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Irvin Schlocker oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, June 30, 2008

Irvin Schlocker (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: Spell your name for me?

Irvin Schlocker: Irvin, I-r-v-i-n, Schlocker, S-c-h-l-o-c-k-e-r...It's ironic that you called now. I just spoke to two members in my squad.

MH: Oh. I'll probably ask you for their names, too...And you're originally from Philadelphia.

IS: Yeah, born and raised. I've been out here in California just about ten years this past week.

MH: What's your date of birth?

IS: 7-11-25 [July 11, 1925].

MH: So, you were growing up in Philadelphia?

IS: I grew up—all my life, I lived there. We had a family-owned flower shop that I ran; at the end, I was the survivor, and it lasted for seventy-five years.

MH: And then, how'd you end up in the Army?

IS: I volunteered to go in.

MH: You were—

IS: I was eighteen years old, and I was still—I had a half a year of high school left. But in those days, every kid wanted to go in to do his duty. It was a common thing to do. There are three guys in our association that I know of, and there's possibly many more, that lied about their age to get in. They got in at sixteen. One guy got in at fifteen.

MH: In your unit?

IS: Yeah, in the division.

MH: In the division.

IS: I don't know what company. But they—actually, one guy, I used to think he didn't belong to us, he looked so damn young. This was not unusual.

MH: Yeah. So, what year was it you volunteered?

IS: Forty-three [1943].

MH: Forty-three [1943].

IS: I could have stayed out to finish high school—you were draft-exempted for that—but I felt like I was missing something, you know what I mean?

MH: I understand.

IS: And I was not unusual. A lot of kids did the same thing.

MH: So, you enlisted. Where'd they send you?

IS: The first week or so was a place called Fort Meade, Maryland. Then we went down by train to Centerville, Mississippi, Camp Van Dorn, and I stayed with that division for two years.

MH: So, they put you in the 63rd?

IS: No, that was the 63rd, at Camp Van Dorn. The division was just starting up; it was being activated. We were the fillers to bring it up to what they call "table of organization strength."

MH: Right. And when did they send you over?

IS: Let me see. Thanksgiving dinner we had at Camp Shanks, New York; the next day, Friday, we got on boats and went overseas. That would be the day after Thanksgiving.

MH: And the ship went where?

IS: Marseille, France.

MH: Okay. And then what?

IS: That was a big secret. That was a big hush-hush, where we were going. But in the middle of the trips, they gave out books, handbooks in French. That was the way they kept things secret.

MH: I was just reading something that some guys were on a ship, and they didn't know where they were going until they opened up the Red Cross ditty bags and it said, "How to Behave in England."

IS: That could very well be, 'cause the same thing happened to us. We did not know where we were going, nobody knew; it was a big hush-hush secret. We saw Gibraltar at night, so we knew we had to be—anybody who was familiar with geography knew you were in the Mediterranean. And then they gave out handbooks in how to deal with French civilians and gave you simple terms to ask for help or food or barter, or stuff like that.

MH: So, you landed in Marseille.

IS: Marseille. We stayed there for about a week and got our weapons unpacked and ungreased, and we got used to living out in the field.

MH: This was forty—?

IS: That was still forty-four [1944].

MH: Forty-four [1944].

IS: Yes, sir.

MH: Late in forty-four [1944.]

IS: Very late in forty-four [1944]. But we got there in time for the [Battle of the] Bulge.

MH: They rushed you up from Marseille.

IS: Yeah, we were—they didn't rush us up; they put us in trains and that sort of thing. Those train rides were an experience. You could make a book out of those train rides.

MH: You were in the 40-by-8s?

IS: Yeah. You know about 'em?

MH: Yes.

IS: Did you know how the men went to the toilet?

MH: Go ahead. In their helmets?

IS: No, no, no, no. They had big open sliding doors. You extended your arms in each direction, your right and your left, and a big, hopefully strong, guy held each arm and you squatted and did your business, while the train was moving.

MH: With your ass hanging out the train?

IS: Yeah, of course. (both laugh) Picturesque, isn't it? That's the truth. I mean, I didn't make that up. And if you had to do urine, that was easy. They had a big bucket in there. They waited until the train slowed down to empty it out, or else the guys in the car behind you got sprayed. (both laugh) It was unbelievably filthy.

MH: (laughs) Once they put you on a train like that, did they stop regularly?

IS: Yeah, they stopped for another train going through. This is combat, now; the tracks still had to be cleared and stuff like that. And it was just bitter, bitter cold. The 40-and-8s, as you know, were open, slatted railroad cars. We had no warmth other than the guy next to you. We didn't get out of those trains for about—I'd say four, maybe five, days at the most. But it was sub-human temperatures, sub-normal temperatures.

MH: How many guys did they put in a car?

IS: Huh?

MH: How many guys did they put in a car?

IS: Generally about a platoon, which is close to forty.

MH: So, you're packed in tight.

IS: No, no, it wasn't tight. There was enough room you could lay down and stretch out, but that was about it. But you stayed close to the other guy to get his body heat. We took our overcoats and we made—either that, or we used our helmet for a pillow, and then covered up. You put on everything that you owned. Two pairs of socks, two uniforms, as many jackets as you had, underwear—long underwear; there were no t-shirts in those days. It was just bitter, bitter, bitter cold.

MH: And what had they told you about where you were going?

IS: You had to surmise where you were going. We didn't know where we were going; we only read the railroad station names. We had no idea. We were nineteen-years-old, and I was supposed to be the squad leader. I didn't know shit.

MH: (laughs) And finally, where do you end up? Where do you get off the train?

IS: At a place called Fort Oberhoffen. Fort Oberhoffen, which was a German or French cavalry base. It had just been captured the day before, so we were more worried about booby traps than anything else.

MH: And again, your unit was—what regiment?

IS: Yeah, go ahead.

MH: What regiment were you in?

IS: I was in the 254th. There were three regiments in the 63rd Infantry Division: 253rd, 254th, 255th. Now, we were just an infantry regiment; we did not have our support. They sent the infantry over first, knowing that we were the most expendable. Seriously, I mean, being practical: they knew they weren't going to lose the artillery and other divisions were losing infantrymen; they used us as a replacement pool. You get it?

MH: Yep.

IS: And my squad was down to about four men at one time: no casualties, just men pulled out.

MH: What was your rank at this point?

IS: Staff sergeant—no, at that time, let me see. I had just made buck sergeant before we went overseas. I was a three-striper.

MH: Right. I'm familiar with that. I was in Vietnam for ten months.

IS: Okay, so you know the drill.

MH: Yes.

IS: I don't know the new ranks, like the sergeants first class. I never knew that. And I stayed in the Army afterwards in the Pennsylvania National Guard and the Reserves. I wound up as a brand new second lieutenant in the Korean War. But I didn't serve in that actually in combat.

MH: Anyhow, so you get to this place that was captured the day before.

IS: Yeah. Fort Oberhoffen, it was called.

MH: Then what happens?

