

August 2008

Monroe Isadore Nachman oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, August 9, 2008

Monroe Isadore Nachman (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: 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

Nachman, Monroe Isadore (Interviewee) and Hirsh, Michael (Interviewer), "Monroe Isadore Nachman oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, August 9, 2008" (2008). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 104.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/104

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.

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, 2010, 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: C65-00093
Interviewee: Monroe Isadore Nachman (MN)
Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)
Interview dates: August 9, 2008
Interview location: Interviewee's home
Transcribed by: Kathy Kirkland
Transcription date: January 8, 2009
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon
Audit Edit date: June 28, 2010 to June 29, 2010
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Final Edit date: June 30, 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: Give me your full name and spell it for me, please.

Monroe Nachman: My full name?

MH: Yeah.

MN: My name is Monroe, M-o-n-r-o-e, Isadore, I-s-a-d-o-r-e, Nachman, N-a-c-h-m-a-n.

MH: But they call you Monty?

MN: Yeah.

MH: M-o-n-t-y.

MN: Yeah.

MH: And your address?

MN: ...

MH: And your phone?

MN: ...

MH: And your date of birth?

MN: 10-23-18 [October 23, 1918]. I'll be ninety years old October 23.

MH: And you were in the 103rd Infantry Division?

MN: I started out in Detroit, Michigan, in Custer's 6th Cavalry with the National Guard, because I had a low draft number and I didn't want to be in the infantry. So, we went to camp at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. We were there for a year, and I was at Monsanto Chemical plant in East St. Louis, Illinois, on guard duty. It was, you know, a vital area we had to protect. And I went to sleep Saturday night, and Sunday, I was supposed to get a pass to St. Louis. Somebody woke me up Sunday morning and said, "They bombed Pearl Harbor." I said, "Who is she?"

MH: Seriously?

MN: I said, "I don't know Pearl." I'd never heard of Pearl Harbor. So, he says, "Yeah, they're gonna declare war," so we left there and came back to Fort Sheridan, and we left —

MH: You had been drafted?

MN: No, I wasn't drafted. I joined Custer's 6th Cavalry—you know, the horses—for about six days, a week or two, and then they took the horses away. 210th Anti-Aircraft, Fort Sheridan, Illinois, for one year and then we were gonna get out; but the war came, and then—

MH: Just so I have this at the front, the camp you were ultimately at was Landsberg?

MN: That's the one, yeah, the one I liberated.

MH And that's for the transcribing person.

MH: You want me to build up into it?

MH: Yes, absolutely.

MN: Okay, so they sent us out to Paine Air Field, right outside Seattle, Washington, and we set up our guns. It rained every damned day there. My battery was run by Captain Pfeiffer; he was a German by birth here, but he was a nice guy. And we had thirty-eight Jews in my battery.

How did I get into the cavalry? We were in the poolroom in Detroit, and a fellow come in, Max Trachtenberg; I'll never forget him. And he says—he's all dressed up in the Army uniform, you know, with the hair. I said, "Max, what the heck you doing?" He says, "You wouldn't believe this. I joined this outfit, we are in Custer's 6th Cavalry and we ride horses, and they're paying us." I said, "What? How do you get in there?" Because we used to ride horses on Sunday, go horseback riding. So, he says, "C'mon, I'll tell you how to get there," and we went down there, and I signed up with about three or four of my friends, personal friends, and before you know it, we had thirty-eight Jews in our battery by Captain Pfeiffer.

We had a good outfit, and then we were sent out there to Paine Air Field, and it was a terrible place to be, but I got a pass—you have a pass to go to this little village close by. You could either eat dinner or you could go to the show; you didn't have enough time for both. So, I came back from that, and I found that a bunch of my friends were shipped out to become gunners on troop ships, cargo vessels—the Navy didn't have enough men—going up to Alaska and the Aleutian Islands.

So, I says, "Captain, I want to go in the next batch, because I don't want to be here anymore. I want to be with these guys." So, he says, "Okay." The next batch, they sent me to Seattle, and I got on a ship called the [USAT] *David W. Branch*. It was a troop carrier cargo vessel, and we started out through the end of the passage. I was up on duty at night. It was a rainy, windy night, and I got off duty, and I was just crawling into my bunk, and they hit an island.

MH: Literally, hit an island.

MN: Literally hit an island, this narrow passage. The guy must've made that trip a thousand times, and it was just chaos. And then the next day, the morning, we get up and looked around, and we're stuck on this island. And they try to pull us off. Boats were around there, and groups, they busted like a piece of string. Anyhow, they took us off and put us up with a Canadian Scottish resident until they got our boat to tell us back. And a passenger ship took us back about a week later. We went back to Seattle, and I got on the *David W. Branch*; it was strictly a—no, I'm sorry, (inaudible), and that was a straight freighter, an old freighter. I think it was taken over from the Japanese. So, we sailed. I made eight trips, all through there, the Aleutians and the Kodiak [Alaska] and all those islands up there.

MH: This is 1942.

MN: Early 1942, and I was there when Dutch Harbor was bombed the first time, the only time. So, after the eighth trip, they said, "You gotta take your shots again, because we can't find your records." Okay, so I take the shots, and I take off, and we get to Skagway, Alaska. My buddy and I, we bought a pint of booze and drank it down. The next day, I was sicker than a dog, and I thought that last (laughs) really did me in. But it turns out that I had yellow jaundice, and then I had to wait until I got back to Seattle. It was a terrible time. And I wound up in the hospital there, and the place was loaded with guys. They had a bad batch of serum. So, a friend of mine said, "Let's go to OCS [Officer Candidate School]," so I says, "Okay." I was just twenty-two at that time or twenty-three, and I didn't know any better.

MH: Had you been in college?

