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Rip G. Rice oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, June 3, 2008

Rip G. Rice (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. The Interviewee has a slight stutter, and this is not transcribed.]

Michael Hirsh: First of all, why don't you start by giving me your full name? And I don't think there's any hard words there, but I was going to say spell it.

Rip Rice: (laughs) My name is Rip, R-i-p, G., last name Rice, R-i-c-e.

MH: And you're a Ph.D.

RR: I am today, yeah. In fact, during the war I was a PFC [private first class].

MH: Well, starts with a P.

RR: Starts with a P.

MH: And your address is.... Your phone is.... And your email address is....

RR: Correct.

MH: What is your date of birth?

RR: April 19, 1924.

MH: And tell me a little bit about growing up before you went in the Army.

RR: Growing up. Jeez, I guess the most striking thing is my dad was an alcoholic, so we moved all over the place. And let's see, I was born in New York, New York, and lived in Long Island and Manhattan and Long Island, then Manhattan—back and forth, moved to Schenectady when I was about eleven years old, and that started a very nice time in my life. After that, after a couple of years, we moved to Buffalo, New York—actually Kenmore, outside of Buffalo. And when I was about fifteen, we were back in Manhattan and a year later or so, we moved to Fort Worth, Texas, another very nice time in my life.

MH: Are you being serious or facetious?

RR: No, I'm serious. I really enjoyed Fort Worth; in fact, I enjoyed it so much after the war I moved back there. As it turns out, but at any rate, I got out of high school in Fort Worth, went the first two years in college in Arlington, halfway between Fort Worth and Dallas, and then into the Army. That was 1943.

MH: You enlisted or were drafted?

RR: Well, I was not drafted, but I won't say that I enlisted. We were in college when the war started, and a few months after that, the Army and the Navy and the Air Force came around and said, "Look, if you guys will volunteer now to join the branch of the Army, Air Force or Navy, we will guarantee you to stay in college until you graduate and then to Officers Candidate School."

MH: That was the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] program?

RR: That was the ASTP program. The first thing I tried to do was get in the Air Force, and I couldn't do that because of my eyesight; and didn't think much of the Navy because I've always been scared of drowning, so that left me with the Army. So, I volunteered and then joined the Army enlisted reserve, I guess it was. And sure enough, by the end of the semester they called that off, and into the Army I went for basic training.

MH: So much for that guarantee.

RR: So much for that guarantee. It was all attributed to a general named Ben Lear, L-e-a-r. I didn't know anything about this firsthand—he wasn't my general—but they used to call him Yoo-Hoo Ben Lear. And the reason that they did that is that they were marching along, his division or whatever, and some good-looking girls came by and the guy started hollering “Yoo-hoo,” and Ben Lear pulled them out and sent them back or put them in the brig or whatever he did. Anyway, he got that reputation early on in his career, and then later on at the time that they did away with the college students, he was the guy in charge that made that decision. And then it was, “Okay, listen, we're going to take you in the Army and we're gonna give you basic training; and then we're going to send you back to college in the ASTP show, on an accelerated pace, and when you graduate then you go to OCS.”

MH: Didn't anybody notice there was a war going on?

RR: Yes, we all noticed that; and we all didn't really believe all this, but by this time you're in the Army, what the hell can you do? So, anyway, we did that and sure enough, Ben Lear came along and said, “Hey, we gotta renege on this again, because we need cannon fodder.” So, April of 1944 is when they disbanded all that and off I went to the 104th Infantry Division, and then Camp Carson, Colorado.

MH: And how long were you there?

RR: Well, let's see. We got to Camp Carson, I think it was April 5 of 1944 and we were on a boat—I'm sorry, we were on a ship, going to France in August, late August of that year. Something unique about that: We were the first convoy to sail directly from the States and land in France on the continent because prior to that, the port of Cherbourg had been plugged up with scuttled ships and all from D-Day; it was not accessible until about early September of 1944.

MH: Did you go to Cherbourg, or did you go to Le Havre?

RR: We went into Cherbourg. Part of the division landed on Utah Beach; but most of us landed at the harbor, at Cherbourg. It was September 6, 8, something like that.

MH: What's the mood of the guys you're going in with at this point?

RR: The mood?

