John J. Blanchfield
Narrator

Michael Russert
Interviewer
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Videographer

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Lake George, New York

MR: This is a home interview in Lake George New York, the twenty second of September 2005, at approximately 1:15 PM. The interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert. Could you give me your full name, your date of birth and place of birth, please?
JJB: My full name is John J. Blanchfield. I was born in Schenectady, New York on March 10, 1924. I am usually known as Jack.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?
JJB: I graduated from St. Mary's Institute in Amsterdam in 1941. I entered Niagara University in the fall of '41 and of course Pearl Harbor took place in December '41. I was not eligible for the draft or anything until '42, at which time in May I registered for the draft. Then in December of '42 a recruiter came to Niagara from the enlistment corps and if we enlisted at that point in time they would guarantee that we could finish the next semester. I enlisted on December 8, 1942. In May of '43 as I completed my second semester of my second year at Niagara, I received notice that I was expected at Camp Upton.

MR: Do you remember where you were and your reaction? Also, how you heard about Pearl Harbor?
JJB: It was a Sunday and I had gone to the movies at Niagara Falls with four of my buddies–classmates–and as we left the movies that afternoon we stopped, waiting for a bus in front of Walgreens Drug Store on Falls Street. Somebody came up to us and said, "Did you hear what happened at Pearl Harbor?" And that was our first knowledge of it. We were quite startled. We were all ROTC units–we had to take ROTC at Niagara. We were startled to hear it and we didn't know what was going to happen to us. We went back for supper that night. Being Sunday, we just had cold cuts and salads, and it was deadly quiet. Some of the fellas knew that they were going to go. Professors were leaving. It was an all-male school. There were a lot of pensive people at that point. What's going to happen? What can we do? And it was pretty much the demise of male students at Niagara until after the war.

MR: Where did you go for your basic training?

JJB: Fort McClellan, Alabama, 13 weeks, infantry. And at the conclusion of that I took a test for OCS or ASTP, the Army Specialized Training Program, as we called it. Some other people called it All Safe Till Peace. At that point in time I was then sent to Clemson College in South Carolina where I stayed for about a week. I met a fellow there whose name was Ritchie Johnson who was a famous Negro baseball player. He's now buried in Amsterdam. From there I was assigned to North Carolina State College in Raleigh and I started courses in engineering in the Fall of 1943. I completed two semesters in March of '44 when ASTP was disbanded. I think I heard that there were about 40,000 of us in different colleges throughout the country, either studying to be engineers or doctors or medical people. From there I found myself in Fort Jackson, Columbia, South Carolina with the 87th Acorn Division and that was of course prior to D-Day in 1944.

MR: Did you get any specialized training at all when you were placed with that division?
JJB: No, I was a PFC at that point in time.

MR: So even with all the background you had, they still had you as a PFC?
JJB: Yes, PFC, infantryman.

MR: So, you were with the 87th Division at that point. Could you tell us about your time with them and what happened to you?
JJB: We were getting ready for something. As an infantryman, you used various firearms and so on and I was with them a short period of time until just after D-Day. I had a ten day furlough and I came back to Amsterdam–my hometown–for ten days. And on the way back I met Sergeant Kirby who was our sergeant of our Company C and he said, "You've been listed to go over as a replacement." He said, "You will be packing up your duds and you'll be out of here," which took place then in the summer of '44.

MR: How did you go overseas?
JJB: Through various stops. I finally ended up at Camp Shanks, which is down in Orange County I believe. I was stationed there for maybe a couple of weeks or so. I had some time to go to New York City. My mother and father came down. They knew I was shipping out. Shortly thereafter I was put aboard the Mauritania, which was an English liner. My grandmother Blanchfield said she came to the United States in 1870–something, on the Mauritania. It was a liner and it was jammed with GIs. I slept in a hammock and we had a half an hour a day to go up on deck. It took us seven days. There was no convoy, we were by ourselves. We were a speedboat–seven days to get over there. I ended up in Liverpool, disembarked and was sent to a place called Delemer Park. The trucks took us there, which was someplace in the area of Liverpool. I was there about a week when I got notice that I was going to Southampton and then headed to