MN: No. I got kicked out of high school in the twelfth grade because a guy called me a sheeny, and I hit him in the classroom, and they threw me out. My mother wanted me to go back to school. I said, "I'm not going, Ma." The war's coming and everything. But I tell you, in my younger life, I have to go by—I lived in a half-Jewish, half-Gentile neighborhood, and every day I had to go by St. Mary's Church, and every day I was fighting. My mother called me a *vilde khaye* because—but she didn't understand. "Here comes the Jews." So, "Here comes the kikes." I was one of those guys that—and two other guys I ran with, we just—we're the type of guys who don't take that kind of stuff, so every day we would fight. So, that's what happened there.

MH: Let me ask you, when you were in high school, did you pay attention to what was going on in Europe?

MN: Yeah, because we had Father [Charles] Coughlin in Detroit, and he was a momser from the first go, he was a bad guy; and not only that, we had the Nazi Southerner parading around, and we used to be fighting with him, too. And—

MH: You knew about *Kristallnacht*—

MN: I used to see it in the headlines: so many Jews killed, you know. Like everybody else, I didn't realize it, and it didn't get through my mind yet how this could be, because whoever could think of anything like this? And this is small. So, we volunteered for MPs [military police], quartermaster, and anti-aircraft was the first choice.

MH: At OCS?

MN: OCS. So, we become officers. So, I took the test and I passed it. I wasn't dumb; I was a hyper kid when I was young, see.

MH: Not like now?

MN: A little hyper yet, but not like I was. And so, I passed the test, and they picked him for MPs and picked me for infantry. I said, "I'm not going to infantry school. I signed up in the Army; I'm not going." And I'll be honest with you, I was never afraid of anything in my life. So, they said, "You're going, you have to go." It was a Purim vacation, and we were training 1-Bs. They have short arms and left eyes, and we were training, given basic training, for office workers and stuff like that. And there's officers coming through just graduating, and we're mad because the ninety-day wonders, they called them, out of college. They were put in with new divisions being activated, and the guys with that experience, they went right overseas. They gave them two weeks of delay en route, they called it, and then they shipped them overseas. So, I said, "The hell with them. I won't make it." So, I went down there, and I told the guy, these redneck old Army guys—they made them second lieutenants to watch us; they called them "bird dogs." Whatever you did, whatever you said was written down.

So, I figured, "What the hell. I'm gonna make this messed up so I don't graduate. I'm not gonna graduate." So, I went there. My wife came down, my wife-to-be came down there, and we got married. And our honeymoon was a Saturday, and Sunday I left to go

back to camp. But she wanted me to be an officer, and I said, “I’m not gonna be no second lieutenant in the infantry.” I didn’t sign up for this and I didn’t want to be one.

Anyhow, my marks were good. I wasn’t a dummy, just hyper. So, they called me before a board, just before graduation. I thought, jeez, they’re gonna pass me in spite of all this. And they called me, and it’s an infantry officer. “What is it with you? Your marks are good. The attitude’s so bad.” I said, “I didn’t want to come here.” So, they says, “Well, how about if we give you a delay en route, and then you come back and take it over again. You got married and didn’t have a honeymoon,” and this and that. I said, “No, sir —” I knew I made a mistake. “I want to go back to my old outfit,” which was the ships.

So, they dismissed me, and just two days now, I get my orders, and I’m, “Boy, I’m going back to Seattle.” I got my orders: Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, 103rd Infantry Division, 411th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, E Company.

MH: Which regiment?

MN: 411th.

MH: 411th, okay.

MN: 409th, 410th, and 411th is the division, and I’m in the infantry at 411th.

MH: What rank?

MN: A T-5, corporal, I’m T-5. Then I made sergeant, okay, I became a platoon sergeant.

MH: So, you’re in the infantry anyhow.

MN: I’m in the infantry. I was deep into the infantry. Once you get in the infantry, you can’t transfer out. The only way you get out is you get killed or you get wounded bad, but you’re not gonna get transferred out. And I became a sergeant, then they changed the commanders, and I got an anti-Semitic captain. And my wife says to me—we were on maneuvers, and she says to me, she writes me a letter, “Meet me in Alexandria” for our six-month anniversary. So, we were on maneuvers, marching, and I was with the captain

—one thing, I never, never dropped out of a march. I was strong and tough. I was small, but I was strong and tough. And I says to him—

MH: How tall were you back then?

MN: Five-foot-five. So, he says, “You can’t go.” Well, that was like waving a flag in front of a bull. I said, “What do you mean, I can’t go?” He said, “You can’t go.” Well, every time at the weekend, on Friday, the general has a critique, and he always took me and a couple of the other guys to the critique, the sergeants, you know. And this time he didn’t pick me to go, so I figured, “The hell with it, I’m gone,” and I did. When I come back, I was a private. I could’ve fought it, probably, but I didn’t care. And they made me dig a six-by-six, six feet deep and six feet wide, for a garbage pit.

But anyhow, we went overseas—

MH: When did you go overseas?

MN: In 1944, in October of—

MH: So, you spent a long time in Louisiana.

MN: I spent—well, I was in four years, eight months and twenty-one days. I was first in the National Guard unit; that was over a year. It was close to two years, and about a year and a half in Louisiana and Texas. We were sent down to Dallas, Texas—Camp Claiborne—in Texas. So, from there, we went overseas—

MH: When did you go overseas?

MN: In October, we went overseas. In October.

MH: October of 1944?

MN: Forty-four [1944] yeah.

MH: That's when they were pumping a lot of new divisions in to try and—they were still sending new divisions over in January of forty-five [1945].

MN: Yeah. We went into action in a place called Saint Dié. And the first day—

MH: You went over by ship. Where'd you end up?

MN: The ship, we come up in Saint Dié, where we started out. Here, it's down here's where we started out, Saint Dié. It's up in the mountains, in the Vosges Mountains.

MH: Yeah, I'm just going to spell some things for Kathy, who's typing this.

MN: Yeah.

MH: It's Saint Dié, capital D-i-é. But you landed where?

MN: Marseille.

MH: Marseille, okay.

