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Karl Pauzar oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, November 30, 2008

Karl Pauzar (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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[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: Hello?

Karl Pauzar: Yes?

MH: Hi. Okay, why don't we start? If you can give me your name and spell it for me, please?

KP: My name is Karl Pauzar, K-a-r-l; Pauzar, P-a-u-z-a-r.

MH: And when were you born? What's your date of birth?

KP: 17 May twenty-three [1923]. I'm eighty-five.

MH: You're eighty-five. Okay. And what unit were you in?

KP: A Company, 62nd AIB [Armored Infantry Battalion].

MH: In?

KP: 14th Armored [Division].

MH: In the 14th Armored.

KP: Yeah.

MH: Okay. When did you go in the service?

KP: The latter part of forty- two [1942].

MH: And you had been growing up where?

KP: Dayton, Ohio.

MH: So, you've been in Dayton most of your life, then?

KP: Well, yes.

MH: Yeah. You went in the service; you were drafted, volunteered?

KP: Yes, drafted. I was put in the anti-aircraft unit, 90mm at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, and then I went before a board. Didn't know what for; I guess based on my IQ. The first question they asked me, "You want to go to ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] or OCS [Officer Candidate School]?" Are you familiar with ASTP?

MH: Yes, I am.

KP: Okay. I went to ASTP.

MH: I'm also familiar with Fort Sheridan. When I was in the service, I was the editor of the base newspaper there.

KP: That's where I took basic training in January. Couldn't hardly stand up, that goddamn ice all the time we were there.

MH: (laughs)

KP: I got out of the outfit, but anyhow, they went to Guadalcanal after all the cold weather. Well, I went to ASTP and they washed the program out, so I was sent down to Mississippi—no, I was sent to Texas, another anti-aircraft outfit, and they broke that anti-aircraft outfit up, because they thought they didn't need any more anti-aircraft. (inaudible) Then I was sent to Mississippi for six weeks' training and put in the infantry. And that's how I ended up overseas in the infantry.

MH: When did you finally go overseas?

KP: Early fall forty-four [1944]. I went into France, and I was infantry. I was assigned to 14th Armored. They had probably 500 of us lined up four deep; it went halfway down the middle, one side 36th Infantry and the other side 14th Armored. A lot of the people put in the infantry drove tanks; a lot of the people put in the tank division were infantrymen. That was their classification.

I was fortunate enough, I guess you would say, to go into the 14th Armored, although I had been in the 36th Infantry back in the States. Before the war, they were a rectangular division. During the early part of the war, they broke them up, cut off the 144th, separated the regiment and made it a training unit, and that's the one I was assigned to in Mississippi. Recently, I got a letter from them; their reunions are a thing of the past. Those people are a little older than I, and there isn't enough interest to keep it going anymore.

MH: What was the first combat you saw?

KP: First combat—gee, I don't really know. Somewhere—I really can't—I don't have a memory at all. I mean, I just can't. I envy these people who remember things. Evidently you can; I can't.

MH: There's three kinds of people: there's people who have no memory, there's people who have a really great memory, and there's people who make it up. (laughs)

KP: Well, I don't make it up, that's for sure. There's only a few guys—I didn't know many guys because I went in as an individual, as a replacement, and I didn't find out till years and years later they were suspicious of me. I come in as an individual, and nobody knew me, nobody I was with. I didn't know them. They didn't know me. I had a German name and I spoke German. So, I wasn't exactly fully trusted.

MH: Going in as a replacement is a very, very hard thing to do.

KP: Please?

MH: Going in as a replacement into a combat situation is a very hard thing to do.

KP: Oh, it is.

MH: It's very lonely.

KP: Yes, it is. You have no support; and on top of it, they weren't very friendly. I didn't know until years and years later, you know. There was only two people I remember, Neil Webster—he's still alive out in Nebraska—and, of course, Josh Hirsh. He's been—I've known him for years, I guess. He got a direct appointment during the war. I came out and—I stayed in the Army for a while after the war. We were in Europe, and they put me in the 9th Infantry under Colonel [William] Westmoreland, whom no one had heard of at that time; he hadn't been to jump school yet. I was a platoon sergeant, acting first as an E-7, and I got promoted by him to an E-8, and then somewhere after that, I got a direct appointment to second lieutenant. I eventually got promoted to captain and major and retired as a lieutenant colonel.

MH: Tell me about Ampfing.