IS: Then they—again, we lost a lot of men. They pulled out all the privates and PFCs [privates first class]; these were the guys who were replacing the men that were casualties in the Battle of the Bulge. You follow me?

MH: Yes.

IS: We never saw these guys again. Never saw them again. They were mostly low-rank guys, privates and PFCs. They tried to keep the unit together by keeping the non-coms [non-commissioned officers]: the corporals, the sergeants, that sort of thing. I mean, they

did the best they could. You couldn't help it. 7th Army says, "We need 10,000 riflemen," all of a sudden, they're going to get 10,000 riflemen. They were expendable. Have you ever studied casualties in the infantry?

MH: No, but I'm reading a lot of the history of the final months of World War II now.

IS: They were tremendous, tremendous. And anybody—we used to joke about it. There were two doctors examining the guys, and one guy looked in each ear. One doctor looked in each ear. If they didn't see each other, you passed.

MH: (laughs) Yep.

IS: If they didn't see each other. I'm sure it was in Vietnam the same thing.

MH: A little different, but I understand.

IS: Yeah. What were you in, what type of outfit?

MH: I was an Army combat correspondent in the 25th Infantry Division.

IS: 25th, that's the Lightning?

MH: Yup, Tropic Lightning.

IS: Yeah. Yeah, I know the one. I kept active—I used to get my infantry journals and stuff like that for years afterwards. I enjoyed the Army, believe it or not, after the war.

MH: After the war.

IS: After the war. Well, I didn't like getting my head shot at, you know, or freezing.

MH: So, when did you personally hit combat?

IS: The actual—well, you could say when we got up to Fort Oberhoffen. Even before Oberhoffen, down in Marseille, we used to have a guy: a German patrol plane would come over there. They called him Bed Check Charlie.

MH: Right, I've heard of him.

IS: It was a common thing. They'd drop leaflets and stuff to surrender; and about three days after we got there, the third day we were in Marseille, we got letters welcoming the 63rd Infantry Division to Germany.

MH: So much for security.

IS: Huh?

MH: So much for security.

IS: Well, it was a joke. Everybody knew what was going on. I remember getting off the boat in Marseille, and I got to talking to one of the guys who was a ship's complement—he stayed with the ship, he ran the PX [post exchange]: he was an Army guy. I got to talking to him, and he was from a town called Jenkintown, and I said, "Christ, that's right outside Philadelphia. Do me a favor: when you get back, tell my mother—don't tell her where we're at"—he wasn't allowed to—"but just tell her we landed safely." And about a month later, I got a letter, "Your friend from the boat said you arrived safely." And that made her feel good, you know what I mean? I was the only son.

MH: Right. So, back to when you first hit combat.

IS: Yeah.

MH: Where was that?

IS: In Alsace-Lorraine.

MH: Okay.

IS: The Colmar Pocket is where we saw our actual first ground combat. It was bitter, bitter, bitter, bitter cold.

MH: That's supposed to be the worst winter in decades.

IS: It was the worst winter, they said, in fifty years. It was so cold, I actually went—oh, there were so many stories I could tell you. The day that we got off the trucks from Marseille, I couldn't find my squad. They told us where they were at and I couldn't find my squad, and I saw this house: a little shed; you'd call it, like, a storage bin now. You know what I mean?

MH: Right.

IS: I go in there and I turn my flashlight, and I see this guy laying there, and in the typical Army language [I said], "You have to move the fuck over. I got eight men to put in here." And this guy starts grumbling. I said, "I don't give a shit who you are or what you are. I got eight men to put in here, and I'm gonna try to get them bedded down." This is maybe one or two o'clock in the morning, I don't know. And he grumbles; but in the morning I find out he's battalion executive officer. I didn't know it.

MH: Nice.

IS: So, I apologized for doing what I did, and he said, "No, you did the right thing, Sergeant: you got your men taken care of."

MH: (laughs)

IS: He reassured me. He said, "That's right, you did the right thing." So, I didn't get in any trouble.

MH: That's a good thing.

IS: Huh?

MH: I said, that's a good—

IS: Oh, I'd have done it anyway. I didn't give a shit who he was. I had to—it was cold, I couldn't find the place to bed 'em down, this is the only place I can give them any shelter at all, and I put 'em in there. I mean, this is the middle of nowhere, dark at night and snowing. What do you do?

MH: Let me ask you: at that point in the war, did you know anything about concentration camps?

IS: No, absolutely not. Absolutely—there was one guy who was an extreme anti-Semitic son of a bitch. I'm Jewish.

MH: So am I. Go ahead.

IS: Okay. And he had the same stupid, fucking dumb joke all the time—and as a matter of fact, I'll tell you another story about this same son of a bitch. He said, "What's the—" he used to tell this story before I got a couple stripes. "What's the fastest thing in the world? A Jew riding through Germany on a bicycle." You know what I mean? This type of humor.

As a matter of fact, when I first made corporal, he was my first duty as a corporal: to take him out on what they call prisoner watch. You went to the prison, the stockade at the base in Camp Van Dorn; you went up there, picked the son of a bitch up. They gave you a loaded rifle, a carbine, and we stayed with him all day. He had to do everything the company did, and at the end of the day, we had to take him back to the prison, to the stockade. They worked their ass off up there. They had to have a full field inspection—I don't know if you know what that is or not?

MH: Yes, I do.

IS: Okay. They had a full field inspection every morning at six o'clock in the morning. And then they had to break the full field and put it back in a pack and carry that pack all day long, and then at night they still worked their ass off; and then, about ten o'clock at night, they let them go to sleep. They purposely worked their ass off. Anyway, this guy, I was assigned to him as a— I was a "prison-chaser," they called it. They gave me a loaded weapon, and it was my first time out as a corporal. And he said, "You wouldn't shoot me,

would you, Corporal?" I said, "Nick, I got a loaded fucking carbine. I don't like you to begin with, and if you make one fucking move, I'll put a bullet in you. Whether I'll kill you or not, I don't know, but I will shoot you, I'll guarantee that. I'm not going to lose these stripes over an asshole like you." That's exactly what I said to him, and he shut up. I didn't like the guy to begin with.

MH: (laughs) That was the anti-Semite?

IS: Am I talking too much?

MH: No, no, you're doing great. That was the anti-Semite?

IS: Yeah. His name was Nick Baron. He's got to be, if he's still alive, the head of the local Ku Klux Klan somewhere.

MH: (laughs)

IS: He was a dumb son of a bitch. As a matter of fact, he got in a fight later on with a nice old Polish guy, who was maybe thirty, thirty-five—at least thirty-four or thirty-five years old at the time—over in Colmar, and he was beatin' the shit of him. He was ten years younger than the Polish guy. He was a guy in our company, [Michael] Listwak was his name. Afterwards, we threw a blanket on him, and every non-com in the company kicked the shit out of the guy. He never knew who did it or did anything about it. That's how we paid him back. Listwak was a nice old farmer from Michigan, didn't bother a soul. And he started a fight with him and he outfought him badly. But that wasn't the point; he should have never started.

MH: So, back to the question, you didn't know anything about the concentration camps?