MN: Then we had to walk all the way through town up to the mountains with our full, full—all the gear we had duffle bags, rifles, helmets, everything. It was a terrible march, but we got up there. Then we had to start digging a foxhole, and it was slate, so I just had enough room down there, so—and then they came over, the Germans, with propaganda planes, you know, buzzing us. And, "We know you're here. Your girlfriends and wives are out with other guys," all that crap. Anyhow, we took off by boxcar, 40-and-8 boxcars, and we went up—got off at Saint Dié, and that was where we were committed to action.

What happened was, we were supposed to get a fifteen-minute barrage. And then we take off at seven o'clock. Well, quarter to seven came and no barrage, no artillery. We took off and we lost fifty-five guys that day, wounded and killed. So, and then we continued. We were in a lot of battles.

MH: What was your first reaction to battle?

MN: Well, it's scary, but when you're in the heat of the battle, you know, you're not thinking. You're just constantly thinking about—

MH: Your training comes in. How did you react to incoming?

MN: You hear the—if you hear them, then you're over your head. The Screaming Mimis, we called them. When you hear them, you know they're over your head. When you don't hear them, that's when you know you're right in the middle of fire, which we were, under friendly fire. Later on, we come into this place, and all of a sudden, it starts coming in on us, and it was friendly fire. A couple guys got killed. But that first day—and then, I could hardly walk. I couldn't hardly do anything, you know, really.

MH: Did you have the right clothing? Winter clothing?

MN: We had the right clothing, yeah, and then they changed the boots later. They gave us these rubber boots. Now, this is from the regiment, this is division. That's the story of the regiment; you can read it in there. So, let's see, we went up—we were all the way up, and then we got some heavy fighting around, where the hell was it?

MH: Where did you cross into Germany?

MN: We crossed into Germany around the Siegfried Line. Let's see. We were one of the first ones to come into Germany. Oh, here. We came in (microphone is muffled)—it was so long ago, you know. Speyer, on the Rhine; they had a wine cellar.

MH: Speyer is S-p-e-y-e-r.

MN: Yeah, they called it Speyer. It had a million bottles of champagne, and the railroad car went right into this mountain.

MH: You guys didn't drink any of it?

MN: (laughs) Yeah. So, the Germans were in an island in the middle of the river, the Rhine, and the captain says, "Don't anybody get drunk here, because—" We got pie-eyed drunk, but I never drank champagne after that. It gave me such a headache. I'd drink

booze, but not champagne. And we took off from there, and then we pushed the Siegfried Line, and we got into the Siegfried Line, and we stood out three counterattacks that night. And we were down to forty-five guys.

MH: In the company?

MN: Well, the cooks and office don't count. The fighting guys, yeah. And they took us out and put us on trucks and took us over to Lorraine. Found out that Patton cut over, you know, about the Battle of the Bulge. And Patton cut over to cut them off. We were holding down the right flank to the 7th Army, which I was in, and the left flank of the 7th Army, and the right flank of the 3rd Army. And they brought us up replacements. We stayed there about a week, and then we moved out, and then we got General [Anthony] McAuliffe took over our division. He came over after Bastogne, and we finally got into a rest area, and we were 130—the division was 133 days on the line without a division rest, so they put us in this rest area, and everybody got replacements and everything. And we're having a nice jolly old time, and the war's coming to an end. You know, close by. And the general requested the division to be put back into action, and we did. We went back into action, and we fought, and then we came across this, at Landsberg.

MH: Tell me about—do you remember the day before Landsberg? Had they told you about concentration camps?

MN: No.

MH: Nothing.

MN: No, had no idea. But in Europe, they have these honey pots. I don't know if anybody ever told you that. They clean out the outhouses in all these small villages, and they stunk like crazy. But then all of a sudden, when we're approaching this place here, all of a sudden it started to smell like a different smell, a terrible, terrible smell. And it never goes out of your nostrils. You always remember that smell; you can never forget what you see. And we came into this place, and my God, it was horrendous. A few of my guys threw up.

MH: You're riding on a truck?

MN: No, we walked.

MH: You walked?

MN: Yeah, we don't ride on trucks.

MH: And you're carrying an M1?

MN: M1.

MH: And your rucksack.

MN: Well, this time, I think I traded it off for a burp gun, they call it. I traded it first for a smaller weapon; I forget what they call it.

MH: Carbine?

MN: Carbine, yeah; and then I ran into a tanker, and I traded for the burp gun, machine gun. So, we come into this camp, and my God, it was unbelievably horrible.

MH: What's the first thing you see?

MN: Bodies lying all over the place.

MH: Inside wire?

MN: Inside wire camp. These underground huts, okay, like this, and they're laying all over the place, filthy, and the stink around there was unbelievable. So, I talked to some people there in Yiddish, and they said whoever could walk they were taking to Dachau to kill off. I told the lieutenant, and he says, "Well, we gotta secure the camp," so they came up behind us, and we caught up with him.

MH: How much time did you spend in the camp?

MN: Not long. About an hour, and that was too much.

MH: What did you do in the camp?

MN: Well, we couldn't do much of anything. We were not—they told us not to give them anything to eat; maybe some water, that's all.

MH: And you talked to some of the inmates?

MN: Yeah, in Yiddish.

MH: In Yiddish. Where were they from?

MN: All over the place. They didn't even bother to tell you where they're from. It was too traumatic.

MH: You're looking at somebody who's skin and bones, or not even that much.

MN: Skin and bones and nothing. Really are. See, and—

MH: What's the conversation like? How do you even talk to somebody like that?

MN: Well, I didn't ask them what happened. I know what happened. We couldn't talk to them, hardly, but this one guy, he says to me, "(inaudible) to Dachau." And that's when I got that out of them. So, we left, we got in our Jeeps. We caught up with them.

MH: How long did that take?

MN: It didn't take long, about forty-five minutes or so till we reached them.

MH: What do you see down the road?

MN: Nothing, until we got up and saw a line of people. Then we got up to the front.

MH: Single-file line or just all over the road?

MN: No, they're walking all—if they could walk, you know, they're stumbling all over the place.

MH: These are still skeleton-type people.

