

April 2008

# Robert Duoos oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, April 3, 2008

Robert S. Duoos (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud\\_oh](http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh)

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

## Scholar Commons Citation

Duoos, Robert S. (Interviewee) and Hirsh, Michael (Interviewer), "Robert Duoos oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, April 3, 2008" (2008). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 50.  
[http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud\\_oh/50](http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/50)

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

# **COPYRIGHT NOTICE**

**This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.**

**Copyright, 2011, University of South Florida.  
All rights, reserved.**

**This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.**

**For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.**

Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: C65-00034  
Interviewee: Robert Duoos (RD)  
Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)  
Interview dates: April 3, 2008  
Interview location: Conducted by telephone  
Transcribed by: Kathy Kirkland  
Transcription date: October 2, 2008  
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon  
Audit Edit date: April 6, 2010  
Final Edit by: Dorian Thomas  
Final Edit date: April 8, 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:** Just so I have everything on tape, can you give me your full name and spell it for me, please?

**Robert Duoos:** Well, my full name is Robert, common spelling, initial S., and the last name is Duoos, spelled Delta-Uniform-Oboe-Oboe-Sierra, D-u-o-o-s.

MH: And they called you Bob?

RD: Yes.

MH: And your address please? ... And your phone number is ... And your date of birth?

RD: January 15, 1923.

MH: And you were with the 80<sup>th</sup> [Infantry] Division?

RD: Yes.

MH: I was trying to remember how I got your name, and it might have been—do you know a man named Mel Rappaport?<sup>1</sup>

RD: Yes.

MH: That's how I got your name.

RD: Yes, I know him through correspondence: e-mail and letters.

MH: I haven't heard—

RD: I never met him.

MH: I haven't heard from him in quite a while; in fact, I sent him an e-mail to see if he was okay, and I never got a response. In any event, where were you before you went in the service?

RD: Where was I?

MH: Yes, where were you growing up?

RD: Well, I was born and grew up on a farm in Minnesota. Following high school, I was employed in St. Paul, Minnesota, and from there into the Army.

MH: It was a family farm?

RD: Yes.

MH: Animals?

---

<sup>1</sup> Melvin Rappaport was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00110.

RD: Dairy.

MH: Dairy, okay. How did you end up in the military, then?

RD: Well, after Pearl Harbor, we all assumed that we were eventually going to serve, and I was drafted in December forty-two [1942].

MH: And where'd they send you?

RD: Camp [Fort] Campbell, Kentucky.

MH: And you were destined to do what?

RD: Well, we draftees formed the 20<sup>th</sup> Armored Division in Camp Campbell, Kentucky. It was formed, a brand new division, in the spring of 1942—forty-three, I should say, 1943. I got my training there. We were trained to fight in Africa, and with the turn of events there, well, we were then trained to go to Europe and fight in Europe.

MH: I'm curious, what's the difference in the training, or was it desert warfare versus—

RD: Desert warfare versus, you know, the invasion of France. Yeah, and we were in an armored outfit, going to Africa; when we went to France, we were plain ordinary infantry. And late in—early, I should say, early in forty-three [1943]—let me think about this a little. Forty-four [1944], would it have been? I was part of a group of people transferred to the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in New Jersey. Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And there I was placed in reconnaissance troop, partly because of my training in the 20<sup>th</sup> Armored. We were in light tanks, armored reconnaissance, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Armored, and now I was in reconnaissance in the infantry.

MH: How'd you feel about going from armored to infantry?

RD: Didn't like it. Didn't like it. But fortunately, being in reconnaissance, the main difference was that instead of light tanks, we were in armored cars and Jeeps. So, we were mounted, where in infantry, of course, we were not mounted.

MH: Right.

RD: So we lived—our combat experience was one of living in a Jeep.

MH: When you say “living in a Jeep,” what do you mean?

RD: Well, a crew of three in a Jeep, and the Jeep was modified—it had a rack welded onto the back, which contained water cans, gasoline cans, rations. We had our baggage, musette bags—which we would call a backpack now—would be attached to the sides of the Jeep. The windshield was replaced with a quarter-inch thick steel shield with slots for viewing through them, and we carried all the necessities for life in that Jeep, and that’s where we lived. And the armored car, of course, they were equipped with the same thing. They were in a platoon, a reconnaissance platoon, and a reconnaissance platoon was made up of three M8 armored cars and six Jeeps: a total of nine vehicles. And the unit like this was out, we were doing the—we were called “sneak and peek.” We were out in front of the infantries trying to keep tabs on, contact with enemy and locate ’em, see what they were doing.