IS: No, absolutely not. We had no idea. When we finally got down into Bavaria, we saw these people—

MH: Were you in the Battle of the Bulge?

IS: Yeah. Yeah, the division was; our regiment was, yeah. That was—all you did was shoot and run backwards. Strategic retrograde of movement, if you know what I'm saying.

MH: (laughs) Yeah.

IS: You fired at the Germans and the side, and then you ran back another 100 feet. It was just hectic, it was chaotic and scary as shit.

MH: I was going to say, how frightened were you?

IS: Huh?

MH: How frightened were you?

IS: As frightened as you could be and still do your duty.

MH: Yeah.

IS: I mean, we never thought about fear. I was trained to take care of my squad, and that was it. I made sure they ate, I made sure they had whatever rations we could share, I did what I was supposed to do. I still love those guys.

MH: Were you hit at all?

IS: No, I wasn't, miraculously. No, I was saved by one of the guys from my company. I was very lucky. I'd been assigned as a mortar—you know what a mortar is?

MH: Of course.

IS: Okay. I was assigned as a mortar observer, and I could not—they told me where they were at and they gave me a map, and I tried to find the goddamn guys. I couldn't find my own company. I did see another officer, a captain—oh, what the hell is his name? He wound up as a four-star general later on. I found him and I said, "Sir, I can't find—" I

was assigned to F Company. I said, “Do you need a mortar observer?” He said, “Yes, you’re welcome. Get behind me and stay with me.” I stayed with him that day. That was in the middle of the Siegfried Line.

MH: What did a mortar observer do?

IS: We improvised: you did what you could do. You with me?

MH: Yes.

IS: I can hardly hear you.

MH: I’m with you. I hear you.

IS: I have a hearing problem, as you can tell. I get 100 percent disability from the VA for it.

MH: Okay. So, the Battle of the Bulge ends. Then what?

IS: Then Colmar, the Colmar Pocket. We spent about one—maybe, let me see. January—first of January, we went to Colmar. I remember that, the first of January, ’cause I got drunk the day before. I got drunk for New Year’s Eve if I could. They told us we were going to combat. “If you’re going to raise hell, do it tonight, ’cause tomorrow we’re gonna get shot at.” We got there and we stayed there about six weeks, maybe, and then after that, we rejoined the division. The rest of the division had come over. You understand me?

MH: Yes.

IS: The artillery units, the quartermaster. In the end of February, we actually were assembled and deployed as a division—as a division, not as a regiment. They took each infantry regiment and assigned it to another infantry division that was there. So, in other words, they had each infantry regiment—each division, instead of having three regiments, they had four regiments. You would call—I think you guys called them brigades.

MH: Right.

IS: Okay. Now another thing I did not know about—I do a lot of military history reading. They had a lot of black men that wanted to, you know, serve—honorably, not in a quartermaster corps. They were automatically put into service units. And these guys volunteered to join the infantry. What they did, they made—each rifle company in my day had three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon: four platoons. They made another platoon out of these black volunteers, and they fought well. We didn't see any of them, but I know they did it. They were always relegated to the labor battalions and quartermaster. But I did see a black tank unit: that I remember very clearly.

MH: Okay. So, anyhow, it's now the beginning of March.

IS: March, and we're just forming up in the Sarreguemines area. Sarreguemines, ever heard of it?

MH: No.

IS: Sarreguemines. It was big—it was an area that was very hotly contested since the Franco-Prussian War between Germany and France. And it's the Saar Basin—you've heard of that, haven't you?

MH: That I've heard of. Okay.

IS: That's where it was at. Every town in that area had something beginning with Saar: there was a Saargemünd, there was a Sarreguemines, there was Saarlatern or something like that. But they all had some geographical connection with the area.

MH: What was your division's objective? Which way were you guys going?

IS: We had no idea. Wherever they pointed us. No, nobody knew. We were happy if we lived that day.

MH: When you say that, I don't know whether you're being humorous or being serious?

IS: I'm being serious. Hold on; somebody's at the door.

MH: Sure.

IS: Don't hang up on me.

MH: I won't hang up.

IS: (to wife) Annette?

(to MH) Hold on, sir.

MH: No prob.

IS: It's a kid soliciting; to hell with it.

MH: Okay.

IS: Go ahead. We didn't know when we were going to get hit or die or anything. We had no idea. I mean, let me put it this way: the company that I started out with, now we were a heavy weapons company, which is a relatively safe unit: mortars and machine gunners. The machine gunners took a much—because they were a flat trajectory weapon, they couldn't hide as well. When you use a mortar, you fire from a deployed position, way in the back, a couple hundred yards behind the back. I was a forward observer all the time, so I was always with the rifle companies. I got to know them guys pretty well. And I used to like to work with F Company of my battalion, 2nd Battalion, for one specific reason and only that: they didn't make me pull guard duty at night.

MH: (laughs) Okay.

IS: You look for yourself, you follow me?

MH: I understand that. When I was in Vietnam, I'd go out to cover—I had two infantry battalions to cover. And when I'd go out in the field on operations, I'd stay with the medics, because, A, they were smarter than most of the people.

IS: The medics? Yeah.

MH: B, they would get ice first at night.

IS: They'd get what?

MH: They'd get ice first.

IS: Ice?

MH: Ice, yeah. We were in a jungle.

IS: Oh, yeah, so it's hot as a bastard.

MH: Right. And the third reason is—the third reason is I could sleep on a stretcher instead of on the ground.

IS: Okay, fine, that makes sense; it's logical. It's the same thing I did. I stayed with them because they didn't make me pull guard duty. I always slept near the company commander or platoon leader of the company that I was assigned with. We got along pretty good, and I got to be—as a matter of fact, I was friendly with some of those guys that lived in Philadelphia many, many years, until most of 'em passed away.

MH: Right. So, anyhow, you're now in the Saar Basin.

IS: Yeah, Saar Valley.

MH: And which way—are you headed east—

IS: East, of course.

MH: East toward the Russians, or down toward Bavaria?

IS: Yeah, east towards the Russians. Well, sort of. We made like a fishhook type of maneuver. We were heading east and south, but we didn't know that. We were just moving forward. And if you got to the next town safely, you were happy.

MH: Is this the point of the war where, when you get into these towns, they're all flying white sheets?

IS: No, that was the end. That was the last—in my case, the last two or three weeks. But I've seen a situation where I was with one of the rifle companies; I forgot which one it was already. But we turned around, and there's a whole goddamn Kraut company lined up in formation with their rifles stacked and everything else, like a dress parade thing. Do you follow me?

MH: Yeah.

IS: And the guy comes running up to me, speaks perfect English, and he's surrendering. I said, "Wait a minute, I'll get you the officer," 'cause I didn't want the responsibility. And I remember he surrendered in perfect English. I talked to him and said, "Where'd the hell you learn to speak English so well?" He said, "I'm a newspaper writer." But I remember him very clearly. But the whole goddamn company was lined up, rifles stacked like an inspection.

MH: Where was this?