MN: Sure, whoever could walk, but most of these people there, they couldn't walk, even.

MH: And where are the SS guards?

MN: Well, they took—the guards were around, and the dummies should've left them, but they didn't, and we caught up and killed them.

MH: Can you describe the action, what happened?

MN: We got around there, they threw down their arms and everything, see. And I just plain shot them.

MH: How many were there?

MN: There were about a dozen or so. I just shot them. And the other guys shot them, too. We didn't take any prisoners.

MH: Was that what you were told to do, or that's just the reaction to—they're SS.

MN: No, just did it.

MH: You used the burp gun.

MN: Yeah. One time, I was taking some prisoners back to camp, and it was kind of a long way back, and I says, "Hell, what am I doing?" Here comes a black captain in a Jeep, and I said, "Cap, do me a favor. I gotta take these guys back to prison camp. I don't even want to go. You want to do me a favor and take them back?" He said, "Well, you know what we're gonna do." I said, "I don't give a damn what you do." See, and we left, and I know damn well they didn't get back, because they didn't take black prisoners, either. They shot them and killed them. It was a crazy war. When we got in there, there was little kids.

I have a friend, Sammy Weinstein. Sammy came in and he weighed about 120 pounds soaking wet, like five-foot-four or five. I don't think he was my height, even. And he got shot through the cheek by a thirteen-year-old sniper. And we caught him, the kid. They just took him prisoner; they didn't kill him. But Sammy's okay. A guy by the name of Ralph McMahan is—he passed away just recently. He picked him up, and he carried him back, held his tongue out so he didn't choke on the blood. And we meet every year. We're meeting, our division reunion. But Sammy was fine.

MH: Let me go back to following these people down the road. You kill the guards. Now how many people do you have to deal with?

MN: I don't remember the exact number.

MH: Are we talking 20 or 200?

MN: Talking about forty, fifty. And we made sure it was secured, you know, people coming along all the time. And we turned them over to them, and we went back to our task, because we were driving to the Rhine. Not to the Rhine; we were going into Germany, way into Germany now, and we just had to get back. So, we didn't stay around too long, you know; and like I said, I don't have any pictures because we never carried cameras. The only thing we carried was a canteen cup; that was what we ate with, drank with and ate with. And then I got wounded on March 4, in my arm, right here.

MH: With one month to go.

MN: Shrapnel.

MH: One month to go.

MN: Yeah, shrapnel, yeah.

MH: Mortar fire?

MN: Yeah, that's a big casualty taker. And then, it was rough. We went through the mountains in the wintertime, and it was cold, colder than hell. You dig a pit, dug out a pit, and you hit water. You gotta start all over again. It wasn't easy, I gotta tell you. I'll show you some of the—

MH: Did you ever get to Dachau itself?

MN: No, I never got to Dachau, because we were driving right along, see. I got some of the pictures with the snow we went into. There's Marlene Dietrich. They made us walk. I didn't even want to go to see her, but I did. This shows the snow. And then I went on this ship. I got pictures of that, where I was in snow. The ship was decked—

MH: Where were you when the war ended?

MN: War ended, the last day of the war, we fought up until the Brenner Pass. Met up with the 5th Army at the Brenner Pass, and then we pulled back into a town. It was a nice town; I forgot the name of it. But, let's see—see if I can see the map I could tell you.

MH: This has you going into Italy. You went into Italy after the war?

MN: No, up to the Brenner Pass, then we turned around and came back.

MH: There they are.

MN: My eyesight's 20/20, but for small stuff I have these ten dollar glasses. I just had cataracts taken out. Innsbruck, that was a nice town, but they took us out of there because the infantry doesn't hanging around the big towns. And we went to another place, and it was like a hotel. Not a hotel, a resort right on the lake, and it was wonderful. We had a Dutch cook.

MH: In Austria.

MN: Yeah, in Austria and we had a Dutch cook, and I used to go out—not canoeing. One-man paddleboats, you know.

MH: Kayak?

MN: Yeah, kayak, yeah. I used to do that around the woods, went swimming, fishing, all kinds of stuff. But that didn't last long. They took us out and put us in a small little village, and we were guarding that part out there.

MH: How long'd you stay?

MN: I was there—I didn't get back until October forty-five [1945], since I was the Army occupation.

MH: Where do you go home?

MN: I was attached to the CIC. At that time, they called it Counter Intelligence—Intelligence Corps. Because I spoke Yiddish, I picked up German. So, that's what I was doing, spending most of my time with them. Then—

MH: You'd ever run into any Nazis after the war?

MN: Nobody was a Nazi, are you kidding? *Nicht Nazi*, not me.

MH: *Nicht Nazi*!

MN: *Nicht Nazi*, not me!

MH: And I didn't smell anything. I didn't know the camp was there.

MN: They were crazy. So, I have—one of the guys, he's a friend of mine, Ralph Durand; he was a lieutenant, and I was his interpreter. And then Ralph hated Germans with a passion, and I was in the office, and a couple young ladies came in and said they were being evacuated from their house they were living in. The house was a little shed behind a farmhouse. You know, there are villages, and they then go out to their farms. But behind that home there was a little place there, a small place, a couple could stay there with maybe a kid or two if they wanted. But the farmer's kid was coming back from the German army, and he wanted to live there with his wife.

So, they came in and said, "Check it out." So we went and checked it out. He says he wants to stay there, and he started giving me an argument, and it was on the street. And I says, "You ain't going in there." I talked to him in German. So, then Ralph came along. He said, "What's the matter here?" and he was a little taller than me. I says, "I'm having trouble with this guy. He won't listen to what I'm telling him. He can't move in the house. He wants to kick the girls out." So, he comes up and says, "Hey, American SS officer, I blow your fuckin' head off." The guy and all the people listening around there, "Oh, oh, he's in the SS, the American SS, me." (laughs)

Then the last thing, they sent me out. A guy, a couple fellows come in; an SS officer, a major, came in, and he lived way back in the woods. That's where he lived, a little village way up—this was in the mountain area there. And he's taking over again, see. Go out and check it out. So, I took another guy with me, and I knocked on his door, and I had my pistol in my hand. I knocked, and I stuck my gun in his face. And, sure enough, he was an SS. You could tell an SS if you see the tattoo on his fingers or under his armpit.