KP: About what?

MH: About Ampfing.

KP: Ampfing? Just that we didn't know anything about it being there. I was driving a half-track, come up upon this town, said, "Ampfing," okay, so I moved forward and there's this camp. There's not a guard or anything around it. So, I drove around to the right side of it, and I saw this—again, the only individual I remember is this elderly gentleman, very emaciated, emotionless—the only thing was a shuffle, blank stare—striped uniform, and he come up to the fence. And I, of course, kept going.

We were instructed not to give them any food or anything else because of this-and-this. Your best source information—you know, late in the game and all; many of those people had died—are those people with a medical detachment. I understand that they dropped some of medics off, and they were there for about six weeks to do what they could with them, you know. But I don't know any of them or anything else.

MH: You didn't stop at the camp at all?

KP: Oh, no. No, no, no. Go, go, go. We had the Germans on the run. We didn't give them a chance to set their defenses and so on and so forth. We just run and run. One time, we were supposed to—late afternoon, we stopped and we went to this place, and Marlene Dietrich was gonna come up after dark. Well, hell, before then, mount up, we took off. We crossed the Rhine [River] on a pontoon bridge, went as far as we could, and about run out of gas. We stopped and lined up, and here they come with trucks and dropped off five-gallon cans of gasoline, and we gassed up and took off again. Yeah.

We ended up over on the Inn River, on the Austrian border, at Berghausen. We stayed there for a while, and then I don't know at what point in time—there was a program, and everybody wanted to go home and everybody wanted their kids home. I had nothing at home, so two of us—three of us—signed up for ninety days at a time at so-called class volunteers; you could waive your right to go home, sign up for ninety days at a time, and that's what I did. And that's when I got transferred, I guess, into the 9th Infantry.

But then, they started bringing lieutenants over from the States, West Point and all, wanting to know where our morning reports were. During the war—you know, they don't understand. You've lost your damned CP [command post], you've lost everything. There are no records, you know. So, I thought, "Well, this is the time to go home." I come back home and joined the active reserve here in town. Eventually, I was a commanding officer of a unit that got recalled in 1961 for the Berlin crisis, and I took a little over 300 men, eleven officers on active duty over on the East Coast, and we replaced a unit over there. If it got worse, we would go over and another unit would come out of the reserves and be replaced there.

MH: To come back to Germany for a second: at the end of the Second World War, did you guys know anything in advance about concentration camps?

KP: No.

MH: They hadn't told you anything.

KP: No, no. They didn't tell you anything. I don't know how it was in your day, but if some dark night, they said, "Okay, you can go home," I wouldn't know which direction to go. I didn't know where the hell I was at in relation to anything else. Okay, so I'm in this French town, I'm this German town, but I couldn't relate it to Paris or Berlin. I didn't know any of that. They didn't tell us anything, and they didn't tell us where we were going. Forward, backwards, that's all we knew. We didn't know what our objectives were; we didn't know from day one. So, if any of us were captured, we sure as hell couldn't give them any information if we wanted to.

MH: What was your experience with the SS?

KP: Saw a few of them. I guess the prisoners that I saw, they come out with their hands up, "*Nicht schießen, nicht SS.*" They were quick to tell you that they were not SS. We searched all the prisoners, of course, for any information we might find. And they had some young fifteen-year-old kids. They would—that's our job in armored infantry: you trot alongside the tanks 'cause they're blind when they're buttoned up, and they can't see the side. Hitler had these young kids laying in a ditch, laying on a bazooka, and they'd get up point-blank on one of our tanks. That was a good trade: a million dollar tank for a sixteen-year-old kid. So, that was our job, to prevent that. Then, when they got to moving too fast, we jumped up on the sides of them and ride with them up to the next point where they slowed down going into battle.

MH: How slow are they going when you're trotting alongside them?

KP: Just that way: slow enough so you could trot alongside of them.

MH: And when they speed up, how fast are they going?

KP: Oh, I don't know; fifteen, twenty miles an hour, depending on the terrain.

MH: Okay. This is a naïve kind of question, but isn't it sort of dangerous jumping on and off those things?

KP: (laughs) (inaudible), because you got two strikes on you to go, you know. The infantry composes only 6 percent of the battle force and suffers 80 percent of the casualties. When the war was over, there's very few people you know. Your company's turned over and over and over. You're spread out; you're not together, so you're spread out. And in the morning, they say, "Well, a little (inaudible) firefight, and six of them got killed." Who were they? They give you some names, and hell, they were strangers. You didn't know them. You never saw them, because they come in a couple days and go, and you never got together. First day and last day's the only time.