IS: Somewhere in Bavaria. I mean, you turned a road and you saw something like this, or you turned a road and you're looking down the muzzle of an 88. The 88 was the best piece of equipment that the German army had. Ever heard of it?

MH: Oh, yeah. It's supposedly better than the American guns.

IS: Yeah, but we came out—towards the last month of the war, finally we got a 90mm. And that was a fantastic weapon, fantastic. They gave them to the anti-tank guys; they

could hit a barrel literally two miles away with that goddamn thing. It was a fantastic, high-velocity; it was exactly like the 88, only better.

MH: So, tell me about—when did you come across your first camp?

IS: The first—it was the outskirts of a camp. We were going through this town, walking through a town with our rifles and all of our gear.

MH: Is this in Bavaria?

IS: Somewhere in Bavaria. And all we saw was these people that we couldn't figure out. They looked like—well, you would call them “vagrants” here. You know what I mean, all tattered and stuff like that. And we had no idea what they were. But there was always somebody in every company that could speak Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, or German, and we found out that they were prisoners that had just gotten out of the camp. We had no idea of the camps, what they looked like. Did you see the movie—did you see this thing *Band of Brothers* [2001]?

MH: Yes.

IS: Okay. Did you see that scene where they overran a camp?

MH: Uh, yes.

IS: Huh?

MH: Yes.

IS: Okay. That's exactly what it was like. You couldn't visualize people like this.

MH: So, you're going down the road, and you're seeing these people.

IS: Yeah, they were there, sitting on the road. Some of them had bags with them, some of them had no shoes, some had little or no clothes on. We had no idea what it was.

MH: What's going through your head?

IS: We didn't know. We didn't know. I mean, we had never seen this in prisoners. We couldn't visualize it, what it was.

MH: So, did some of those people who spoke those other languages figure—

IS: They all started to talk to them, and they give 'em cigarettes. Then the officers came around, especially the medical officers; they begged us not to give them food. They said, "They will die if they eat." You couldn't give them food, they were so—their stomachs were, I guess, not in any shape to receive regular food.

MH: So, you got that word while you were still on the road.

IS: On the road, yeah, while we're marching there. A jeep came down with a Red Cross thing on it, a flag, flying a Red Cross flag, and they kept saying, "Don't feed 'em. Give 'em candy if you want, cigarettes, but don't feed them." We couldn't understand that at all. But then we saw how emaciated they looked.

MH: What'd you think?

IS: We didn't know. We just didn't know. Can you comprehend it today, if you saw it all of a sudden?

MH: No.

IS: Okay, same thing for us. We were reasonably intelligent young kids. Matter of fact, the aid man, a guy that I always felt sorry for—he was a little roly-poly guy; he was from down in—I went to see his house—it was the most magnificent place—after the war, when I started to travel a little bit. I can't even think of his name now. But anyway, I used to feel sorry for this bastard. He was always—did the aid men carry double bags, one on each side with 'em, in your case?

MH: No.

IS: Okay. Well, in World War II, they carried two bags crisscrossed across them like you would carry a gas mask, one on each side. They were loaded down, and I always felt sorry for him, 'cause he was—[Morris] Gezzer was his name, that's right. It just came to me. I felt sorry for him, because he was loaded down with all this medical stuff. And the guy, after the war, became a plastic surgeon and a board-certified ophthalmologist. But he was only an aid man in our battalion. He was a real nice guy, and I went to see his house—it was the biggest place I've ever seen in my life—somewhere down in Tennessee. He was a very accomplished surgeon and doctor.

MH: But anyhow, so the Jeep comes down and they warn you not to feed them.

IS: Warned you not to feed them. They said they were prisoners; they didn't say what kind. But we figured out with the different languages, they had to be civilians. They were not wearing any kind of uniforms. Some of them had blankets draped over 'em; some of them had one shoe, nothin'. I remember kicking a door in for one of them, and I brought in a few of his buddies with him. I had never seen this guy. I kicked the door in, I went to a closet, and jokingly, I put—not jokingly, but you've seen where guys take a suit and hold it up, “This is your size,” type of thing?

MH: Right.

IS: I gave him stuff that was in that closet, anything they wanted: just take it. That's how we outfitted them.

MH: Did you find yourself getting really pissed off at the Germans because of the condition of these people?

IS: I couldn't even comprehend it, to tell you the truth. I hated the fuckin' Krauts, being Jewish. But we had no idea of these atrocities. We knew there was concentration camps; we had no idea what they were like. We knew they—I mean, anybody that read the paper knew there were concentration camps. We had no idea, no concept of what they were. And there was a lot of concentration camps, and satellite concentration camps.

MH: There were death camps, there were slave labor camps; there were all sorts of things.

IS: Right. We had no idea what this one was that we saw. No idea.

MH: How soon after you first began seeing these people did you actually come to a camp?

IS: I only saw the outside, the fence. They kept us moving. We were still in a combat condition.

MH: So, tell me what you're seeing or smelling.

IS: It was horrible. You saw—just like that thing in *Band of Brothers*. There were fires, they were grubbing for food from us, they were—we gave them—whatever we had, we gave them. I mean, I wanted to give them my rations; I couldn't, 'cause it would have hurt them, so I gave them cigarettes. I didn't smoke. You follow me?

MH: Yes.

IS: And that's all we could do. And I also saw one Kraut—a couple of the prisoners grabbed him and they actually drowned him in a horse trough.

MH: You saw this going on?

IS: I saw that going on. And we didn't even bother to stop. Didn't even bother to stop 'em.

MH: That was at one of the Landsberg camps?

IS: Somewhere down there, yeah. It must have been. You know, you don't know where you are at.

MH: How could the prisoners, who are so emaciated, pull down and kill a German soldier who's—

IS: Because probably—we were probably helping them. We were probably helping them. We saw what the places were like. We were probably assisting them: maybe shot the guy in the arm or the leg, or even shot 'em full, kill 'em. We didn't know. But we gave them any assistance that they needed, unquestioningly.

MH: So, as you're seeing this camp, there's still shooting going on?

IS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It'd just been taken. It had just been taken. But the shooting is all ours; there was no enemy fire. They were hiding. A lot of them—what you would do is find uniforms all over the place, German uniforms. They just got out of their uniforms and got into civilian clothes.

MH: And how big was the camp you were driving past?

IS: I have no idea. I really don't know.

MH: But the horse trough that you saw was in the camp or outside?

IS: In the camp, yeah: the outside of it, like. And the guy—a couple of these guys overpowered this Kraut, whoever he was, and just held his head in there until he drowned. I've seen guys—I've seen a German guy killed with his own helmet. They just beat him to death with it. It was the only weapon they had.

MH: The prisoners, you mean?

IS: No, no. This was in combat.

MH: In combat, okay. So, you see this stuff happen. Do you want to stop, or you can't stop?

IS: No. We couldn't stop.

MH: You're riding in what?

IS: No, I was walking.

MH: You're walking.

IS: Walking. I was with the rifle company; they walked. When I was with my own company, we rode, because each squad had a jeep in a heavy weapons company.