MH: Did you push through the enemy lines?

RD: Yes. We spent—most of our time was between our infantry and their lines, but there were times when we were behind their lines.

MH: I imagine quite often, the danger is getting shot by both sides.

RD: Yes, that—a friendly artillery was a factor a couple of times. But our biggest hazard was being ambushed. The Germans would set up ambushes. Our casualties, many of our casualties, were from ambush.

MH: Where did you initially land in Europe?

RD: In Scotland. We went over on the *Queen Mary*, landed at the Firth of Clyde—is that it?

MH: Yeah, the Firth of Clyde, right.

RD: Yeah, and from there we went into England—um, I'm trying to think of the name of the town right now. I can't think of it right offhand, but we spent one month in England. And then from there we went to Southampton and then across to Utah Beach. And we landed on Utah.

MH: On D-Day?

RD: On the second of August. Very fortunate that we were still in New Jersey on D-Day. But we landed there the second of August.

MH: Then what happens to you?

RD: Well, we spent the next 274 days on our way to Austria. We landed the second of August and went on through France and the Ardennes, across the Rhine, through Germany, and into Austria.

MH: Were you in the Battle of the Bulge?

RD: Yes.

MH: What's your most intense memory of that experience?

RD: Well, we were on the right flank of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on the seventeenth of December, expecting the counter-attack on the right flank. And that was—we were led to believe that's where it was going to happen, and of course it happened up north. On the eighteenth of December, we made a rapid move into Luxembourg. It was the first time we were able to use the headlights on our vehicles, drive as fast as we could, and just moved quickly from the right flank to the left flank into Luxembourg. And what I remember about that is that our ration was one D-ration bar, and a D-ration was a piece of hard chocolate the size of a large Hershey bar. And that's what we ate until we were settled in. And um, what I remember about it? Worst case of constipation I ever had in my life. (laughs)

MH: (laughs) From that chocolate bar?

RD: Yeah. It was so hard, you had to use your bayonet to chip off pieces, and I don't how it affected the other guys, but it—

So then, once we got into Czechoslovakia, into Luxembourg, our first assignment was to locate the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which was somewhere in Luxembourg. They knew where they were, but nobody else did. Our first assignment was to find them. And that was routine; we were pretty much on the—I guess you'd say the south side of the Bulge. We didn't get into Belgium. But we were on the edge of those troops, so we had it—compared to those in Belgium, we had it relatively easy.

MH: Were you aware of what was going on with the other units at the time? Did you know how bad it was?

RD: I cannot remember. I can't recall. I know we were coping with the weather, and we knew it was serious business. We had soldiers—our lines were so thin on Christmas Day, we had two of our guys captured by Germans in the middle of the day. And they were—a lot of our missions were outposting. They were outposting, and we found out later when we recaptured them, like in April or March or April, that they were doing their usual thing, outposting, when they were captured by German soldiers wearing American uniforms, U.S. uniforms. And the Germans just walked up to them and took them prisoners. And those kinds of things—our lines were pretty thin.

MH: But you didn't find out about—well, there were some warnings about German commandos doing that sort of stuff, so I don't know if they got to your unit.

RD: Not that I remember, no.

MH: Right. So, I was just reading a biography of George Patton, and he was talking about some of the measures that American forces would take to try and stay warm, because he said it was obviously one of the worst winters they'd ever had. What unusual things did you do to keep warm in that situation?

RD: Well, I remember sleeping on the hood of the Jeep because it was warm. We were a part of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry but we were not infantry, thank goodness, because those guys were sleeping in the snow. We would manage somehow, usually, to get into some kind of shelter. We would move into a house and stay in a house whenever it was possible, or into some kind of shelter. But being a small unit of a platoon of thirty people, it was fairly easy to accommodate us, relatively easy to accommodate us, as opposed to an infantry company of 120 people.

MH: When you're in the Battle of the Bulge, I mean, do you believe it could be that bad?

