I wish you would've asked me?

MH: Yes.

MB: I really don't know. You've gotten the story. It was one of my life experiences, and I guess I can't tell you how fortunate I feel that I'm still around. Sometimes I think about it, and it boggles my mind.

MH: Do you think about the guys you left there?

MB: Oh, yes, and the close calls I had, like this bullet coming down between Ed and myself, and the guy next to me having the bullet go through his helmet, that got through the strafing that time. There were so many close calls. Even when we attempted the escape from the group, that we weren't killed. The hate that existed at that time—but there were some people, I guess, just accepted that we were prisoners, and they didn't want to kill us outright at that moment. I don't know. I can't tell you all the events.

MH: How do you feel about Germans?

MB: Well, I had a lot of hate. I did have a lot of hate. I used to have the dreams where I see the commandant pinned up against the wall, and I would carve him up with a knife. So, I had those feelings that I had to dispense with, get rid of somehow. But, again, as I say, I guess I just hate war.

MH: Were you one of the Vietnam War protestors?

MB: I was anti-war at the time, and I think what got me more upset is that it was a trumped-up reason for going into war. That whole Tonkin Gulf business was fraudulent.

MH: And now?

MB: And what's—

MH: What's going on now?

MB: Now, the same thing, with [George W.] Bush. And it scares me with Bush, in terms of how close his behavior has been to Hitler in terms of legally making rules and regulations in violation of constitutional law. And that the Congress didn't stand up more to him with some of the things that he's done. When they pass a law that says he shall go to court and prove the need to examine someone's communications, and just disregard it, to me, this is Hitler behavior, and it's scary.

MH: Does away with habeas corpus?

MB: Right. Right. To me, it's frightening. And I've written letters to Congressmen, and I'm very upset with Congress in not taking some kind of action. I mean, with [Bill] Clinton, they gave him the business because he fooled around with a girl [Monica Lewinsky]. I mean, compare to what's gone on in this administration. To me, it's revolting.

MH: When did you have your last nightmare?

MB: Let's see. I had a—I guess it's what you'd call it. I had a bad one, it's now close to ten years, when I flipped out of bed, and I cut my eye in the middle of the night and didn't realize how bad it was until my wife came after me and said, "Where are you?" I just, "Just taking care of something," and she came out to see what I was doing. I had to go in and get about eight stitches. I hit the corner of the night table.

MH: It was a dream about being back in the camp?

MB: Well, it was a dream about—I don't know if it was the camp. I felt something coming at me, armaments or something, shrapnel or something that was coming, and I guess I flipped out of bed and caught the night table. But every once in a while, I'll have a dream. At least now I can cope with it. Sleep is not always easy, but it's—compared to what it was, it's nothing.

MH: Anything else you want to say?

MB: I don't know what things I might tell you. You've got my story. It's what I could do that would be useful, and that's why I say I go out on these talks and try to get people to understand that there has to be some alternative to solving problems, and more. You know, I'd been excited that the U.N. [United Nations] might do something constructive, very perturbing in terms of what goes on at the U.N.

MH: You haven't been back to Germany.

MB: No, I have not gone to Germany.

MH: Have you been to Israel?

MB: I've been to Israel, I've been to a lot of European countries. Been to Japan.

MH: What was the experience like, going to Israel?

MB: Well, thrilling in terms of what people can do of a constructive nature to change the land and at least find a place where they could feel they could not be persecuted. And, as I say, just the constructive nature of the situation.

MH: Did you go to Yad Vashem?

MB: Yes.

MH: And?

MB: And, well, it's something I experienced. (laughs) And I know how many other people have experienced other kinds of things. I remember wondering about why the Jews didn't do more, but learned that many of these camps, they came from different countries. They didn't even communicate. Well, they spoke different languages. One of the political prisoners who was there at Berga had said one of the things that struck them was how the Americans seemed to be a cohesive group and supported each other, which

didn't exist with them. So, I guess those things were very significant. They're little things you might not really pay attention to, but they are so significant in terms of the behavior of people. As I say, I learned about behavior of people under stress, what it was like with us, and who stood up to it and who didn't, and the psychological effects with attitude toward whether you're able to survive or not.