MH: So, when you're with the rifle company and you're seeing these guys drowning this guy—

IS: Nobody bothers.

MH: You get a good long look at it.

IS: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MH: Is there a fence between you and then?

IS: Probably through the fence. I don't remember that detail. But we did see it, and nobody bothered to prevent it. We knew what was going on: they were getting even. We saw that camp, you knew they had to get even.

MH: Then what happens?

IS: By then, you saw—the further you got into Bavaria, which is our sector, where we were at—we were in that sector roughly where that *Band of Brothers* was, Bavaria. Now, Bavaria is a big area. We got as far south as—let me see. The last town we captured was a place called Leipheim, my regiment. Leipheim, L-e-i-p-h-e-i-m. Ironically, when I was on tour of Germany when I went back with my wife later on, we happened to stop there and I look up and there's a road sign: "Leipheim, Germany." It was the last town we captured. And that was—the war was still on. We ended combat exactly on the 27th of April. The war still lasted to the 8th [of May].

MH: Right. So, when you say you ended combat, what'd you do, just hold in place?

IS: No, they put us on trucks and jeeps—we had our own jeep—and they just pulled us back for what they call R&R [rest and relaxation]. You guys called it R&R. We went on occupation. It was like we were occupying the territory that the other guys had captured. And we did guard duty, mostly. We were looking for stragglers, German stragglers; we knew enough to look under the left armpit of the German to look to see if he was an SS guy.

MH: Did you find many?

IS: Huh?

MH: Did you find many?

IS: Yeah. Some were really—they tried to escape, shall we say. And they were executed, right on the spot. You know what I'm talking about, that tattoo they had?

MH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, the lightning bolt that looks like—

IS: Whatever it was, we knew enough from fighting these bastards: if they looked young and full of pep and piss and vinegar, that's the first—we made 'em take off that—they wore something called a tunic, I think. We looked under their armpit. If it was that, they were shot, no questions asked.

MH: And the officers didn't have any problems with that?

IS: Nobody looked. Nobody worried about it. I mean, it was cold-blooded killing, yes, but it was overlooked. This was done. There's no way of denying it. I never did. I am very proud I never mistreated a Kraut prisoner, but I also never coddled one, either.

MH: Okay. I just wonder how guys today, sixty years later, feel about that.

IS: Well, we were lucky. The biggest thing we all concerned about was being alive. Being alive, you know, being there for the final day. We got so drunk on V-E Day, it's unbelievable.

MH: German wine and beer?

IS: Whatever we could steal or borrow or barter. Yeah, we bartered for a lot.

MH: (laughs) I think the official term is “liberate.”

IS: Yeah, that sounds just about right. We used to liberate stuff, but we always bartered for it. In other words, in one incident after the war, the captain—and I recorded this for the Army, by the way. The captain said to me, “See if you can find some green material.” The officers wore like a green loop on their epaulettes. You know what I’m saying?

MH: Yep.

IS: I don’t know if that was your war or not.

MH: Some units, yes. But I know what you’re talking about.

IS: Okay. Well, the non-coms wore a strip about a half-inch wide and the width of the chevron. You follow me? About three, three-and-a-half inches long, and about five-eighths of an inch wide. Whatever looked good, we cut. Anyway, the captain sent me out and said, “See what you can find.” Germany was bombed to shit, and there was nowhere you could find anywhere like that. I was out for two or three days with a Jeep. I was on my own. The war was over; it was fun and games.

On the way back, I stopped back to go to the bathroom. I didn’t want to squat anymore, so the German—what they called the—oh, what the hell?—guesthouse. It was a bar. I don’t know the right term for it anymore. It was a bar, you know what I mean? And I went in there to use the toilet, which was generally over a barn. So you did your—you shit over in the barn, the shit went down over the straw beneath it, and then they used it for fertilizer. This was very common. All the rural areas did that. They had a big pool underneath that where all the human waste went into, and then they drained that off and had horse-drawn or ox-drawn or cattle-drawn barrels, like trucks, that they fertilized the ground with, with that human waste. They used it for fertilizer.

Anyway, I went into this place. I found—as I’m walking out, I see a pool table. What color is a pool table?

MH: Okay, I got it.

IS: Huh?

MH: Green felt.

IS: You got it. So, I gave the guy a can of C rations, and I took my trench knife or bayonet, whatever the hell I had with me, and I went around the perimeter of the pool table and peeled it all off and came back with a nice roll of pool table material underneath my arm. The captain almost shit himself when I brought it in. He was a nice guy.

MH: (laughs) He would have rather had the whole table.

IS: Huh?

MH: He would have rather had the—

IS: I took the whole cloth. All I wanted was the material. And he said, “How the hell did you do that?” I said, “I just blundered on it, sir. I had no idea where I was going to find anything. You sent us out, we went out.” He was a redneck from Mississippi, but he was not in any way anti-Semitic at all. He was a real nice guy.

MH: So, when'd they finally bring you home?

IS: Huh?

MH: When did they finally bring you home?

IS: April 6, 1946.

MH: You stayed in Europe for a long time.

IS: Yeah, for about—the war ended in—

MH: May [1945].

IS: No, that was in Germany, but the war didn't end—we were training—

MH: For Japan.

IS: —in Germany to go to fight in Japan. We were actually training. I mean, we had live ammo. Some of the guys got wounded in training. We had live ammo. We used to use the German mortars, 'cause they had a lot of shells there laying all over, so we would—that was the safest way to get rid of 'em. We put roadblocks up so nobody could go in there, and we just fired the shit out of them. Do you follow me?

MH: Yep.

IS: Just to get rid of them. And then we would take the mortars and the bipods and the base plates and throw them into a river somewhere. It was the only thing we could get rid of. We were afraid that the Germans were going to re-arm. So they had inspections, surprise inspections, for about the first two months. They would call a surprise inspection: we never knew it, nobody knew about it, and we would roust everybody out of the houses in the middle of the night or the day and go through their house looking for weapons, look in the barns, anything at all. And one thing about the Germans: they always would squeal on each other. The other guy was always the “*gross* Nazi.”

MH: (laughs) “But not me!”

IS: “Not me!” Oh, no. “He’s a *gross* Nazi,” the *bürgermeister* or something. No, no. “I didn’t like the war. The war was no good. We didn’t like Hitler.”

MH: What did they say, “*Nicht* Nazi”?

IS: Huh?

MH: “*Nicht* Nazi”?

IS: “*Nicht* Nazi,” yup. That’s another thing: whenever you captured them, the bastards, the first thing they would say “*Nicht Deutsch. Ja* Polski, *ja* Russki, *ja* Czech.” You know what I’m saying? They’re either “I’m a Russian,” “I’m Polish,” or, “I’m a Czechoslovakian.” They were actually forced into the Army. We knew that after the war. If they didn’t go, they shot them right on sight.

MH: Anyhow, you come back in April of forty-six [1946], and you get out of the service?

IS: Yeah, sure.

MH: And then what do you do? Go back to Philly?