RD: Well, you dealt with reality, I guess. I don't remember what we really believed or what we expected. We did best we could under the circumstances. Like I said, we lived out of a Jeep, so we were able to carry a bedroll, which was an Army blanket wrapped up in a shelter-half, and when you slept at night, we at least had that Army blanket and shelter-half. Always slept in my helmet. I never—you know, you slept with your head in a helmet. And you had your rifle—we had carbine rifles—and we slept with those, and of course we were armed. And we never took our shoes off. The only time we took our shoes off was in what we considered to be a safe situation. And sometimes that was a mistake.

I know that during the Bulge, one time I helped a couple of the fellows who were wounded to an aid station. After we got them to the aid station, I helped lift this one fellow off the litter by putting arms underneath his waist to lift him off; it so happens that part of the litter was full of blood, and so my sleeves were soaked in blood up to the elbows. And it was exactly thirty days later that I got to change my shirt. So we went for a month at a time without a change of clothes; and, as I say, taking our shoes off at night was a luxury. We didn't get to do that too often.

MH: Did everybody smell pretty ripe, or was it just so cold that you didn't notice?

RD: We didn't notice, no. I have tried to recall how often we had a change of clothes, and you know, I can only remember it happening twice: once in France, early on in France, and then once in Luxembourg.

MH: They actually would bring you new uniforms, new fatigues?

RD: Well, I don't remember getting the new uniforms, exactly, other than underwear. But as far as during the Bulge and after the Bulge—after the Bulge, I wore a pullover sweater that I got out of a German department store, and some socks that I got out of a German store, where we were in the town. Of course, it was—they had fled; there were no Germans in the town when we got there, a small village. And I remember outfitting myself pretty much with clothes from the store, just helped myself. So, no.

MH: At what point, if at all, before you confronted it, did you know about the death camps or the Holocaust or slave labor camps?

RD: Well, towards the end of the war. It would have been mid-April, and we were—I have to look up names of the town now. Limbach, Mainz. We were scheduled to occupy a town; I think it was Limbach. And we were all set to move into it when, the night before—the night before we were to move into the town, we were told that was in Russian territory, and we had to leave it for the Russians. So, they reassigned us to go to Nuremberg.

En route back to Nuremberg, we had to go through Weimar. When we got into Weimar, we had a stroke of good luck. Our Jeep wasn't running. The company or troop continued on to Nuremberg and left us behind, with instructions to get the Jeep fixed and catch up. There happened to be an anti-aircraft maintenance unit on the edge of Weimar, and they left us with them. Gave us a box of 10-in-1 rations, and said, "Get your Jeep fixed and catch up."

MH: A box of what kind of rations?

RD: 10-in-1.

MH: What are 10-in-1?

RD: Ten meals in one box. There were three of us.

MH: Those are Ks or those are Cs?

RD: Well, they were different. They were—let me—they were more complete meals. They came in a box about, I suppose, ten inches deep and fifteen inches wide and twenty-four inches long: ten meals. And, at any rate, they left us with that and said, "Get the Jeep fixed and catch up." The three of us. So, now we're in the town of Weimar; it had been occupied for about—maybe it's about ten days. There were no enemy troops, so we went into town and we checked into a place called Elephant House.

MH: Elfin?

ED: Elephant.

MH: Oh, Elephant House, okay.

RD: Yeah, Elephant House. Some people refer to it as the Elephant Hotel, but I remember it as the Elephant House. My Jeep driver had two years of college in New Jersey before the Army and had some German. So, we went into the hotel and said we wanted a room in the hotel, the three of us, and they accommodated us. They were civilians, wearing suits, all men. We had our 10-in-1 rations and told them we wanted them to prepare us our meals while we were there, and we stayed on the second floor of the hotel.

We were the only American troops in the hotel. It was really dumb on our part. We were too dumb to realize that we were putting ourselves in jeopardy. The entire fourth floor of the hotel was reserved for Adolf Hitler and his staff when he was there, and it was strictly off limits. Nothing above the second floor was on limits for us. And we didn't realize these things. It was here, then, that we learned of Buchenwald.

MH: How did you hear about it?

RD: The aircraft maintenance people said there was this camp down the road about four miles, and we said we'd go down and take a look at it. And they had seen it. Now, this would have been about the seventeenth of April. The camp was liberated on the eleventh—tenth and eleventh. So, we got a vehicle from them and drove on down to the camp and took a walking tour, spent the afternoon there.

MH: What was your first sight of the place?