MH: I mean, the war's been going on for a couple of years.

RR: I'm sorry?

MH: The war had been going on for a couple of years.

RR: Yeah, but D-Day had been only since June 6; and this was September. Actually, we landed on the sixth, because I remember now talking about D+90¹ is when we landed. And we all—thank God we didn't have to go through D-Day. And what happened after D-Day, you know, there was a lot of stuff in the hedgerows that gave the troops a heck of a problem. Anyway, that's when we got there.

MH: So, you've landed in France. Now what?

RR: Now what? Well, I guess we took a couple of weeks in a suburb of Cherbourg; by the way, all of this is written up in a book that was put together after the war. *Timberwolf Tracks*, it's called. I'm not saying you should stop the interview and go read the book; but I do have a copy of this book, and if as you're transcribing anything that you want to use and you're not clear on some dates, please advise me and I'll go look at my copy and get the exact dates out.

Anyway, as I remembered so vividly, we stayed around there for a couple of weeks; at the time, there was a pocket of German soldiers on the Brest, B-r-e-s-t, Peninsula. And somehow part of our troops got involved in the mop-up of that. And that's probably why we were there a couple of weeks, maybe three. And then in early October, I think, we drove through Paris—it had just been taken—and turned north and went up into Belgium, and stayed there for a very few days and then on into Holland. And that's when we started with our combat.

Now, I think I told you I was not in actual combat. I was in a combat zone but my role was with the engineer battalion, which was part of the 104th in the Headquarters Company. There were four units of five guys each, each called a "water point," and these

¹ D-Day plus ninety days.

four units were in charge of purifying water. And I was on one of those water points. And in fact, as I've said to my family and anybody else that wants to know since the war, I had at the time the safest job a guy could have in a combat zone. I was always in back of the front, except in the unusual event of maybe a counterattack. And I was not at the rear echelon: I was in between them, so that I was too far back of the front to get any small arms or mortar fire, and I was too close up to get any artillery; that would go over our heads and get to the rear echelon, normally.

MH: How do you account for such good fortune?

RR: I'm sorry?

MH: How do you account for such good fortune?

RR: God. Well, that's interesting. God and my chemistry, because I had a couple of years of chemistry. I was originally assigned to one of the line companies in the engineering battalion; B Company, I think it was. And one morning or afternoon, at some point the captain asked us to fall in, and we fell in, and he got us to attention, dress-right, dress and all that. And then he said, "At ease." And then he said, "Who knows the definition of the term pH?" Well, I'd been in the Army long enough to know I shouldn't volunteer. So, I didn't say a word, nobody else said a word. The captain said, "C'mon, somebody's got to know what the hell it means." So, something told me to put my hand up, so I did. "Sir, pH, the potential of the hydrogen ion." "Rice, fall out. Company dismissed. Rice, you're transferred to headquarters; they need a chemist on the water point." "Wha? Wha? Wha? Okay." So, there I was; that's how I got it.

MH: College has paid off.

RR: College paid off. But I was lucky, something told me to volunteer. I didn't know why. Against my principles, I volunteered. Thank God I did; that's where he gets into the act and gets some credit for this, because I didn't do it on my own.

MH: And for the rest of the war, were you in that fortunate position?

RR: Yeah, I was. And so were the other guys on these water points. The only time I can remember being really worried was when we'd put up a water point that was right next to an artillery battalion, and that got us a little lot of attention. We had bombs on us one night, and we had artillery coming in, 88s coming in on us, and we were under a tree, in back of a tree, facing the—you know, with the tree in between me and where the fire was

coming from. So, we lived through all that; after that, we learned our lesson. Never set up a water point anywhere near our artillery, because that's going to get attention.

MH: No German aircraft coming in on you?

RR: There was one Germany aircraft that came over that first night we were there and dropped bombs on the little house we had commandeered, a train station right next to an autobahn in a very, very small rural area; it wasn't even a town, just a train stop. We were sleeping in there, and here comes this plane dropping two bombs. He didn't hit the building at all; he hit near us, but he didn't hit the building. So, we got a little worried that night, and the next day we got this artillery coming in, and that's when we moved the water point. It's pointless doing this.

MH: So, you move around, the Battle of the Bulge happens, then what?