IS: Yeah, I went—I got discharged in Philadelphia. I got home on a Friday morning; Friday afternoon, I was working in that flower shop. I didn’t even have any civilian clothes.

MH: What was your adjustment like?

IS: Nothing at all. No problem, no problem. I wasn’t psycho or battle-fatigued or nothing like that. It was very easy. I did—one time in Germany, a diesel truck started up. Have you ever heard a diesel truck start?

MH: Just, you know, regular—

IS: It doesn’t start like a regular [one], it whines. It sounds like a Kraut 88 coming in. And I actually threw myself in full, fancy uniform down to the ground. I felt like an idiot, but it was instinct. That was the only thing. But some of the guys, they were very noise—any noise would drive ’em nuts. I never had that problem. I got readjusted within ten minutes after I was home and saw my mother. It was fine.

MH: That’s a good thing. So you were married?

IS: No, but I got married. I’m married fifty-nine years now.

MH: And children?

IS: Yeah, two. Both professional.

MH: Okay. Do you know any other guys who may have seen any of the camps?

IS: Just the guys in my squad, and I don't think their memories are as good as mine, 'cause I'm the youngest guy there. I talked to one guy today who was ninety, and another guy who was eighty-nine, so that's the remnants of my squad.

MH: Okay. All right.

IS: No, I can't give you any more. The only thing we saw was the outside of one. We saw the fence, the wire fence, the barbed wire. We saw the conditions in there, 'cause you couldn't help but miss that. It was much like they showed you in that *Band of Brothers*.

MH: Okay. But you don't actually know which camp that was you were going by.

IS: Yeah, it was somewhere outside of a place called Landsberg.

MH: Oh, it was Landsberg, okay.

IS: There was a—we got a—we were one of the divisions at the Holocaust Museum that was honored there with our flag. But look, let's face it: the average kid there didn't know what he was doing. We did what we were told to do. Morally, we didn't do any crimes, other than if we caught an SS guy or something like that. But we never—I got into a hole one time with a Kraut, and I had a rifle. I could have killed the bastard, but I didn't. I just kept my weapon pointed at him. When the artillery lifted, I made sure he took his helmet off and his belt. That was the sign of surrender, if you had no helmet.

MH: Oh, okay.

IS: You follow me?

MH: Yep.

IS: Hello?

MH: Yes, I follow you completely.

IS: Okay. And once he dropped that, I pointed to which way to go, and I told him, “*Hände hoch*,” that meant “Keep your hands high.” “*Hände hoch*.”

MH: “*Hände hoch*”?

IS: Huh?

MH: “*Hände hoch*”?

IS: I can’t hear you.

MH: I’m trying to hear the phrase in German. “*Hände*—

IS: “*Hände hoch*.” “*Hände hoch*.” It means “Hands high.”

MH: Okay.

IS: It was something that—we used to joke about the same goddamn thing. We would jokingly, during or right after a German counter-attack or something like that, we would give the German salute and say, “Hey, it’s like ‘*Heil Hitler*,’ in case we lose.” You had to do something like that to keep your sanity.

MH: I can relate to that.

IS: Okay. You did crazy things.

MH: Yes. Well, you ever watch *M*A*S*H*?

IS: Oh, sure.

MH: It was, you know, being crazy to stay sane.

IS: Exactly. Like, we once had an Army reunion in Philadelphia, and we brought home—Hello?

MH: I hear you.

IS: Okay. We brought home a German flag with the swastika on it, the big red banner, and we used it as a table cover for our registration desk.

MH: (laughs) Oh, jeez.

IS: Well, the hotel asked us to please remove it, because people were complaining: they thought it was a Nazi group.

MH: (laughs)

IS: We understood. But we used to use their equipment wherever we could. We used their—they had a—you know what a sound-powered telephone was? I don't know if you guys had them or not.

MH: Yes, I know what they are.

IS: You crank them up. Well, the Germans' was exactly like ours, exactly interchangeable; the terminals were the same. It had a different type of covering on it, but it was exactly—so, whenever we found them, we used them. We incorporated whatever we could. They also had an excellent rifle-cleaning thing. It looked like—you're not Catholic, I know, but do you know what rosary beads are?

MH: Yes.

IS: Okay. Theirs was like a rosary bead: you could drop down the barrel of the weapon and pull it through back and forth and clean your rifle.

MH: Yeah. But our M1s were better than their rifles.

IS: Much, much, much. They were the best weapon of the war. Seriously, it was infallible. It froze up once in a while in Colmar, but we learned to piss on it to loosen it up. We urinated on it.

MH: Yeah, I understood what you said. (laughs)

IS: Okay. That broke the frozen oil. But it was an excellent weapon. We all said after the war we were going to buy one, piss on the barrel and watch it rust. We never did. It was a good weapon. Are you familiar with an M1?

MH: Yes.

IS: Okay. If it ever jammed on you, you know that little thing that you pulled it back to cock it? You just put your foot on that and pushed it down, and it broke any jam. It very seldom jammed, if ever.

MH: Right. I was also familiar with “M1 thumb.”

IS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, if you don't pull your hand back. I went through every position in my squad from ammunition bearer to squad leader, and I went through every weapon that everybody carried, and the only one that ever hit me was the M1. The carbine was easy to have an inspection with; the pistol was very easy. You had to keep it clean.

Oh, there's another thing. When I talk, it brings back memories. The same day that I made corporal, we had an inspection. I had just made gunner, which was a corporal's rating. The captain inspected us, and I had a dusty pistol—not dirty, but dusty. The next detail, the shit detail, I caught, as a non-com. I was put in charge of doing some dirty job.

But it didn't matter. I know it was not done maliciously, just to teach me a lesson: don't show up with a dirty weapon.

We had good officers. I'm still in contact with one of them, the one surviving. He's a Presbyterian minister, and I talk to him at least once a month. He calls me, or I call him.

MH: Do you think he has any memory of the camps?

IS: I don't know. I could give you his number, if you want.

MH: That'd be great.

IS: Sure, hold on. Takes me a little time to move. Hold on. Don't hang up.

MH: I'm not. I'm here.

IS: Hello?

MH: Yep.

IS: Okay, hold on. I got it. My fingers—I have double carpal tunnel syndrome. My fingers are very ineffective. I have trouble holding silverware and that sort of thing. Hold on.

Here it is. His name is Vincent—Reverend; he's a Presbyterian minister. Reverend Vincent Stratton. S-t-r-a-t-t-o-n. He lives in Indiana, Pennsylvania, the birthplace of Jimmy Stewart, the actor...He's a very, very fine gentleman, a real nice guy. When we had our dedication of our memorial in Valley Forge, I called him. He came and visited us and said the—what they call that? What do the goyim call it?

MH: The benediction.

IS: The benediction, whatever. He performed the services at the memorial service.

MH: And he was what, a captain or a lieutenant?

IS: No, he was a second lieutenant.

MH: Second lieutenant, okay.

IS: At that time; then he got promoted to first lieutenant. But he was a fine man. He didn't drink, and he used to give me his liquor rations.

MH: I didn't know you got liquor rations!

IS: Huh?