RD: Well, it was a surprise. We apparently had heard of these kinds of places, but seeing this was—we were surprised. The thing I remembered most was the strong smell of Lysol. Everything was draped with Lysol. And the inmates sitting around looking at us—there were quite a few U.S. troops in there the day we were there. Quite a few other outfits had come in from—well, the town had been occupied for a week or so, and so those people were in there, too. I don't know how many of us at one time, but probably twenty-five, forty, fifty of us. And we took a walking tour.

MH: The gates were open, or they were manned by Americans?

RD: No, everything was wide open. Everything was wide open.

MH: And the former prisoners weren't wandering around outside the gates?

RD: Yeah, they were wandering around. I had a camera but I didn't have much film. I had a roll of film in the camera, but not many shots, so I had to be very careful about the pictures I took, trying to find—I didn't want to take too many pictures. I was afraid I'd run out of film, but I did get a few pictures. I saw the crematorium and the bodies piled up waiting to be burned, and we took a tour of the hospital and went in there. I didn't take any pictures in the hospital: the lack of film.

MH: Did you have conversations with the inmates?

RD: Yes, but not immediately. We were told, we were warned, "Don't offer them any food. Solid food could kill them." And communications—well, the camp was set up in sectors by nationalities. There were the Belgians, there were the French, there was the Gypsies, different groups. And of course, they all spoke their own language, and they didn't approach us and we didn't approach them. And so, then when we—let me flash ahead here, speed track ahead a little. When we did catch up to our troop in Nuremberg, there I met the first inmate from the camp and talked to him.

MH: So this is way out of the camp?

RD: This was way out of the camp; this was back in Nuremberg. Now, what happened here was that one of the inmates was a fella from Paris, who was married to an American girl. This American girl was from, I think Jericho, New York. And she was acquainted to a fellow in our outfit, who was in G-3; his name was Major Cole Kerr. He had been commander of our recon group in the States and had been promoted to G-3 division; he was a major. And he knew this girl—husband, who was—his name was Count Roald Lubecec from Paris, France. He was a prisoner in the camp because he had helped American airmen who would be shot down in France, helped them escape; he was part of the French underground. And for that activity, he was put in Buchenwald.

Now, when Major Kerr learned of Buchenwald, he knew that Lubecec was in Buchenwald, he got one of our platoons—the recon platoon, the officer of the recon platoon—to take him to the camp to see if he could find Lubecec. So, they drove into the camp and one of the first people he met, standing there looking at him, looking for an American that he might know, see, so he met him there. Lubecec was in good enough condition that he could have gone back to Paris right then, but he said no, he wanted a chance to even the score, and asked for permission to go with our outfit for a while. So, he was in my platoon for ten days, two weeks, and while he was in the platoon we got

information from him. It turned out he spoke better English than some of our guys. (laughs) A well educated person. He gave us many details of life within the camp. And, I say, he stayed with us ten days or more.

MH: Do you remember any particular conversations you had with him?

RD: Well, a couple of—he talked about discipline, and one of the rules was that an inmate, if you were outdoors, had to have his head covered. The penalty for being uncovered was assassination. And he told of examples, where they had a fence around the camp with a double fence, with guard dogs between the fences, and of course a tower here and there for guards to—now, there was a no-man's land, a third wire, which I saw, which was probably twenty to thirty feet inside of the camp, and only about knee-high, just a low wire. The penalty, if anyone went into this area called no-man's land, the guards would shoot 'em.

So, what a German guard would do to amuse himself, he would take an inmate's cap and throw it into the no-man's land, and he'd say to the guy, "Where's your cap? You know what the penalty is for being outdoors without a cap?" and the guard would say "Assassination. What are you going to do?" The guy would say, "Well, I'll go get my cap." "Well, what's the penalty for being in no-man's land?" Be shot. And whatever his choice was would not be the right one. He would be shot. Those things happened.

And another incident: the outdoor latrine—I suppose they were all outdoors—he said were deep trenches. And there was a log situated over the trench; you'd sit on this log while you were using the latrine. And some of them, they were in such weakened condition they might lose their balance and fall into those latrines. There was a long pole, probably eight, ten feet long, lying by each latrine. The purpose of it was, if a person fell in, you put the log down in there and helped them get out. He said they would use it for another purpose: they would push the person under and that was it.

MH: The Nazis would do that.

RD: Yes. Those were two things that I remember that he discussed. He talked about interrogating inmates, and he said they would have female guards in the hospital, using a little torture. The torture was common, and they'd use females to crush one's testicles, for instance, to get you to talk. Those kinds of things.