RR: Well, after the Battle of the Bulge, which we didn't really get into—we were, I think, on the north end of it, the north border of it. It never got up to just where we were because the Germans wanted to drive all the way to the coast; they didn't want to just take over all the land that was there.

But at any rate, after the Battle of the Bulge, we then crossed the Ruhr River—at least, our infantry did—and we went over after that, and then the hop, skip and the jump over to the Rhine [River]. And then, the great thing on the part of the thirteen guys that got on that bridge at Remagen and they cut the demolition wires so that the last bridge over the Rhine—and it was supposed to be blown. You might have seen the movie; it was remarkably accurate, in my opinion, to what I lived through.²

And there was a bridgehead formed across the Rhine, and I could just see Eisenhower back there picking up the phone and hearing from the on-scene commander, “Yes, sir, how about that bridge. Would have been blown to hell, right?” “No.” Then I can see him putting his hand over the phone, turning around and saying, “[Walter] Beetle Smith, what the hell are we going to do now? They didn't blow the bridge.” And so it was get everybody across that that you can.

Yet, that bridge was very derelict, and our commander, whoever it was, had the line company engineers build a pontoon bridge over the Rhine, and then pull a lot of smoke in the valley so that the Germans on the other side of the hills on the other side, who

² *The Bridge at Remagen* (1969), based on Ken Hechler's book of the same title. Hechler, later a U.S. Representative for West Virginia, was a member of the division that captured the bridge.

couldn't see what was going on but had the 88s zeroed in and all that, they didn't know anything was happening until we got damn near an army across the Rhine. That was just absolutely gorgeous. I mean, it was just wonderful; and if it hadn't been, can you think of what we were going to go through rowing across the Rhine with all this fire coming in on us? It was going to be something terrible, but it didn't happen, thank the Lord. And that's when I started getting a lot of religion was knowing that something had happened, those thirteen guys that went out on that bridge, saved I don't know how many thousands of lives. And there you go.

So at any rate, after we got across the Rhine, there was a pocket around Düsseldorf, in that area, that was very thin but there were a whole lot of Germans trapped in there, and we just went around them and on. Our general, Terry Allen [said], "Let's go, guys; let's get to Berlin before anybody else does," that was the attitude. So, from the time we crossed the Rhine and established the beachhead, we—my group didn't establish the beachhead, but as soon as the beachhead got there, they needed a water point and we were the first one over. So we got that job and that was fine; but after we had enough men and materials then, off we took and didn't take us long to get up to Nordhausen and then to Halle and end the war.

MH: At what point did you know anything about the concentration camps, the slave labor camps?

RR: The only thing that I saw of that, that we saw, in the 104th, was when we got to Nordhausen.

MH: But you didn't know that they were out there?

RR: No, no.

MH: Do you think the higher command knew and just wasn't telling you?

RR: Nope. I don't think anybody knew what was going on, but look, I'm just a PFC, and I don't know. I have read a lot of histories subsequent to this, where people have said [Franklin] Roosevelt knew all about it and he didn't do anything and blah, blah, blah. And I don't believe that. And one of the reasons I don't believe that is that one of my neighbors here has a museum that he's had for years; he's been a fan of FDR, and he's got all kinds of artifacts in there from World War II and all about FDR. And he puts on a show, an act from time to time. He's been doing this for many twenty years, and so he knows a lot about what FDR was like and all of that. Not that he was a personal friend or

confidant or anything—he wasn't—but he was just enamored of the guy and what he did, and he's pointed out to me several times that the Jewish people never had a better friend in the U.S. than FDR, despite what history seems to say. So I can't tell you for sure what happened; but we had knowledge whatsoever. Now, one of the things that we did, as soldiers, was every week, I think it was, *Stars and Stripes* came out. And there was nothing in there about any of this. Now, it could have been somebody was keeping it out, sure; but I doubt it. I really do.

And when we got to Nordhausen, I didn't know what Nordhausen was. We were driving from, I think, Kassel with a K—K-a-s-s-e-l? And it could have been after that, I'm not sure. But we were driving one morning; our objective was—see, what they had with these four points, if you've got the front line and in back of it close up, maybe a mile or so, you've got a water point. And then two, three miles back you've got another water point. And three, four miles back you have a third one, and then you have a fourth one back near the rear echelon. We were the fourth one, and we were leap-frogging all these others to go on up into past the Nordhausen area. In fact, our objective was not to go to Nordhausen, it was go beyond that. So, we're driving along in this valley—

MH: What are you driving in, by the way?