MH: The lightning bolt.

MN: Lightning bolt, yeah, SS. So, he had a P30 Luger pistol, and I took that away from him, and I brought him in, but who knows what happened to him, you know. And that was some of the things that had gone in there.

MH: What was it like coming back home?

MN: It was great, but coming back home was like coming into another world. It was total destruction, Germany, especially in Germany and France, but not so much in the German cities. They wouldn't fight in the German villages; they fought outside the villages. France was devastated, because they'd fight even in the churches. They didn't give a damn. But in Germany, they didn't fight that way. They fought out in the fields. They didn't want to destroy their cities, so Germany was a beautiful place. And the

people—after a while, you get to talk to them, after a while; they're clean and industrious, like nothing.

MH: Did you ever ask them, "How could you let this happen?"

MN: "*Nicht Nazi.*" (inaudible) You understand Yiddish?

MH: A little bit. A *bisl*.

MN: "It wasn't me. I'm not involved in that." The butcher, he was a Nazi, and he used to sell meat to all the guys; we used to come in and buy meat from him, you know, and we'd broil it. And I got to be friendly with him because I talked to him. So, one of the majors, he picked up a BMW in one of the villages there, and he took it with him. He rode around, that's his car. So, when we're going home, the major says, "See what you can do. See if you can sell the damn thing." So, I said to the butcher, "Listen, I got this car, the major's car. He'll sell it to you for so many thousands of marks." He was making money, because it was American marks, American currency. Not like our dollars, but they were invasion dollars. He bought it. Then I went and exchanged it—I went to Munich with a driver, and I exchanged the money for him.

By the way, I gotta tell you: when I got married, Rabbi Shane, he was the chaplain there. He married my wife and I; we were about eighth or ninth in line. And he was the first rabbi that talked over German radio. I heard him speak, and I looked him up and found him. I spoke to him when I was there, which was kind of exciting. I'm not a religious man, and I swim four times a week, a third of a mile, and my rabbi swims with me. I have Rabbi Norman Goldberg, he's my best friend.

MH: That sounds suspiciously Jewish.

MN: He is a very religious man.

MH: Orthodox?

MN: Norman Goldberg.

MH: Orthodox?

MN: Yeah, Orthodox. You can't call him after four o'clock on Friday, you know. So, Norman was a chaplain in the Army in the Korean War, and we swim together. And I was talking to him one day. I said, "Norman, are you in the VA system?" He didn't even know what it was. I says, "You know, you're entitled to get into the VA system, and you can get your medications and this and that." So, I got him involved and I got him in. And we became very, very close.

I want to tell you, I was in the hospital twelve times last year.

MH: For what?

MN: I got a problem with my arteries, you know. I got eight stents and a pacemaker in me. And I still swim a third of a mile, four times a week, and I play gin rummy after I get through swimming. I played poker last night. And I belong to a men's talk; that's where I was this morning. I'm one of the moderators. So, as dumb as I was and never graduated high school. My wife never worked, and I sent two kids to college, and here I am.

MH: What'd you do for a living?

MN: Well, when I came home from the Army, I was from Detroit, and my wife came from Chicago, and her father had a little business, tailor supplies, dry cleaning supplies. And I just knew two streets: Wilson and Kedzie, and that's it. So, I went to work with him a little bit, and I learned the area, the streets. I was with him for about five or six years, and he went out and I took it over. It was a one-man business, and I didn't want to do it anymore. So, nobody would hire me. I was forty years old already. So, a friend of mine says, "You want to sell cars?" I said, "I've never sold one, but I'll try it." And I got the job, and I loved it.

MH: Who'd you work for?

MN: Well, there's no school for that. I started out with Z Frank on Peterson Avenue. And then I worked for two years. The first year, it was just like a year—the second year, Dave Leavitt, I worked for the guy; he was a son of a bitch. He was—if he saw you in a restaurant with five people, he picked up the bill. But when you're working for him, he was terrible, he was tough. So, he calls me in one day, just before Christmas holidays, he'd pass out the bonuses and stuff. He calls me in his office, he starts bawling me out.

“What the hell is it with you? This is down and that’s down. I can get Andy (inaudible) to do that.” Back and forth. He said, “What happened now?” Complaining about my this and that. The next morning is the breakfast, and who do you think gets number one salesman? Me! I got the thing that he gave me, if you want to see it. But nevertheless, that’s what happened.

Then I worked in the automobile business, but I invested in the stock market, too. And so, I’m very comfortable now, money-wise. And my wife never worked, and here I am. I got a beautiful yard—you’ll take a look—and the swimming pool, which I don’t use, hardly, because I do my swimming over there. And we have a library with a workout room, but I can’t use that stuff because of my condition. In the pool, I’m fine, when there’s no weight on my body.

MH: So, let me ask you. It’s now sixty-three years past the war. You saw horrible stuff. Does it come back to you?

MN: All the time. I’m on medication. Now, let me tell you what happened. I’ve been fighting the VA for sixty years or thereabout. “Send me proof.” This wound was nothing. “Send me proof, send me this, send me that.” My records are burned up, this and that. So, finally I was hassling them. So, then I says, “You know what, I think is the last time I’m gonna write them. The hell with them; I’ll just wipe it off.” So, I write them a letter, and I says, “Okay, you win.” I did it. “You win. But you’ll never know how many nights I was up with nightmares and flashbacks from a concentration camp that I liberated and the friends that I lost,” and things like that, and the sleeping pills that I had to take and the fights with my wife. I never abused her physically, but mentally, you know, I used to blow up fast. And I had a temper when I was a kid, too. I used to fight at the drop of a hat. And next thing you know, I get a letter from them. “Congratulations, you’re 100 percent disability, but we’re only going to give you 80 percent.”