I don't know if you're aware, but more of the very young guys didn't make it, compared to the older—you know, there was a range of maybe ten years. But they seemed to have more ties in terms of family in terms of need to come back and be with their wives or family because of whatever the connections were. So, they survived more than younger fellows who more easily gave up. And as I say, these kinds of experiences gave me a feeling about the psychology of people and how emotions and my own personal experiences, as I said to you, where I couldn't even get food past my teeth.

MH: You saw people at Berga who would go out of their way to help other people, and others who were just to themselves?

MB: Yes, absolutely.

MH: It was just their nature.

MB: I guess their nature, and how you cope with a stressful situation.

MH: Did you ever find a point where you had to make a decision whether you'd be one or the other?

MB: I never thought about it in that way. It was just more afterward, recognizing the differences. I knew how I had to behave, what I had to do, and—

MH: Which was?

MB: To do what I could to help others, like I said to you with Seymour Fahrer, getting him to give up cigarettes for food. He talks about it because he says I saved his life; you know, he feels like I helped save his life.

MH: He's still alive?

MB: Yes.

MH: Where is he?

MB: He lives out on Long Island. And that we were able to help some others, carrying them when they felt very weak and couldn't walk. Because it was important to be capable at that time, because the Germans didn't seem to care. As I say, they dumped you. And they found others left in various places along the road. I learned that much later. I didn't think they had left anybody that way, but they evidently did. Because I had estimated that there were 100-some-odd guys left at the end, out of 350, and I went to the archives in Maryland, and I don't know—are you aware that the National Archives have all the military records are in—I don't know, Archives 2 or something at the University of Maryland [NARA College Park].

MH: No, I wasn't.

MB: Well, they have all the military records. I went to look up and found the 11<sup>th</sup>—a lot of stuff I found out was cleansed records, military records. Don't ask me why, but I did find records of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armament on the date I was liberated, finding that there was a memorandum that they liberated 140. And so, that gave me the exact number.

MH: I thought, according to the book—now I don't remember the number, but I thought it said something like seventy-two died.

MB: Well, I said that to Roger Cohen, because I said I verified the fact there were 140 of us at the end, learning about others who were left along the road.

MH: Left for dead along the road.

MB: Just left. Some died along the way. So, to me, I estimate maybe 200 survived. He says more. I would say at the most that they found 140 of us at the end and maybe sixty along the way, so 150 who died in the camp. That's how I put together the figures. I don't know where he got his verification from, but I know we've buried groups of guys along the way. Dug out a hole and dumped bodies in.

MH: On the final march?

MB: On the march.

MH: On the march. What about at camp? Did you have to bury those?

MB: No, I never buried anybody in the camp. There were some fellows, I know, just left out, and I guess the Germans left them out as an example to us of what would happen if we tried to escape.

MH: But on the march, they made you stop and bury—dig holes?

MB: Yeah, we buried guys along the way. And of course it was the one situation where I wasn't directly involved, but some of the other fellows went to bury some guys in the Kirchen cemetery, I guess, and didn't know about the religious segregation there, and they were kicked out. They wouldn't allow—whoever was in charge of that place, wouldn't allow them to bury any of our guys there.

MH: This is a cemetery at Berga?

MB: No, along the road.

MH: Along the road, okay.

MB: Along the road.

MH: I'm surprised the Germans let you stop and bury people.

MB: Well, to some extent. I guess I don't know why, when or how, but maybe they were military and they recognized that. I don't know. But so, that occurred, and I always wondered whatever the heck happened in actuality, because these events, you know, you block out some. And, as I say, some of the fellows tell me, "Gee, you remember a lot," and some of them have blanked out completely. They don't remember it at all.

MH: Whatever it takes to cope.

MB: I guess, yeah. A fellow said, "Listen, nothing."

MH: Unless there's anything else, I think I probably have the story.

*End of interview*