RR: Oh, well. We had a ten-ton truck, pulling a trailer in back of us. The trailer had the actual pumps and machinery to pump the water out of a source; and then on the ten-ton trailer we had our tank and our bedding and all the slats with the tank to put up and all that, and spare parts and everything. So, even though it's only five of us, we needed a ten-ton truck because of the space.

MH: So, you actually made water? You'd throw it in a stream or a river and you'd purify it?

RR: That's correct. That's correct. Now that I know how to purify water, I've been in water treatment with ozone for twenty-five years or so. I look back on what we did in World War II and I said, "My God, how could we have drunk that swill?" But at any rate, that's another story. So, that was my job.

But the point of it is, we got into this valley, which turned out to be about ten, twenty miles from Nordhausen, and we started smelling this very strange odor. The nearest thing I could compare that odor to was when I lived in Fort Worth. We had stockyards on the north side. And they didn't care much about air pollution at the time and when they could do the slaughtering and all that, they'd have things left over that they'd burn, from the animals. And that's what it smelled like: burning animals. Only it wasn't exactly that;

there was something more to it. And that odor kept getting stronger and stronger, and we didn't know what the heck it was.

MH: Did you talk about it?

RR: Well, we were on this truck. "What the heck is this?" you know? I was saying, "Well, I tell you what—it smells a little bit like the stockyards in Fort Worth." That's about all we were—but we didn't have any idea what was going on. We got up to some intersection—this was a rural road, you know, out in the boondocks. No town around. And here's an MP [Military Police]. What the heck is an MP doing up here—we're close to the front and all that. Why have we got an MP standing out in the middle of the road? And he says, "Guys, the captain wants you to make a detour here—turn left and go into town, there's something you gotta see." So, we turn in, and a couple miles we're into Nordhausen, or the outskirts of Nordhausen, and into this yard where all these bodies are. And the stench was just—I mean, we got there and every one of us was—we just tossed our cookies, we couldn't stand it.

MH: This was behind the wall, behind a fence?

RR: Well, I thought it was behind a wall—in fact, I thought it was a courtyard of some kind. But in 2002 or 2003, I was back there, and I met the mayor of the town, who was a little kid when all this was happening, and he said, "There was no courtyard here. This is the spot," which was a very open spot. But the point is, it wouldn't have mattered if there was a wall or not; these bodies were there that were rotting and were stacked up and just were nauseating. I mean, the thought that people could do that to other human beings, and—oh, I can't tell you what was going through my mind, but I got sick as a dog; everybody else did.

MH: How many bodies do you think you were seeing?

RR: Oh, oh, I got photographs—I could count 'em, but there were hundreds of 'em. I mean, they were stacked five and six high, in big mounds. And there were more inside buildings, there were some buildings; there was a building, at least, there. It could have been two, it could have been three. I was so nauseated and so upset by this horror that I was looking at. Now, I had no idea what was happening at this place. I didn't know—for instance, we didn't know that this was the day either, the day after the camp was liberated. We didn't know anything about making missiles in the mountains there. We thought this was a concentration camp, but we didn't know what to call it. Well, it turns out it wasn't that, it was a slave labor camp. Still, they just worked these folks to death and didn't feed 'em right, and oh, jeez, it was just total horror.

MH: How old were you then?

RR: I'm sorry?

MH: How old were you then?

RR: I was twenty years old, because a week later, I turned twenty-one. This was about April 10, 12, something like that. A saving grace for me: I stood there, see, half of me is Jewish. I had no idea what these bodies were. You couldn't tell anything about their religion. The other half of me is German. And I just sat there, stood there, throwing up my guts and saying, "I never want to see another German as long as I live." Because I was—we were all like this. It's not me; it's everybody that was there. The saving grace was when the commanding officer, whoever he was, had sent a detail into town to get the German civilians to come through this plant, this area, to see what had happened. And they came in; every one of them threw up his cookies. That's the only thing that saved the German people in my imagination, as far as I was concerned at that time. They were human beings, too. But it didn't bring these people back to life or anything.