France. At Southampton I was put aboard a ship from the Netherlands called New Amsterdam, which was kind of surprising that I was on that kind of ship. We went across the channel that night and we were off the coast of France the next late morning when they threw all the ropes over the side of the ship. We climbed down into an LCI–landing craft infantry, I think it was, rather than an LST–which took us to the shores of Omaha Beach and there was a metal ramp-like that was in the water. It was high tide and we had full field packs and we had gas masks–the whole bit. So over the side I went into this LCI and went towards shore and the front came down and we started walking off and I found out in high tide–I was about 5'5" at that point in time–I damn near drowned. The water was up to my chest. The guy in back of me grabbed me by my tush and said, "Keep walking, keep walking." By that time I'm spitting water out, couldn't swim and I thought to myself when the Germans see me as a new secret weapon coming out of the water, they're really going to be in for a time. So I walked up Omaha Beach and the first thing we did was throw away our gas masks. There was a rise from the beach itself which we climbed up and at that point in time they were just opening up the new graves.

MR: Now what date was this when you went in?
JJB: It was probably around the first of August.

WC: Was there any evidence of the battle at all? Did you see anything?
JJB: No, it had been pretty well cleaned up by then except for the gravesites. They were just beginning to put crosses and Stars of David on them. I found out later one of my classmates from St. Mary's in Amsterdam had been killed on D-Day and had been buried there which kind of shook me a bit. From there we got on trucks and were sent to a repo depot–replacement depot. We were there for ten days or two weeks or so when my name was called and I was ordered to report–I was being shipped to Company C of the 11th Regiment of the 5th Division which was part of the 3rd Army. The 5th Division had been in Iceland and then to North Ireland and then into France, so I was being sent to them. We were put on trucks and taken to Company C, the 11th, and at that point in time they stenciled a red diamond on my helmet. And then from there we took off. The 3rd Army had not been in existence very long. Patton was our General.

MR: Did you ever get to see him?
JJB: Never saw him.

MR: What were your feelings about him as a general?
JJB: He was a heck of a good general. A little bit wild, I guess, because all we did was run like crazy. And we had the Germans on the run. In fact, we didn't see much combat for quite a while. We got stopped periodically at the remains of various towns and so on. I just remember the first time I had an 88 shot over me and with all the training and everything I had, the only thing I could do was just

hold on to my helmet and say, "Hail Mary". Scared me to death. And the first shot I took was–we were held up outside of a small village so we were behind some little bunkers and the Sergeant hollered over to me, "Shoot, shoot." I hadn't shot my M1 yet. And I shot it. I hit a house. I thought, "Boy I'm really doing a good job." We kept going east at a fast pace and our tanks were everything; they had the Germans really on the run. Periodically we would get stopped by a small group of Germans and then they'd fire at us for a while and they'd disappear. If we came to a village that we'd stay overnight, why that was fine. If we came to a village once in a while, we came down for a while, and the next morning everything was quiet–they were gone. The tanks were doing well until we got close to the Moselle River and this was probably already mid-September. Then we were ordered to dig foxholes. We'd been sleeping in split trenches every chance we had. Then they said start digging deeper. The question then was why, because we'd been on the run and we had the Germans on the run. The answer was the tanks had run out of gas. We had stretched our lines of what we needed. Once the tanks were stopped, why we were stopped. We were there for a while and then in early October the rains came. It rained and it rained and it rained. Our object at that point was to take the city of Metz which was on the Moselle River. Periodically, we sent out patrols–I would go out on patrol–periodically sent out to outposts. Metz was pretty well fortified by what was known as Fort Driant which was part of the original Maginot Line. But Fort Driant was more than just one fort. There were a number of forts. Periodically we'd go out and make an attack, maybe twice, and we were always right back.