MH: I didn't know that the guys got liquor rations.

IS: Officers did.

MH: Officers did. Oh, okay.

IS: Yeah, officers got liquor. I said, "Sir, I don't drink." So, he said, "Give to your squad." I had one guy, a Polish guy by the name of [Albert] Kulik. That son of a bitch was a fucking sponge. But I gave him all my liquor. Plus, he could scout up his own pretty good, too. I used to bed down with him so that he wouldn't get drunk on me. He was a good soldier, but I always had to keep an eye on him when we were anywhere near any booze. He was a hell of a nice guy, but he drank too much.

MH: Okay. Do you have a photo of yourself from the war?

IS: I don't look anything like that now.

MH: I know that. But do you have one from the war?

IS: I've got some. I don't know where the hell they're at. I'm sure I've got some.

MH: Do you have an e-mail address?

IS: No.

MH: Okay.

IS: I'm just getting used to touch-tone phones. I don't know how to use a fax machine. I bought two computers for my grandchildren already. I don't have one, I don't want one, because I know I would become addicted to it. Oh, by the way, there's a 63rd Division—what do you call that, a Web site?

MH: Yeah.

IS: Have you seen it?

MH: I have a researcher who's going through all the Web sites of all the divisions.

IS: The webmaster is a very competent guy. There's a guy, by the way, that lied about his age. He was sixteen when he was in the Army.

MH: What was the patch for the 63rd?

IS: A flaming—it was a teardrop-shaped thing, all red, with a knot of Army olive-brown, and a sword in the center, tipped in blood.

MH: Right. In your newsletter, there's a thing about my book, in the newsletter that you get from the 63rd Division Association.

IS: The 63rd calls it—

MH: The *Blood*—

IS: The *Blade*, they call it.

MH: The *Blood and* something.

IS: The *Blood and Fire*. There's two of them now. One is the 63rd Division, the original guys: that's us. And then there's a 63rd ARCOM, Army Reserve Command. They call their newspaper the *Blade*. Two different things.

MH: Okay. Well, in the *Blood and Fire*, there's a little piece about my book.

IS: This issue?

MH: Yes.

IS: I should be getting it shortly. What are you, selling the book?

MH: No, no, no, no, no. I'm researching it. I'm trying to—

IS: Oh, you want information on it.

MH: Yeah, I'm trying to find guys.

IS: Yeah. The division that actually overran them possibly more than we did; in my case it was only my regiment and my battalion that I know. But I know the 255th also overran a camp in Landsberg. The three regiments worked like teeth in a comb, you follow me? Side by side.

MH: Right. Well, I'm hoping that the guys will read that in the newsletter.

IS: I would suggest you put a phone number in it, too.

MH: It's in there. It's all in there.

IS: Some of the guys—look, there's guys of every ilk in there. There's guys that are super intelligent, and there's guys that are kick-shit dumb. But they all served and served well. Now, I had only a high-school education at that time, when I was in. I was an electrician, trained as an electrician.

MH: Did you end up going to college?

IS: I went when I was fifty years old. I went to Temple. I wound up teaching high school-level horticulture in Philadelphia for ten years, when we sold our business.

MH: Okay. Were you a Phillies fan?

IS: Not particularly. My son is. But I've gone to ballgames, but it don't mean a thing to me. Why?

MH: Because one of the broadcasters for the Phillies is a guy I worked with a long time ago.

IS: What was his name?

MH: Chris Wheeler.

IS: No, it doesn't ring a bell. Was he on the radio?

MH: He was on radio and then on TV.

IS: Okay. No, when I was a kid and active in baseball, they had what they called the Knothouse Gang. Knothouse? Wait a minute, Knothole, Knothole Gang, which was supposedly the holes in the fences. They let the kids in on Sundays for \$0.57 in Philadelphia. I used to—as a kid, I went to the ballpark often. As a grownup, our first—all the guys from Philadelphia that were in H Company, we got together for opening day 1946. We went to the ballpark. We met there. And that was the first time we'd seen each other.

I'm still active with the association. I'm still—I have a 63rd Division logo on my car. I still wear my Combat Infantry Badge. I'm looking at it right now on my right arm. You ever see them?

MH: I have one.

IS: Okay. Yeah. You wear it as a bracelet or what?

MH: On the rare occasions when I put on a suit, that's the lapel pin.

IS: Okay, that's the miniature one.

MH: Yeah.

IS: No, this is a full-sized one that I had made up when I come out of the Army. I had my name, my unit on there, engraved in it. It's all worn to hell, but I still wear it, and very proudly. You know what that paid? I don't know, did you guys get extra money for it?

MH: No.

IS: We got ten dollars a month.

MH: No.

IS: And that's another thing we used to have fun with. After the war, you know, you're trying to make out with the frauleins. And they would all—you'd show 'em your medals and shit like that, like you were Sergeant York, if you know what I mean?¹

MH: (laughs) Yes.

¹ Sergeant Alvin C. York (1887-1964) was the most decorated American soldier of World War I. The 1941 film *Sergeant York*, starring Gary Cooper in the title role, was based on his life.

IS: And they would ask for this one, and we always gave them—every guy gave 'em the same stock answer: "*Fünzig Deutschen Soldaten gefallen.*"

MH: (laughs) How many?

IS: *Fünzig.*

MH: That's what, fifty?

IS: Fifty, yeah. "*Fünzig Deutschen Soldaten gefallen.*"

MH: You killed—

IS: The Kraut girls all did the same thing. They would hold their heads, both of their hands over their ears, and say, "Oh, my God!" something like that, you know. But that was one of the fun things we did. "*Fünzig Deutschen Soldaten gefallen.*"

MH: (laughs) Somehow, I think that would work against you trying to get laid.

IS: Well, look, I lost my virginity in Germany: the one time I got laid. I was afraid of getting dosed, though, to be very honest. And I was very careful. I used a condom. They didn't even call 'em condoms in those days.

MH: They were rubbers.

IS: Rubbers. And another use we used to do with them—

MH: Keep the rifles dry.

IS: Yeah, the rifles, though there was a better thought than that. When anybody—like, in Mississippi, you can visualize how hot it gets down there?

MH: Right.

IS: Some guy would always have a couple extra condoms on him. And after a long lengthy speech by some lieutenant colonel or major, and he's got us out there in the hot fucking Mississippi sun for about three hours, explaining the virtues of something relatively unimportant, about a dozen condoms would start floating. Did you ever do that?

MH: (laughs) No.

IS: That was very common. And then another guy—if the speech was too long, one guy would yell out “48.” The next guy somewhere, maybe twenty feet away or yards away, “49,” and the third guy would yell “50,” and then the whole crowd would join in with “Bullshit.”

MH: (laughs)

IS: You never did that?

MH: (laughs) No.

IS: That was a very common one, if the speech was overly lengthy for what its purpose was. I'll never forget there was one guy telling us about the fire alarm, how to prevent a fire in Camp Van Dorn. And this son of a bitch couldn't speak English. “The number to call is foh-foh-foh.” You know what I'm saying, 444?