In searching the German prisoners, we found a couple—we searched all of them, and we pulled the caps off them, and there were a couple were women with hair piled up on top of their head.

MH: They were women?

KP: Yeah.

MH: Really? What about the Hitler Youth? Did you find many of them in the ditches with the Panzerfausts?

KP: A few of them, not too many. Not too many, right. But, you know, the tanks behind us or whatever, whoever—the first indication was those kids jumping up and get shot before you could do anything. We never lost a tank after that, due to that type of action. Of course, land mines are another thing. You learn—if you survive a week, you learn a whole lot. For example, you see a wooded area up there. You know there are Germans in there, but you don't know how they're equipped. Is it German infantry or is it armored? So, what you do, you fire tracers into the woods. Well, if you don't hear anything and they go into the trees, that's fine, but if they hit metal and ricochet up in the air, then you damn know you've got some metal in there. (inaudible) in a different way.

(inaudible) these tire tracks. There'd be mines there that they'd plant: they'd take a wheel and roll over it to make tire tracks so you'd think there's been a vehicle there. You can run through a minefield of anti-tank [mines]; it takes 250 pounds to set it off. (inaudible) but the next thing were anti-personnel mines. (inaudible) We'd get on our

hands and knees on a dirt road and probe with bayonets for mines. We had no mine detectors; the engineers weren't handy, and they're the only ones that had mine detectors. So, if any one of us had touched an anti-personnel mine, I wouldn't be talking to you.

MH: Right. Were you wounded at all in your time there?

KP: No, I was not. You know, again, a matter of luck. Just had a friend of mine, he was a prisoner for a while, and he was talking about—he was standing there, and a mortar shell come in and dropped right down beside him. It was a dud. So, (inaudible) he wouldn't have been there. Yeah, he was our state representative for the platoons here in Ohio. (inaudible)

MH: What did you do after you got out of the service?

KP: (inaudible)

MH: Well, I thank you very, very much for calling me. What did you call Ampfing? You said it was Waldlager?

KP: Waldlager Drei und Vier, Woods Camp III and IV.

MH: Wood Camp III and IV.

KP: Uh-huh. That was the official name for it. And I have a plaque here in town from the Jewish community in town for my small part in liberating. One Sunday, I was sitting home; it was cold and rainy, nothing to do. I read in the newspaper that the Jewish community was honoring three or four guys in this area that had liberated the concentration camps. So, I went to the synagogue, and I seen three or four guys there in civilian clothes, and I thought that who it was. I went up and talked to them and the Jewish woman who was the driving force in keeping it alive. She has the Holocaust display at Wright-Patterson Air Force base; my picture's on there, standing there in Germany, and after the war.

Anyhow, she comes up and said, "Are you—" and I said, "No, I'm not with these guys," but I told her [about liberating the camp]. She said, "Well, come on," so she had me (inaudible) by two Jewish officers in the back of the synagogue, and we went up on stage and told our little story. Again, I have the plaque here, and so and so forth, and I was

with her going around to the various schools. She's a driving force keeping the Holocaust memory alive in this area, anyhow. Both her parents, I think, were survivors of the Holocaust.

MH: Hmm. Okay. Again, you were 14th Armored Division. Give me the company?

KP: Company A, 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion.

MH: 67th Armored Infantry.

KP: 62nd. There were 62nd, 19th, and 68th.

MH: 62nd, okay. All right. Well, thank you very, very much for calling me. I really appreciate it.

KP: Have you had any response other than me?

MH: Yeah, I've had, I think, two other guys: a man named Ray Gock.

KP: Who?

MH: A man named Ray Gock, G-o-c-k. He was with the 68th Armored Infantry.¹

KP: No, I don't know him. The only guys I know who are still alive are with the 62nd. Neil Webster out in Nebraska is alive, and Gus Hinrich. He got a direct appointment. I know him, and he's the secretary/treasurer of the 14th Armored Association.

MH: Okay. All right. Well, I thank you again for calling me. I appreciate it.

KP: No problem.

¹ Roy Gock was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00051.

MH: Okay. Take care, sir.

KP: Thank you.

MH: Thank you. Bye-bye.

End of interview