MH: Do you recall how this man spelled his name?

RD: Yes, I've got the spelling here. Hold on a second.

MH: Sure.

RD: He went by the name of Count, C-o-u-n-t, Roald, R-o-a-l-d, Lubecec, L-u-b-e-c-e-c.

MH: L-u-b-e-c-e-c, okay.

RD: That's the spelling I have.

MH: How much time did you spend with him?

RD: Oh, about ten days. And he usually, you know, when we had breaks—we were on duty, we were patrolling, and he was riding along. But it was usually at nighttime, when we were down for the night.

MH: He had enough military experience that you weren't concerned about having an amateur with you?

RD: No, that was not a concern. In fact, we would have—we would take amateurs with us from time to time, for language purposes. We had a boy from Luxembourg, who happened to be at home in Luxembourg City when we entered. And he was a German soldier on the Russian front. And because of his language skills, and—(laughs) I don't know the exact explanation for it, but we took him with us as an interpreter, gave him an American uniform, got him some U.S. dog tags, and he spent the remainder of the war with us. He became a U.S. soldier by choice. He was defective—defecting—and chose to do that. He was not a true German; he was a Luxembourger, who chose to do this.

And we would have an occasional—I suppose you could say European—ride with us for purposes of communicating with the enemy. We were—you know, we could hear at night, sometimes, in situations. We could hear them talking, close enough so that they—we had no trouble at all communicating with Lubecec, though. And then, I was in contact with—let me get his name here—Pierre C.T. Verheye. Does that ring a bell with you?

MH: No. Pierre C.T.—

RD: P-i-e-r-r-e, initial C.T., last name V-e-r-h-e-y-e, and he was a political prisoner. I think he was Belgian. And I've got his number.

MH: His name actually shows up on a Google search.

RD: It does show up?

MH: Yup.

RD: Oh, I communicated with him; he was living in Tucson and we communicated: e-mail and corresponded a little. And he confirmed a few questions that I had.

MH: You met him in the camp?

RD: I didn't meet him, no. Not in person. But he furnished me with information that I wanted.

MH: To go back to the time that you were actually in the camp—

RD: Yeah?

MH: In talking with many, many soldiers who were there—I mean, the descriptions of bodies stacked like cordwood eventually seemed to become so commonplace that you're either numbed by it or they don't have an impact on you.

RD: No, it had an impact. Right now, I'm looking at a piled up like cordwood just outside the crematorium, and yeah, I took a picture of it. It's hard to believe. But it was hard to believe how emaciated they were. And the camp was self-liberated, you know that.

MH: Yes.

RD: And, according to Verheye, he said the total strength of the underground—they had underground—is 850 men in 171 sections of three to six men each, armed with ninety-one rifles and carbines, twenty pistols, one machine gun and ninety-six hand grenades. And then he goes on to talk about the sectors, 'cause there were twenty-five sectors: sixteen Yugoslav, nine Polish in the Green Sector. Red Sector was seventy-seven sections: thirty-seven Soviets, nineteen Soviet PWs, twenty-one Czechs, and so on. Blue Sector, Yellow Sector, Red Sector, Green Sector. And that underground went into effect on the tenth of April when the U.S. troops were approaching Weimar.

The German S.S. guards fled and left the camp in [the] control of the small number of German soldiers, young soldiers. And the underground overpowered 'em, put 'em in a prison, which they called the dungeon. A couple of these guys tried to play the part of being inmates. And, of course, inmates knew better and put 'em in the dungeon, and these two fellows hanged themselves. I have pictures of the two of 'em lying alongside the stacks. And what made me suspicious of them was that they were healthy looking. I thought that the inmates had killed 'em, but it turns out—I found out later that they had hanged themselves. And these pictures, they sent the pictures to Verheye and he found them helpful in determining who these individuals were some time later. But—

MH: Going back to your time walking around the camp, what other things did you see the memory of which still sticks with you?

RD: Well, in the hospital, I saw lampshades that were made from human skin, with tattoos, and they had every part of the human body displayed in alcohol jars, jars of alcohol. And one of the things that was really unusual was that they had cut an inmate's body in two, from the head to the seat, cut him lengthwise, and he was mounted on a glass inside a tank of alcohol. So, you're looking at the cross-section of the inside of a human being and those kinds of things in the hospital: hard to believe.