In the middle of October they took us off line and we went in a rest area–went back up to a little village–I think it was Vierzon. They took us back there where we had a chance to clean ourselves up a bit and get some heavier clothing. We were relieved at that point I think by the 95th. At the end of October we went back up on line and on the 4th of November the Sergeant came to me and he said, "Company A got hit pretty hard a couple of nights ago. They are going to need some help. I want you to go over and report to them temporarily." So I went over and reported to Company A which was just a little bit south of where I was. Reported to them. It was Saturday, the 4th of November, and they said, "Okay, the first thing you are going to do is go to an outpost." I met a fella who I was going with–his name was Cootch or something like that from Vermont. So we went up on outpost which, as everybody knew, it was ahead of everybody else and we were supposed to be in charge of reporting any activity. They said no patrols were out at that time. Cootch and I were in one hole and to our left flank, maybe just ahead of us a wee bit, were two other guys. And as usual on outpost you sleep two hours, and stay awake two hours, just flip flop. So I went ten to midnight with my tour. Just shortly after I went back to sleep Cootch said, "We've got company." Well we knew there were no patrols out so it wasn't anybody that we wanted to see right then. Yep, he was right; it was a combat patrol that hit us. We had a phone with us. They had sent us up with pork chops

and a boiled potato so I had something to eat and that becomes important later on. But we had a pretty good firefight and Cootch was killed. Right behind me, well the phone was cut. We tried to use the phone and that was cut. We just had our M1s and the Germans had–[unclear]–we used to call them. They gave us a pretty good battle; as I said Cootch was killed. I knew somebody was behind us because the phone was gone. And the next thing I knew I heard somebody say, "Raus, kome raus, hands up." That was the end of combat at my point in time.

MR: You were wounded also?
JJB: Yes, I was hit with some shrapnel, one of the potato mashers as we called it[unclear]. But it was as close to combat as I had ever expected because it was just a few yards away from each other. The fellas in the other hole I do believe got killed also. Because I know there was lot of firing over there too. Thinking back about it, I always wondered why they left us out there. I guess maybe that we were just–we were there to stop them or get killed or something. Later on my father and mother got a letter stating that I was on outpost and there was a firefight and they came out the next morning and found I wasn't there. So I got captured. It was the German First Army that we were against and these were a couple of SS Troopers, who were good soldiers. The Germans were really good soldiers. We weren't too far from the German front line because they had the chance to regroup as we did. So they marched me past a bunch of the German Wehrmacht who started hooting and hollering and calling me different names and so on and a lot of words that that I didn't know what they meant but I don't think they were very kind. The guys that picked me up–captured me, I guess–checked me over for cigarettes and for D-Bars. That's what they wanted, I guess. So they took those away from me.

MR: What sort of winter gear did you have?
JJB: At that point in time, I had long underwear, I had the winter uniform, I had a small skull cap that you wore underneath your helmet, I had gloves and I had a field jacket, so I was not in too bad shape.

MR: How about your boots?
JJB: Boots were the same. We did not have combat boots. This is something that I've seen on everything on D-Day–the guys did not have combat boots. We wore leggings.

WC: You just had the ankle topped boot?
JJB: Yes, the ankle topped boot and of course the legging. You would lace up. And of course, the helmet with the big red diamond on it. We walked quite a ways. They took me to a brick house and brought me in there. It must have been a central place or something because there were all kinds of telegraph lines, almost like movie stuff, people marching in and out with information. They took me in there and then they took me to another room and started asking me some

questions and of course I was still a PFC at that time and Eisenhower hadn't told me anything and I didn't have much information to give them except name, rank, and serial number. They knew what division I came from because I had the red diamond on my helmet. Periodically they'd get upset with me and give me a little jab with a bayonet. Otherwise it wasn't too bad. They locked me in a room and the next morning two guys with skulls and crossbones on their uniforms put me in the back of what could be the German version of a jeep–in the back seat. One guy sat next to me and the other guy was driving. They tied my hands behind me and we took off. And we came to a small stream and this German vehicle–the driver shifted gears of some sort and it became a floating jeep–a little boat–went across this stream. We drove maybe four or five hours and we stopped at a place where they locked me in a barn and they brought me some meat and a piece of potato. They brought in this young fellow from Yugoslavia. In 1944 I just turned twenty and this guy was probably about sixteen or seventeen. They put him in the barn with me and he said something in his language and I couldn't understand him and we went through a couple of different things and the next thing I knew he could speak French. He asked me an awful lot of questions. I started wondering what the heck he was doing there and why. Couldn't answer any of them. So I fell asleep in the pile of straw and woke up the next morning and he was gone. He was locked in. I often wondered why–I think he might have been quite interested in what was going on. I was picked up on Saturday night, the 4th of November. The following Tuesday was the 7th, election day back in the United States. Roosevelt was running for his fourth term against Tom Dewey. Among the questions they kept asking me was, "Are you getting ready to attack us?" We had been sitting still for a few weeks. I guess they were afraid that Roosevelt might pull an attack to maybe help solidify his possibility of becoming President again. It was his fourth term. I often wondered if that was the main point of the questions.