It was just—so, for a long time I thought Nordhausen was a concentration camp. And then after we left, we were only there three, four hours at most, and then we went on to do our thing later on up towards Halle. But later on I found out that they were making rockets back here. And even later than that, years later, I found out it was a slave labor camp and not a concentration camp. It was not an Auschwitz, it was not a Dachau. But to me, it didn't matter. It was horror that you've never seen before or smelled before in your entire life.

And it—whenever I hear somebody nowadays, some kid, say, "Hey, it never happened, it was just a figment of everybody's imagine. You were faking." I'm just, "Full of shit, buster. I wish I could have rubbed your nose in that smell, you'd never forget it." You know what happened. And anybody who says it didn't is just doomed to repeat history: a tragedy. And you pushed the wrong button on me, I'm sorry. I get emotional about this.

MH: That's okay. Does it ever go away from you? Do you ever get it out of your system?

RR: Yeah, yeah. But it always comes back somehow or other. I mean, little things happen. Like for instance one night in 2002, my wife and I and some friends of ours were doing something, a technical meeting on ozone in Amsterdam, and I said, "Gee,

let's do something after that." And at that time, I had been in contact with a fellow half my age who was born and raised in Halle, and he was the town historian and he'd written some stories about what happened in Halle, which is an adventure all of its own in my background.

MH: Halle is H-a-l-l-e?

RR: H-a-l-l-e. But the point is, I had arranged to go to Halle and to meet this guy, one on one, and do some other things. So from Amsterdam, we took a little tour. We went down to Breda, where the site of my first water point was. That's in Holland, and then the next was over to Nordhausen, and then on to Halle. And I had contacted by email somebody in Nordhausen, who turned out to be the mayor—or at least he was the mayor; I guess he stopped being a mayor about 1990 or something like that. He invited us in; he says, "Oh, you guys are welcome anytime. Come on in and we'd love seeing you again and we'll show you all around." And man, he showed us: he took the whole day and showed us all around Nordhausen and into the mountains where they made the rockets, and into the museum that they have there.

By that time, prior to our leaving—by the way, *Modern Marvels*, one of the cable channels had developed this one-hour story of the rockets and how they got made at Nordhausen and some of the slave labor things on that. So we were kind of—I was oriented back to it again, and when we got there, the mayor showed us even more, which was very nice. So, yes, I've kept it in my mind all this time, wondering what I could do to help stop anything like this from happening again. But then I don't know that answer's ever come, but that's about it. I was not one of the liberators; I was just an observer that came by after the liberation of Nordhausen and all that. But I can sure tell you what a revolting experience that was. Little boys became men all of a sudden.

MH: How do you—aside from remembering it, how do you think the experience affected your life?

RR: Made me more tolerant of my fellow man; but maybe that's just part of growing up, I don't know. I don't know that it has affected my life; it doesn't wake me up in the middle of the night screaming and all of that. Nothing like that, it's just that I know it happened. I thank God I didn't have to go to other concentration camps.

I remember my entire experience was a renouncing of things German in my background. When I got back from the war and I got into George Washington University to get my—finish my bachelor's degree—I found that I had to take two years of German. I didn't want to do that. Why do I have to take German? I have all this French and all that. They

said, “Because you want to be a chemist; you gotta have French and German.” If I take another language, Russian’s going to be the language of the future, maybe Japanese, you know. Nope, you gotta have German. So, I was forced to take two years of German. Well, I just hated it. But I passed it with a C—maybe even a D, I don’t know. I didn’t care to learn it. I wasn’t going to remember anything about the language, ’cause I was never going to go to Germany.

So that was 1946—seven [1947]—and after I got married, late sixties [1960s] now, the wife says all of a sudden—I come home from work and she says, “Guess what? Us and three other couples in our circle, we’re going to go to Europe for a vacation.” And I said, “Great, where are we going to go?” Munich. (MH laughs) First thing popped into my head: Dachau. I don’t want to go to Munich. And where else are we going? Vienna. That’s Germany, too; I don’t want any part of that. And then Budapest. Well, that’s all German and Russian—I don’t want any part of that, either. But we were going to go in about two, three months. The only thing I can say to you, and I’ve told this to the wife—she didn’t believe it at first, but she does now—I so did not want to go that I seriously, I seriously thought about putting a gun to my head and getting it all over with. I didn’t want to go back to Germany.