MH: And you saw these there?

RD: Yes. And there was an inscription above one of the doors at the hospital—I don't know if they dedicated the hospital or just a part of the hospital or room to a Japanese, and the Japanese name [was] up there above the door. And I thought that was kind of strange. That's just pretty much—

MH: The human skin with tattoos that you saw, that was in the hospital?

RD: Yes, part of the office, you know: a light fixture on the desk, that sort of thing.

MH: You were how old at the time?

RD: I was born in twenty-three [1923], so I was twenty.

MH: You were twenty. How does a twenty-year-old kid process this stuff?

RD: (laughs) Good question. With disbelief, I guess, mouth open. You know.

MH: I mean, do you get physically ill?

RD: No, no, I didn't, although it's—it felt creepy-crawly, but no, I don't remember being physically ill. But then, by that time we'd seen a lot of gruesome things.

Switching back early on, as we were crossing the Moselle River, fighting for the town of Sainte-Geneviève, when we were moving on out of the town after considerable fighting, I was riding in the back of the Jeep, eating a can of—C ration can, I suppose, of pork. And when we were going out of the town of Sainte-Geneviève, I noticed there were all kinds of pigs wandering around in the streets. We were on the edge of town. There was a dead German—a dead American soldier lying in the road. The vehicle that had traveled past him had run over his head. It was a gruesome sight.

As we went by, there was a pig eating this soldier's arm. Pigs will eat human flesh. And I'm eating a can of pork as I go by, and need I say, the rest of the war passed without me ever eating pork. Those are the kinds of things. And one of the other fellows, one of our radio operators, when we'd open a can of rations, a 10-in-1 or a K or whatever, if it was pork he would offer to trade it for cheese or anything, just to get rid of it.

MH: Because he had seen that, too.

RD: Yeah.

RD: So those are the kind of things that you—

MH: Did you see any other camps besides Buchenwald?

RD: No. No.

MH: After you see Buchenwald, does it change in any way the way you feel about dealing with the Germans?

RD: Well, there were two kinds of Germans: There were those that had been indoctrinated from birth by the Nazi regime; and there were those who, when we took 'em prisoner, their first question was, "Do you know my uncle in Milwaukee?" In other words, they had relatives here in the United States. They were usually older Germans; by older, they were probably in their forties. They were home guards, largely. The older ones would be left behind to protect a town when the Germans left the town, hoping that they would delay us long enough for them to reestablish the line they set up. And I had those people come to me and surrender and actually—[I'd ask] "Why are you doing this?" you know, they'd come hand me their gun. And they'd say, "Well, I'm not a damn fool." There are those Germans.

And one time, and I suppose it was about the time of Buchenwald, my Jeep driver—we were patrolling through a town, a small village, and the Jeep driver said to me, "That guy is a prisoner—that guy is a German, standing in that doorway over there at the *Gasthaus*." And sure enough, there was this German soldier standing in the doorway, looking at us going by. I said, "I'll go get him," and I jumped out with my rifle and ran over, take him prisoner. He asked me if I would come with him into the *Gasthaus* before he became a prisoner. I went in there. There were fifteen German soldiers sitting at a long table, eating.

Now, what do you do when you find yourself in a situation like this? Well, I start giving commands in phonetic German in a loud voice: "*Alles come mit mere—hands en copp.*" All that stuff. And they all jumped up, and I'm telling them they're prisoners. They all had guns, and I told them, "Over there," and I pointed to the corner, and they piled all the guns in a corner. And now, I'm coming out of the *Gasthaus* with fifteen prisoners, okay? I disarmed them, collected fifteen pistols, and got out in the street. Now these people, they knew the war was over. They knew it was hopeless at this point, and they were looking for an opportunity to quit, see. And there was those Germans, who would—I put them in a different category. They were reasonable people that you could deal with.

And then there were those, of course, who were not. I would find them mostly younger, and then knowing only as growing up as a Nazi. And another experience I had: We came into a small village, and the people in the village told me there were Hitler Youths, three

Hitler Youths—S.S. Hitler Youths or something like that—hiding in the basement of a house, and that they had put mines in the ditch leading out of the village. They'd mined the ditch. So, I don't know how many of us, two or three of us, went into the house and took them prisoner. But now we were in a situation, I mean—let me get back to those fifteen in a minute.