MH: (laughs) Yes.

IS: And for a long while, somebody would yell “4” and another guy would yell “4,” but most of the time it was “48, 49, 50,” some shit. We were a well disciplined army. I went to the VA with some of these guys that fought in Nam. And they would talk openly, whether they were bullshitting us or not, how it was not uncommon to frag [assassinate] an officer.

MH: A lot of that was happening later in the war. Later on in the war that was happening.

IS: They were actually fragging officers?

MH: Yeah.

IS: We loved our officers.

MH: But there was also a lot of drugs.

IS: Yeah. Drugs we never had. We never had drugs. The only thing we had was booze that we found, or liberated.

MH: Which VA do you go to?

IS: Down in Long Beach.

MH: In Long Beach? Okay.

IS: Yeah, my son-in-law's a doctor down there. I don't see him as a patient, but—

MH: I used to go out to Sepulveda.

IS: Okay, that's the one up in Wadsworth, I think they call it.

MH: Well, Wadsworth is West LA, and I used to go to the one in the Valley.

IS: I don't know that one. I know where it's at, but I don't know it. I went to a VA party there one time. No, they treated me excellent. I was in the hospital five weeks with my knee operation, which is unusually long, but I developed an infection. And I hate like hell to use this name: if I was President Bush—God forbid—I couldn't have gotten better treatment. It was excellent....

You've been there, done that, I know what you're saying. We were lucky: we had none of that chemical warfare. We knew the Germans had literally no air power. When an

airplane flew over us, we didn't even bother to look up; we knew it was one of ours. They had absolutely no air power for the last three months of the war. And if we did find German aircraft, they were on the autobahn. They used the autobahn because they deliberately bombed the airfields so that they couldn't use them; they'd make craters in them. So they used the autobahn—

MH: To land on.

IS: —for running. No, to take off onto—and land on, of course. But then they hid 'em inside the woods there. The German army was a shambles by the time, the end of March. It was completely disintegrated, completely disintegrated; there was no cohesiveness to it. If you captured a bunch of guys, they gave you sixteen different units they were all from. They happened to be thrown together.

As a matter of fact, in Leipheim—that was our last battle—we killed more dead Germans there than I've ever seen in my life. Why? As the Germans retreated—the town of Leipheim had an air base there. And they just gave all these Luftwaffe guys rifles and they made 'em soldiers all of a sudden, you follow me?

MH: Yes.

IS: They were clerks, or whatever you do in the air force. And they were butchered, butchered. There must have been, to capture that one little town—without exaggerating, there was 500 dead Krauts. All draped on the roads, on trees, on fences. There was one guy captured about twenty of 'em and put them into a barn and then put a nail or something through the hasp to keep 'em in there. They weren't going nowhere. Once they were surrendered, they were happy, do you follow me?

MH: Right.

IS: Another company went by there, heard them talking German and threw thermite grenades in there, burned them all to death.

MH: Nice.

IS: They never knew they were in there. They heard German voices, and that was it. Sad. Same thing happened to us one day. We were on a patrol and we heard something, and we

yelled, “Who the fuck’s over there?” or something to that effect, you know, and the answer we got back was, “*Wus?*” You know what that is?

MH: No.

IS: “*Wus?*”

MH: “What?” Yes.

IS: “What?” in German. So, every guy in the platoon lobbed a grenade over the hill. When we finally got enough nerve to look, they looked like shredded wheat, these guys, these Krauts. But they were as dumb as we were, but we were faster.

MH: (laughs) Okay. Irv, thank you very much for talking to me.

IS: My pleasure. I hope I haven’t talked too much.

MH: No, you’ve done fine. Thank you very much.

IS: Call Lieutenant Stratton.

MH: I will.

IS: And remember me to him, please; he’s a gentleman of the first order, and he might have a little more knowledge of what went on than I did. I was, like I say, in his section. But, as an officer, he saw more than I did.

MH: Okay.

IS: He’s a real nice guy. There’s three hours’ difference, of course, back there.

MH: Yeah, well, that’s where I am. So, I’ll call him tomorrow.

IS: Okay.

MH: Thank you very much.

IS: Where you at now?

MH: I'm in Florida.

IS: Okay. That's the same time zone.

MH: Yep.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

IS: Okay, where is that town that you're in?

MH: You know where Sarasota is?

IS: Yes, I've been there. The circus used to train down there.

MH: Right. I'm forty-five minutes south of Sarasota.

IS: Okay. We went there on our honeymoon; that's the only time. Ringling Brothers used to train. Do they still do that?

MH: Further north, between—closer to Tampa, I think.

IS: Okay, then. I went to Tampa, we spent our honeymoon in—oh, what's the town across from Tampa?

MH: St. Petersburg.

IS: Huh?

MH: St. Petersburg.

IS: St. Petersburg, the elephant burial ground.

MH: Yeah. We're actually going up there for a baseball game. I'm from Chicago, originally, and the Cubs are playing the Rays, so we're going up there next week.

IS: Okay. St. Petersburg used to be where all these people who were retirement age, they went down there to live out their lives.

MH: Very many.

IS: No, seriously.

MH: Yeah.

IS: It was the first town I ever saw with numbered—they had, like—I've forgotten how the numbered streets were, but they were different from anything I had seen. And also, the first town I've ever seen that had ramps on the corners for wheelchairs. Still there?

MH: Oh, yeah.

IS: That's been incorporated all over; even Philadelphia has them now. And out here in California it's very common. The handicapped here are treated with real dignity and pride. Now, I went—we drove home from San Francisco this morning, came back. I drove up there last Friday 'cause my granddaughter just graduated junior high. We came back today. And when you walk with a cane, people actually open doors for you. I'd never seen it. I'm sure I might have done it myself, but I didn't think about it. They get out of your way, and literally will help you do whatever you have to do that you're having problems with. It's an amazing thing when I use my cane. And with a wheelchair, when I couldn't walk at all, it was even more so.

MH: Okay.

IS: Interesting thing. Anyway, if you're getting any excerpts of anybody from the 63rd, I would be interested in that. Will you keep that in mind?

MH: I will—

IS: A photocopy of it would do. I don't need a book. How far are you progressing on the book?

MH: I've been working on this for about three months.

IS: Okay. How far have you progressed?

MH: Well, I've probably interviewed forty people so far. The manuscript—

IS: Are they all as long-winded as me?

MH: Some of them not, some of them longer.

IS: Seriously?

MH: Yeah. Yeah. It depends; some people can talk, and some people can't.

IS: Well, I used the phone in my business all my life, so I'm used to using a phone. It was no problem to spend an hour a day on the phone taking orders or looking for a shop to do business with or something like that.

MH: Okay.

IS: Please, if you get it, send it out. You have my name and address.

MH: I've got it.

IS: And please remember me to Stratton.

MH: I will. I'll call him tomorrow.

IS: He might be helpful, or he might refer you to somebody else.

MH: Okay. Thank you very much, Irv.

IS: You're very welcome. A pleasure.

MH: Okay. Bye-bye.

End of interview