MH: That bad?

RR: That—I didn’t want to go. I just—I never wanted to see another German. But I went, and thank God I did, because when I got to Munich Airport—this was late sixties [1960s] now—they still have some soldiers there with guns, you know, at the airport. And that was disturbing as all hell, to be in Germany with no gun, and here’s some Germans with gun. That didn’t feel right. But at any rate, we got to downtown Munich, we took a nap and we got up, and I fell in love with Munich and the Bavarians. And from that point on, I’ve been a Germanophile.

My two years of German—I have learned more German since then, not formally. I can do better in German than I can in French now. And I had seven, eight, nine years of French in my lower schooling and all that. But I just admire the Germans and what they’ve done. And most of them, especially the ones who are almost my age, they will admit, “Our country made serious mistakes, and the problem was we personally couldn’t do anything about it. What would you have done?” If you speak up, you’re gone. And so, I don’t—I probably would have done the same thing, I don’t know. But all that’s over with—I’m a Germanophile. I love Germany and Austria and Switzerland. And I love to go over there; in fact, I’m going over there in the middle of July with two of the bands I’m involved in, and we’re going to do some big band music of the forties [1940s] and thirties [1930s].

MH: What do you play?

RR: I play tenor saxophone, yeah. I direct one of these bands, and I play in the other one. And we're going to take an extended tour—both bands have been invited to play at the Montreux Jazz Festival, and that's what we're going to do the last two days. But the first band will go back home; the second band is going on an extended tour, which gets us into Croatia, Slovenia, Vienna, and then back to the U.K., and I've just been invited to stop off at the U.K. and give a lecture at Newcastle University, and do with ozone.

MH: Have you been to Montreux before?

RR: I've never been to Montreux, no. I've been to Switzerland many, many times, but never to Montreux. I've been in the area: that is to say I've been around the lake, but not ever stopped in Montreux.

MH: Never been there for the jazz festival.

RR: Never been at a jazz festival, no.

MH: You mentioned God a couple times.

RR: You bet.

MH: Seeing what you saw there, at Nordhausen, you had said you were thanking God for the assignment you had the war because it kept you safe.

RR: Yeah.

MH: Seeing what you saw at Nordhausen didn't cause you in any way to question how God could let this happen?

RR: No.

MH: Why?

RR: No. I'd come to grips with that earlier on, or maybe later on, I don't know. First of all, at Nordhausen I was so sick, I just couldn't—it was hard to recover and think straight. However, when you look at parts of the Bible, the early books of it, and you have Joshua and the Israelites crossing the River Jordan with orders from God to slaughter X number of people, all the people in this area, that kind of thing—that's when you start to wonder, "What the heck is this all about? I thought this was a loving God." Ah, but those guys had sinned. Well, when you start to think about that, you look at these people—you didn't know at the time you saw them whether they had sinned or not in the eyes of God. Later you find out they had not, they were just being exterminated. But at the Nordhausen camp, it wasn't simple, "Let's get rid of all the Jews." I found out there were some Americans at Nordhausen, in the slave labor camp. And one of these days, I'd like to find out more about that; the curator told me he'd send me whatever information he had. He's never done that, but—

MH: I've interviewed two Americans, POWs, who were put in—who were first taken to Stalag IX B and then with a shipment of what was supposed to be 350 Jewish American prisoners of war, were sent to Berga, which is a slave labor camp, digging tunnels into a mountain. And I've talked to two of those guys.

RR: At Bergau?

MH: Berga. B-e-r-g-a.

RR: Ah, B-e-r-g-a. Yeah. I know some friends at Burgau, B-e-r-g-a-u [*sic*], which is closer to Munich.

MH: Berga an der Elster.

RR: Yeah, no, that's a different town. Oh, I didn't—that's good. I sure would like to know about that at some point, because what you see there is a memorial, a big slab of stone. And it's got the names of every country of people that were slaves at the slave labor camp at Nordhausen. And down at the bottom you see U.S.A. or United States of America. And that's a shocker, because nobody thought—I didn't think that. I didn't think there were any Americans there. And that raises the question of how that happened.