We were in a situation where we couldn't take prisoners. But what we had been told, that they'd buried mines, what we did was took 'em to the areas that the people said the mines were and gave them our entrenching tools and said, "Dig up the mines." Well, they could not understand us. They thought that we were telling them to dig your own graves. And one fellow suddenly came running up to me, fell on his knees, put his hands in the position of prayer, and said to me in understandable English, "Don't kill us! We'll come to America and be your slaves forever, but don't kill us." Can you imagine that?

MH: (laughs)

RD: And so, we finally come to the conclusion—we couldn't take them prisoner, couldn't take them with us. So, what we did was we found some white cloth, put cloth on a stick, gave each one a stick with white cloth, and said, "Walk down this road in that direction and someone will take you prisoner." And that's the last we saw of them. That's how we dealt with it, yeah.

Now, the same thing, going back to those fifteen.

MH: Right.

RD: My lieutenant, thankfully, wasn't a very aggressive soldier. He came to me, and he says, "We can't take prisoners on this mission. We're out here, we can't take prisoners. What in the world are you thinking about, taking these guys prisoner?" Well, it so happened that a mile down, prior to the town, we picked up two British soldiers who'd been prisoners of the Germans for five years, and they were working on a German farm. When we came through, they came out and asked to stay with us. They wanted to get out of Germany. So, they were riding, if it was—the Jeep was rigged for us to live in. They were riding in the back of the Jeep, and I remember one of them saying to the other "Imagine this: here we are, after being prisoners for five years, we're riding in an American Jeep eating cake." Well, we'd given 'em some C ration cookies or crackers, and they thought it was cake, and they were so happy.

Now they're overhearing my lieutenant giving me hell for taking fifteen guys prisoner, and they said, "There's no need to worry about it. Give us a gun; give us some of those German guns. We'll take them down to this schoolhouse, which is empty, and we'll hold 'em there until you radio back and get the (inaudible) registration or somebody to come and pick 'em up." So, here we have two ex-prisoners of war, Englishmen, telling our lieutenant how to do his job. And, I might add, I found out later none of the guys in the platoon had any more respect for him than I did, and I never did have much respect for him.

MH: What was your rank at that point?

RD: Strange thing. I could have been private, could have been corporal, could have been sergeant. Whatever our assignment was was what our rank was. I ended up as a buck sergeant. But I was a private much of the time. I was a corporal part of the time. I was a sergeant. They would—one of the touchiest jobs was being point Jeep.

MH: Being what?

RD: Point Jeep, on a patrol. Normally, that should have been a staff sergeant's position. We had one staff sergeant, and he made a point of riding in the turret of the armored car. We had a buck sergeant, and we'd take turns being point Jeep. But if you were in the point Jeep, you had the authority of a sergeant. And if you were not in the point Jeep, if you were at the back or rear of the column, you had the authority of a private, see. And we didn't think in terms of—I dunno if we ever had a PD [pay day] when we were in combat, you know. They'd send our money home, or—I dunno, I don't remember ever getting paid. I think we had arrangements, of course, with the paymaster or whatever that they would automatically send money home. But we saw—as far as our roles were, it varied from day to day.

MH: Where were you when the war ended?

RD: We were in Austria, near Linz.

MH: Okay, and do you remember that day?

RD: Yes.

MH: Tell me about that.

RD: The seventh of April—seventh of May. Well, we were on patrol, in the mountains. And we were told that there was a cease-fire, and we went to the nearest town in Austria, a small town; I've got the name of it somewhere in my stuff. We got back into this town and we were told that. I think it was the 6<sup>th</sup> SS Division, which was able to escape from France because of [Bernard Law] Montgomery's brilliances. They were a crack German division that was now sitting in Austria, and they were to surrender to us.

They sent men, coming down with white flags, saying, "Look, we'll make a deal with you. You're going to have to fight the Russians. We will fight the Russians for you. You provide us with the materiel, and let us go into your prisoner of war camps and recruit soldiers and give us safe passage across the river, and we'll go fight the Russians." And we had to say to them, "No, we can't do that. The surrender is unconditional." For two days, we negotiated. They would come down, they wouldn't march down and surrender to us, they tried to negotiate this arrangement. They would say to us, "Look, you're going to have to fight the Russians; take advantage of this deal," you know.

So, finally they got the message. They surrendered to us, to our platoon. Now, when they came down, these soldiers—it seemed to me they were all six-footers, and immaculate—they would march. They came around the corner and would come marching to us in company groups, groups of 100.