MH: Then they give you unemployability, and you get back to the 100 percent.

MN: No, no.

MH: They didn’t give you unemployability?

MN: No, no, they didn’t. That’s all they gave me is 80 percent. Now, there’s a difference between 80 and 100, a big difference. I just got through talking to the Congress lady. She said they might be able to help me. But they won’t do nothing, you know. Anyhow, when I got the 80 percent, the DAV, Disabled American Veterans, they told me, “They

screwed you again,” see. They send me a check for about \$15,000, \$16,000, something like that, and I get \$1,460, something like that, monthly, which is good. But there’s a big difference. My friend was a POW; he gets everything, 100 percent. Didn’t do nothing, got captured by the Russians.

MH: You ought to nudge them one more time.

MN: I am. I’m going to start nudging them.

MH: Tell them you want the 100 percent. And I don’t know how Illinois does it, but if you are 100 percent, you’re probably exempt from property taxes.

MN: I know. You know what? Illinois’s the second-worst state in the union for veterans.

MH: Really?

MN: They were terrible here. When I first started going there, my God, this was years ago. My feet used to swell up. When I came home, I bought these—you know your army shoes are—bought these shoes, and I couldn’t get the things on or off. My foot was like a vice. I had a hell of a time getting them back on, so I had a pair of shoes made on Lawrence Avenue; there was a guy making shoes. And I went to the VA, and he says, “You’re still walking around.” I don’t want to use the words, but I said, “Go screw yourself,” and I walked out. I said I wouldn’t go back again.

MH: Which VA do you go to?

MN: I go over on Howard Street, but I get glasses and hearing aids at North Chicago.

MH: That’s a schlep.

MN: That’s a schlep. But they got a bus that’ll take you out there. I used to like to go out there because I go for a ride or something. Anyhow, I play cards, gin rummy; and we buy new cards all the time and I take the old cards and bring them out to the VA.

MH: Tell me about the nightmares.

MN: I used to get crazy, you know. It'd come back, it's a flashback.

MH: What do you see?

MN: Well you see the bodies. When I came home, my wife had a family club. And it at the house, and when I got home, you couldn't get an apartment, so we were living with my in-laws on Kedzie and Leland. And we had this party, then they introduced the new son-in-law. Now, I never lacked for words in my life, but all of a sudden, I get up and I'm talking. And all of a sudden, I'm seeing bodies laying all over there. I become like a schtoomie, you know what I mean? I couldn't talk. They must have thought I was—

MH: What's the word?

MN: Schtoomie.

MH: Schtoomie.

MN: Yeah, that's like a guy who can't talk.

MH: Oh, okay.

MN: Schtoomie. So, that was that case. Another time, I testified when—now, I never said anything. When I came home from the Army, I never said anything about the concentration camp to anybody. It was too horrendous, and nobody in my group would even talk about it when we first started, you know, from our division when we had reunions. They didn't want to talk about it. And just one time, a guy by the name of Don Powers, he was a vice-president for Amoco in Paris, and he came back to Houston, and he wanted fifteen minutes just to speak to the group Saturday morning.

MH: Which group is this?

MN: The 103rd, to speak to the group about the denial of the Holocaust.

MH: What year is this?

MN: It was about four, five years ago. And he came back and says he wanted the division to go on record that the Holocaust did happen, and somebody seconded it and another guy said he wanted it to go on the Congressional Record, and they seconded it, which it did. Our battle flag hangs in Washington, D.C. And I made Steven Spielberg sent a crew out to my house because this Professor [Arthur] Butz, the University at Northwestern, wrote a book and said it never happened. I said, "What the hell you talking about? It did happen, and I was there." And that's when I first came out with it. And then they had a dinner, and they invited me to the dinner.

MH: Did you ever confront Butz?

MN: No.

MH: Or any of those people?

MN: I confronted when the KKK came here to Skokie—the Nazi party, rather, came to Skokie. My Jewish War Veterans and my wife was with me. We went out—there was rabbis praying down by the lakeside, and this one's praying on this side, but we were out there. We were out there; they never got to talk. We were throwing stones and rocks at them and stuff like that, but they never got to talk.

MH: This was in downtown Skokie.

MN: No, this was in Wilmette Park, the police—

MH: Oh, this is a different one, then.

MN: No, it's the same one, but they put them in Wilmette Park, so they didn't come into Skokie at all. We had a Mayor [Albert J.] Smith. He was a very, very good friend to the Jews, and we gave him a cap, a Jewish War Veterans cap, as a—because of all the good things he did for us. One time, the Jewish War Veterans couldn't sell poppies directly; we had to buy them through the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars. But Mayor Smith got it so we could do it and do it in Skokie on our own, which is very nice. Let's see, what else was—

MH: What other times did these visions, these flashbacks, hit you?

MN: Oh, a lot. I couldn't go to sleep at night a lot of times. I'd be so nervous, I'd twitch around and everything.

MH: And you were only in that camp for an hour.

MN: Five minutes'll do the same thing. If you had seen that, you wouldn't believe it. It just didn't happen. How could anybody do something like that to human beings? I had a couple things I brought. One was a round cylinder about so long, and it had a real strong spring. You could flip it out that, and you could do it like this, and on the end, they had an iron ball on that. Now, you could crack a guy over the head with the ball, break his skull, and nobody'd say a word. Nobody'd do anything.

MH: You found that in the camp?

MN: Yeah. I had that, and I had a dagger, *Deutschland über alles*, and a few other goodies. And my wife's cousin, he was going to high school at that time, and me, like a dummy, he says, "I want to bring it to the school to show the guys." And then he tells me he sold it. I think he sold the stuff, he's a momser kid. But I lost it. I should've never given it to him, but I did. The two guys I had, a Beretta and this Luger I took from the Nazi guy. I gave the Beretta to—when Israel was forming a state, they'd come around looking for uniforms and stuff like that and guns, and I gave them the Beretta. The Luger, I kept. And my wife didn't want it in the house anymore, and I was hot tempered at that time. I came home, and I would've killed my brother-in-law. We got in a fight. It turned a little physical, not too much.