But back to your question, I didn't think of that at the time, the question of how could God let this happen; all I know is he works in strange ways. But as he affects me, there's been about a dozen times in my life—a few of them in World War II, but not many—but

after World War II when I should have been out of here. And something happened that made me change course in terms of medications or go see the doctor about this or something that I really should have been out of here, and I haven't. He's kept me here to do whatever I'm doing, I presume. So, that's one reason I'm still working with my ozone, and I'm playing music to entertain folks, including myself, and whatever he says is fine with me. If he's ready for me to go, I'm going. Not that I have anything to say about it. But the point of it is, that makes me that kind of a guy. I'm not a churchgoer, but I'm a believer. I absolutely believe in it.

MH: When you said you were half-German, half-Jewish, what religion were you raised in?

RR: I'm a Methodist. My father was a lousy Catholic, and he never—I never went into a Catholic church until during the war, when I dated a gal who was Catholic and she took me to church one morning. And I never was in a synagogue until I was maybe thirty-eight years old and you know, way after the war. But the Jewish side of my family I love very dearly, and the Catholic side of my family I love very dearly. I don't know; I'm a half-breed.

MH: Any other thoughts with respect to what you saw during the war there?

RR: Oh, no. All I can say is that when I read about these other concentration camps, saw the pictures, and I couldn't wait to see *Judgment at Nuremberg* [1961] to see how they were going to play all this up. And that's fine. And they did a good job. I just saw the movie again, just a month or so ago, and I had a little different take on it—it looked like it was doing a little too much now, but not then. You had to get the word out. Any other comments on the war? That was just about it.

There's an interesting thing that you might have interest in, back to Halle. Here it is April 18 or 19, and we're coming up upon Halle and we get there in the afternoon and the MPs or whoever it was came out and said, "Hold off, guys. There's a problem here. We've got a pocket of SS guys in town, and we're going to have to do something about that. The big brass hasn't decided whether to raze the town or what, but you guys stay out here and when they all clear in, probably tomorrow, we'll let you know when it's okay to go in." So, we settled out of town and we figured we were going to hear all kinds of artillery and bombing and that kind of thing, in case they razed the town or something—or at least some kinds of battle sounds and all that, 'cause this was about as close as we were going to get to actual battle.

Well, nothing happened. Next morning we were told to go on into town, and we did, and there was no looking like it got bombed out or anything in the dark, and we didn't hear it. And we set up our water point and all that. And then what happens after you've got your tank full and all that, Jeeps start coming in with their five-gallon water containers, and they're driven by cooks and/or enlisted guys, and every now and then you'd find an officer coming around to see what's going on. And he's driving the truck, so you get to talking and asking questions. And some of these guys were from the infantry companies; those are our clients, as it were, our customers for the water. And we were saying, "Why didn't we have a big battle here last night? We were told all hell was going to break loose." And a lot of people didn't know.

And one guy says to me, "You know, the funniest thing happened: there was a member of the German underground who got on his bicycle, posing as a pots and pans salesman. And he rode his bike through the German lines, through the American lines, or up to the American lines, where he damn near got killed, and he said, 'I want to speak to your commanding officer; I have information.'" So, they took him to the commanding officer; he sat down with a pad and he drew a map of where the SS guys were, street by street—there was only a couple of streets of 'em, but in buildings, on which floors they had the machine guns and you know, where everything was. And the commanding officer says, "This is great if it's true." So, he calls the artillery, the American artillery, they open up, they surgically strike these places, the SS guys would give up. That's what I was told. So, I said to myself, "Gee, one of these days I'd like to meet that German guy and pat him on the back."

Well, years later—when was it, I'm talking like 1967 or eight, I'm working at W.R. Grace Company here in Clarksville at the Research Division, and I'm in one group over in this building, and in the other building are the guys doing contract R&D [research and design] for the government. And for some reason I won't go into, I get a promotion and I go over there to take charge of this group. The guy that normally would have been the boss is a German-speaking guy, and he's got a pretty thick accent but he's a very nice fella. And his name is George Braude, B-r-a-u-d-e. And you know, George was gonna be the boss, but I got put to be his boss, so that made for kind of a friction between him and me for a while, but after a while he came to grips with it, and we started being friends and we started talking.