MH: This was SS, with the lightning bolt tattoo and the whole thing?

RD: The whole thing. I'm not certain of that. As I recall, we were told they were SS, the 6<sup>th</sup> Division or Group or something. When they came up to us, they'd come up in columns of two and stand before us at attention, and we'd have to disarm them. They wouldn't hand you the gun; you'd have to take it from them. They wouldn't hand you the pistol; you had to remove it. They wouldn't take the binoculars off; you had to remove the binoculars. They stood at attention until you did that, and then you moved them on and they went on up beyond, each one. It took us two or three days to disarm this group, twenty-four hours a day. Now, they were a crack unit, of course, and they knew it. We didn't have to fight them, thank God.

Then, from there we went into a little town in Austria and we were there about a week, and from there we went to Markt Rettenbach, Germany as occupation.

MH: When did you finally get back to the States?

RD: The thirty-first of December in forty-five [1945].

MH: And got out of the Army then, or—?

RD: And then got out on the fourth of January.

MH: Went back home to Minnesota?

RD: Went back to Minnesota and went to school.

MH: Where'd you go?

RD: Augsburg College.

MH: Which college?

RD: Augsburg.

MH: Augsburg, okay.

RD: Augsburg College in Minneapolis.

MH: And studied what?

RD: Prior to the war, I was in science. But because of the war, I got pretty much interested in European history, and so I ended up being a history major.

MH: That's what you got your degree in?

RD: Yeah.

MH: So now what do you do with the history degree?

RD: Taught school.

MH: At what level?

RD: High school.

MH: And that—for many years?

RD: Thirty-one years, thirty-two.

MH: Yeah. And then what have you been doing since you retired?

RD: What I've been doing since I retired: yard work. (laughs)

MH: (laughs) You're married?

RD: Yes.

MH: Kids?

RD: Four.

MH: And grandchildren?

RD: Four.

MH: Four. Well, your grandkids can keep you occupied a bit.

RD: Oh, yeah. That's where we were these past two weeks: out in California, going to surf camp with one of the boys and sand volleyball camp with one of the girls, and that sort of stuff.

MH: I see. I forgot to ask you one other question, which goes right back to Buchenwald. The day you were walking through there, do you happen to remember the weather?

RD: It was surprisingly nice for—well, I shouldn't say that time of the year. There was no problem with the weather. I don't remember other than that.

MH: Just a clear, spring day.

RD: A clear, spring day, yeah.

MH: All right. Anything else that I should have asked you about that I didn't?

RD: Well, I could go on and on, I guess. Once back in Nuremberg—we were in Nuremberg for Easter Sunday that year. I wondered why were in such a hurry to catch up to the troop. We were three guys all by ourselves in a Jeep, lots of gas, and we found our way, all by ourselves. We should have gone the other way and spent the month in Paris or something, you know. I don't know if anyone would have missed us. We caught up to our unit, and it was just by chance. We didn't know it at the time, but we were billeted in a field, an orchard, next door to the building in which the war crimes trials were held in forty-six [1946].

So, my driver and I walked through the building. It was totally empty, it was damp and dark and smelled like mildew, and there was an eight-foot high stone wall around the back, where the scaffolds were that they'd hang these guys in. And they still had the swastikas up all over the place, in the *Sportplatz*.

MH: When was this?

RD: This would have been Easter time, forty-five [1945].

MH: Forty-five [1945]. So, that was before you went to Buchenwald.

RD: This was immediately after Buchenwald.

MH: Immediately after, okay.

RD: And, let's see. From there, we moved on; a short time later we're in Austria.

MH: Well, I thank you very, very much for your time. I have a question: Do you have a photo of yourself from World War II days?

RD: Well, I did have a picture of myself standing by a stack of bodies by the crematorium.

MH: You're easily recognizable?

RD: Well, you can see a GI soldier. I don't know how recognizable I'd need to be.

MH: Is it possible for me to get a copy of that, and then I'll return it to you after I scan it?

RD: Well, I'll have some copies made and send them to you.

MH: Okay. Do you have an e-mail address?

RD: Yes, it's....

MH: Okay. I'll send you my address and an e-mail.

RD: Yeah, that would be great.

MH: I thank you very, very much for your time. I really appreciate it.

RD: You're welcome.

MH: Okay, take care, sir.

*End of interview*