MH: When's the most recent time you had a nightmare or flashback?

MN: I'm on medication for it.

MH: What'd they give you?

MN: It's an anti-depressant. It's in the long name, you know, so I take it every night.

MH: Wellbutrin?

MN: Huh?

MH: Wellbutrin? Prozac?

MN: I'll show it to you, just a sec. I just got a refill on it. It comes from the VA.

MH: C-i-t-a-l-o-p-r-a-m hydrobromide. Citalopram hydrobromide [Celexa].

MN: So, I take this. That helps, that helps a lot. It calms me down, because I used to be so damned nervous and get twitchy and everything like that and in my hands and fingers. I'm gonna put this back.

MN: Can I get you a drink?

MH: No, I'm good, thank you very much. You said you're not a religious person, even though you're hanging out with an Orthodox rabbi. (to Mrs. Nachman) Hello, I'm Mike.

Mrs. Maria Nachman: Hi!

MN: This is my wife.

Mrs. Nachman: Hi, Mike.

MN: Maria. Sixty-six years, we'll be married.

MH: Really?

MN: Got married in Fort Benning, Georgia.

MH: Did the Holocaust have anything to do with you being not a religious person?

MN: Not entirely. Because like I said, I was a very hyper kid, and I went to Hebrew school when I was a kid, and my sister and brother, I don't know who did it, but they bought me one of these dollar watches. And I brought it to school, and they used to beat me—the rabbi'd pull your ear, and that's for nothing. For something, you'll get more. I had Mrs. Margolis; that was the teacher's name. And a guy asked me what time it was, and I pulled out the watch, and I told him the time. He says, "Bring the watch here," so I showed him the watch. He says, "Leave it here." I said, "I want the watch." He said, "You'll get the watch." When class is over, I say, "Give me the watch," he says, "Tomorrow, you get the watch." Tomorrow, somebody stole it out of the desk. Well, I threw the place up for grabs, and they kicked me out. So my ma says, "I'll get a rabbi." I said, "I don't want no damned rabbi."

Now, my rabbi here, I talk to him four times—

MH: Were you bar mitzvahed?

MN: No.

MH: Your rabbi here hasn't offered?

MH: Huh?

MH: Your rabbi here hasn't offered to bar mitzvah you?

MN: Oh, let me tell you what he says. So, he says to me—we talk all the time, and the different things I do, and I helped him out—I did a lot of good stuff in my life, I really did. Matter of fact, I just saved a woman's life on this floor, and I'll tell you about that pretty soon. Rabbi Goldberg is my best friend. I love the guy, and he's a very religious man, and one day he says, "You know, Monty, you're more religious than you think you are. Because you can go to shul, you can daven all you want and shuckel all you want, and you go out and screw the people. That's not a good Jew. But you're a man that does a lot of things, you never get anything back, and you never ask for anything back. You got enough mitzvahs built up that you got the key to the place." So, I says, "I'm glad to hear that, Rabbi." But that's Norman. And he served in Korea, like I told you, and he had a shul in Texas, Waco, Texas, and he didn't like it there, so he came here—

MH: How many Orthodox Jews could there be in Waco, Texas?

MN: Not a hell of a lot, but they had a shul there. He didn't care for it, but he—I'll tell you about this, too. He came here and got into the academy, the Jewish Academy, and he was a teacher and then he became assistant administrator. I bought a star in Jerusalem: it was all gold, it was really nice star, and I wore it all the time. When the Jewish Center closed, they had a deal with the YMCA over on Touhy Avenue that we could use their pool. Now, when you go in, you have a locker, a place where you can put your valuables. I put all my valuables in it, and didn't put the star in there.

So, now I go in the bathroom, and the rabbi was with me. And I'm going in the bathroom before I go down; I take my towel because I'm going to take a shower before. I get to talking and put my suit on and go downstairs. Now we come up and the place is cleaned out. My shoes, my socks, my underwear, everything; they took everything. And my star is gone. Anyhow, I reported it to the police and insurance took care of it. But what happened was one day I come to the J, and he says, "Do you see who's up there?" "Yeah, the Israelis selling custom jewelry." He said, "They got stars, and I'm gonna buy you one." I say, "Rebbe, you don't have to do that." He says, "I'm going to buy you one."

So, we went out and I picked out one, and I really wore it all the time. Now, I go to have cataracts taken off, and I take the star and give it to my wife, and she can't find it. Disappeared. Now, this I bought for my grandson, Mark, who happens to be a MD, PhD; he's on the staff at Northwestern, a neurologist, but he's in research, too. So, I bought him this one. He's a younger kid, and he says, "Pop, why'd you choose this one?" He says, "Because I don't wear it, you can take this." I said, "I like this one." So I took it, see, and I got a lot of compliments on it. But that's what the star and my rabbi.

MH: How'd you save a lady's life? How did you save someone's life here?

MN: Oh, my neighbor right down the hall, her husband had a stroke, and he's incapacitated to the fact that he can walk around with a cane, he had a brace on this leg and he has trouble getting it on and off. And his wife had cancer, and then she beat that, and then she hasn't been feeling well. So, I go in there and I bring the Saturday paper up and the Sunday paper up—actually, the Sunday paper up—and I go to stop in and see them. Okay, so I went last Thursday it was, last Thursday. I go in there, and they're having dinner, and I'm at the table just carrying on a little conversation, and he says he didn't like the food; he needed a couple crackers and he'd be fine. She tried to get up, and she couldn't hardly stand up.

Finally, she gets up, and I took a look at her legs. I said, “Ruthie, what happened? Your legs are all swelled up, that’s dangerous.” She says, “Yeah, I feel terrible, Monty. I just feel terrible.” So she had a little bathrobe, summer weight bathrobe, and I said, “I’m going to touch you,” and went like this. Full of water. I said, “Ruthie, you’re going to the hospital.” He said, “I’ve been trying to get her to go for three days. She won’t go.” I spent about twenty minutes and convinced her. I said, “Bernie, she’s going, I don’t care what she says. You call 911 and get them out here as fast as you can.”