And at one point, he said, "Rip, were you in the Army during World War II?" "Yeah." "What outfit—where were you?" "I was in Europe." "Oh, what outfit were you with?" "104th." And he just sat straight up, "104th Infantry Division? Did you wear a Timberwolf on your arm?" "Yes, I did." "My God. Let me tell you a story. I was in the German underground, and on the night that Halle fell, I found out where the SS were organized in the south part of town, and I got my bicycle and got myself disguised as a pots and pans salesman." And I said, "Hold off. And you rode through the German lines, you got to the American lines where you almost got killed, and then you went to see our

commanding officer; you drew him a map,” and he’s nodding his head. He’s the guy. This is the guy that did that. I was absolutely amazed.

Well, I had forgotten all about this—this is, you know, 1967, amazing thing. I patted him on the back, ’cause I always wanted to do that, shook his hand, bought him a drink, whatever it was. I said, “I don’t know if you saved my life, guy, but I know you saved the lives of a hell of a lot of Timberwolves that were going to have to storm that town, and thank you for what you did.”

So, I forgot all about it after that. I was never a member of the Timberwolf Association or anything; I wish I had been, but I stayed away from it until about 2001, when for some reason I got on the Internet and I saw this, and I saw war stories on the Internet and I saw Halle and I didn’t see anything about this guy. And I said, “My God, why not?” So first thing I did was to go find him again, ’cause he had moved to another job and all that, and he’d retired. But he was still in this area. Happily, he was now getting into a little bit of Alzheimer’s and sure enough, within six months he was gone. But at least we got back together again. I’m sorry, is that you?

MH: No, I’m okay.

RR: Could you hold a minute?

MH: Sure, no problem.

Pause in recording

RR: So, we’d gotten back together again, and I wanted to try to find somebody in the 104th that could corroborate his story, you know. So, that’s why I got back into the Association, or I got into the Association. And I wrote this story up and I passed it around among those that are still left. Nobody said a word. Nobody that is left had any recollection about it. But my friend did have a letter from the colonel that he had talked to and draw the map for and all that, and the colonel was getting on in age when he was contacted by my friend, and said, “Well, if you really are the guy, you sure did a hell of a good service for your people and mine, and we thank you very, very much for that.”

Now, that leads me to the historian at Halle who had written a story in Germany about why Halle had not been razed on that night, and that’s a long story by itself, I won’t bother you with. But the point of it is, in the book, he mentioned my friend Dr. George Braude by name and that’s when I decided—because there wasn’t anything there, other

than “Dr. Braude, University of Halle,” where he was. And so I contacted the fellow and said, “Braude’s my friend, what is it you’d like to know?” So, the guy writes a letter to Braude for me to take, and it’s all in German. I give it to my friend Braude and what do you think he does? He gets scared to death. These are Nazis coming after him. He doesn’t want to tell me a damn thing.

MH: Really?

RR: Yeah, he was scared to death, literally scared, and I don’t know whether it was his Alzheimer’s took over or something. I felt bad about making him feel that way. It turns out that’s the farthest thing from the truth, but that’s the way he thought. Can you imagine that? And he told me more things that had happened, like while he was with the underground, the Allies would drop some fliers down and of course everybody would throw them away—at least, the Nazis in charge and all that would throw them away. But my friend and his underground colleagues would pick them up and then they’d go around at night hanging them up on the telephone poles.

MH: Sounds like a really good way to get yourself killed.

RR: Absolute beautiful way to get yourself killed. Yet he wasn’t killed, nor were his colleagues; they were just smart as hell. And it turns out there were three or four German underground units in Halle; his was at the university. At any rate, that’s why I went to Halle, ’cause I wanted to put that to bed and get his name up in German history for what he had done for the war effort. So, those are my stories. Most of my interesting stories didn’t happen until after the fact, and certainly don’t really have much to do with combat. Any of those guys who were in combat and lived through it, they’re my heroes. They didn’t want to do it, I didn’t want to do it, but they did it. And that just—I’m just loaded with admiration for them.

MH: Thank you very, very much for your time.

RR: No problem.

MH: I really appreciate it. Bye-bye.

RR: Thank you.

End of interview