I says, “Ruthie, he’s going to be okay.” She’s worried about her husband wouldn’t have anybody to help. I said, “You got your sister. If necessary, I will help, my wife will help him. He will be fine. You’re the one that’s sick now.” So they called 911 and she went in. So, the next day I called her up and she said, “Who’s this?” I said, “This is Dr. Monty.” She says, “Oh, Monty, I was so sick. You have no idea.” And her husband came back to her later on. He was trying to call me for three days, but he had the wrong number.

MH: What was it she had?

MN: She’s full of water. They don’t know, they got to take—some of the water went out of her stomach, but the legs were still swelled. They got to take a biopsy of her liver, which is not a good sign. She’s such a wonderful person. She was a teacher, a nice lady, real nice lady. But that’s what it is. And see, I’ve done a lot of things for people.

When they opened up that VA on Howard Street, I went in there. There was a Filipino doctor there, nobody could understand her, but she says to me, “My dear”—everybody’s my dear—“if I don’t get people in here they’re going to close the place up.” So, I says, “Give me your car. I know a lot of people, because I belong to this men’s talk, and we had 135 guys one time showing up on Wednesday.” This was a few years back. And I got up and I says, “Fellas, I got some good news. They’re opening a station over here; you can get your medication for four bucks.” “Wow!” It set the place—and they were, “Give me the cards, give me the cards!” I couldn’t give it enough cards.

And everybody—I go into a shopping center, I carry her cards with me. I go into a shopping center and she’s—my wife goes shopping, and I don’t follow her around and I just sit there and I talk to who’s ever there. I talk to them, “Are you a veteran?” “Yeah.” I give them a card, go here and do this. So that’s what I did. They sent me a nice plaque; I’ll show it to you later. I got all my medals and stud hanging in it. And this is my pleasure, and I bring the cards, like I said, to the VA; and I sell poppies, and I’m one of the biggest moneymakers for poppies. And I wrote an article in the *Times*, not the—about the poppy days. You know how they look. If you want, I can show it to; you can read it. It’s a small article.

MH: You mentioned you've talked to schools, high schools, grade schools. What's that experience like for you?

MN: Well, you know that, it was a great experience, and I want to tell you—

Pause in recording

MH: This is Monty Nachman again.

MN: The experience I had there was the most interested people and asked the most questions after was the blacks. And I associated it with the fact that they have their problems, too, and they ask more questions than the white kids did.

MH: What kind of questions did they ask?

MN: Why did they do that, you know; what was it like, and what did you think? And stuff like that. And at the Jewish Solomon Schechter School, we had some questions asked but mostly from the teachers. Not the students. One or two students asked a few questions, but nothing serious. But this is my experience. Then I went out to Waukegan at the Abbott School out there, and my wife was with me, and they had a group meeting me at the door and gave me a shirt from the school, and I gave my speech and showed them the pictures and stuff like that. They were very appreciative again. A lot of blacks and some Latinos were asking the same questions, different questions; I don't remember now. But that was the experiences with them.

The fact is that there are people, you know, even the younger ones that lived this life. You know, you can't picture yourself in somebody else's shoes, especially the blacks. You know, a white person can—the irony is, when I was a kid, I applied for a job at AT&T. At that time, we had to put down your religion, so my friend puts down “American,” and like a dummy, I put down “I'm Jewish.” He got the job and I didn't. Now, the same thing with my wife here in Chicago. Her and her cousin went for a job at Ward's. Her cousin said “American,” she put down “Jewish.” She didn't get the job. So, that's the anti-Semitism that exists.

MH: You dealt with anti-Semitism before the war.

MN: Oh, yeah.

MH: What about after the war?

MN: Not too much. You know, I had anti-Semitism in the Army days. I had a fight with one guy in my platoon. He was a bully, and he was a little bigger than I, he was a farm guy from Iowa. Like I told you, I was a scrapper. And I took my stripes off, and we went out in back, and we had it out. Now, I wouldn't say I was the winner; he was the winner, but we had it good. And I could take a lot of punishment, because that was me. After it was over, the captain said, "What happened?" I says, "Nothing." And all the guys came up to me, and they really came around me and—now, we got into combat, and who do you think the first guy that run away?

MH: The bully?

MN: The bully, yeah. I got his picture in the thing there, one of my books. I got a lot of pictures in the books. But the bully was the guy who ran away.

MH: But you didn't run into anti-Semitism when you came home?

MN: Ah, a couple times, but you want to know something? I got to a point where I overlooked it, because I didn't want to get in trouble. I was a hothead. I got to tell you something. I left my wife at her girlfriend's one time on Barry Street in Chicago; it's two lanes—it's a one-laned street, actually, going south. A taxi guy gets behind me, and he starts blowing the horn, and I says, "I'll be a minute." And the girls go out, they're walking. I get out of the car and I walk back to the taxi, and I said, "What the hell you blowing your horn for?" and I punched him in the nose. I turned around and went back in my car and went away.

MH: I think you still have issues.

MN: (laughs) But even to this day, I find there's Jews that—I wouldn't say they're anti-Semitic, but they're anti-Jews, anti-religious, and I speak up for my rabbi. And the strongest part, I think, of the Jewish religion is the religious people. They know everybody and everybody knows who they are, see. They don't hide the fact, and they're very proud of the fact. It's hard—my mother used to say "*Shvertz azayan Yid*," which means, "It's hard to be a Jew," and it is hard to be a Jew, because the cost and the different efforts you have to make and the things you have to do. But they do it, and

they're very strong here. The shuls that close up are the Conservative ones and the temples. The ones that are surviving and opening more up on Touhy Avenue is the religious.

MH: Chabad?

MN: Yeah, all kinds. They got all kinds, you know. So, this is what that is—

End of interview