My two fellas with the skulls and crossbones picked me up again that morning and took me to a town called Forbush, as I found out later. I was put in the town jail in a cell by myself, and after I was there for a while I got some knocking on the wall. And a fella said, "Are you American?" I said, "Yes, are you?" He said, "Yes." He was a fighter pilot that got shot down and parachuted and he had been there for a couple of days in that jail. They eventually took him out, and I heard some screaming and hollering. He never came back. I don't know whatever happened to him and I often wondered if some of the civilians maybe got to him because they were notorious that way if they caught anybody. From Forbush, I was there for maybe four or five days by myself in the jail.

One guy took me out on a train. We went to Limburg, which was Stalag XII-A. At that place they took my picture and who I was and I felt kind of secure at that point in time that I was a POW. There had been rumors–and it happened on our side too–that periodically POWs never made it, never heard from them again,

became an MIA forever. But once I had my picture taken I got my dog tag with my number on it, 078069, and Limburg was Stalag XII-A and there were British, Canadians and Americans–all POWs there. I was there for maybe three weeks or so. Very boring. I felt very sorry for myself, what had happened. I felt sorry for the guys who were with me when I got hit. By the way, the shrapnel–a German medic got the shrapnel out. The biggest piece was in my elbow, and he sewed me up. They didn't have cloth bandages, they used crepe paper. They wrapped me up with crepe paper. I had a couple of other small pieces. But anyhow I was there–at Limburg for a while. They took a bunch of us out and put us on a train–a boxcar–there were forty-some of us. There was all straw on the floor and a big garbage can in the corner. There wasn't much room in it for forty-some guys and there was one fellow–I think he was from Chicago–all he kept talking about all the time we were on that boxcar was his mother's banana cream pie and after about four days in the boxcar with him talking about banana cream pie, we would have shut him up. After a day we took off in the train. I think there were a couple of other boxcars with GIs because when we did stop eventually we met them. And we stopped periodically and they'd put another boxcar on. Now, whether these were Jewish people that they were taking to someplace else, I don't know. Every once in a while–there was a little cubicle above the boxcar–the guard up there would drop some water and some bread down to us. We found out what the garbage can was there for after the second day. And then we really had problems. Some of the guys drilled holes with the dog tags to get the seepage out. It was horrible. About every third day they'd give us some bread. We had to stand up. Everybody couldn't lie down at the same time. These boxcars were too small, so we had to stand up. We stopped someplace and we were there for a while and the Americans–it was daylight–they came over and bombed this railroad and we were screaming in the boxcar. We were targets of our own men. Fortunately they didn't hit us. The boxcar ride took us seven days–an absolute horror–and one time they said we were going to Danzig. The German guard above said we were going to Danzig. We turned around apparently and came back and we ended up at Neubrandenburg, which is Mecklenberg, thirty-some miles probably north of Berlin. They opened the doors to us and they let us out and we were then herded into Stalag II-A which was Neubrandenburg which had Russian prisoners beside British and we were the first American prisoners to get in there. It was a big camp–a big prison camp. The first thing they gave us was cabbage soup, which was cabbage and water, and two slices of black bread. Most of us hadn't eaten much more than a slice of bread in over a week, so we devoured everything we got. Boy, did we pay for it in the next day or two. To have not eaten and to just get cabbage and everything else didn't do us any good. We were taken into the camp. I was there for probably three or four weeks. We got to the camp on November 29th, Thursday, which was Thanksgiving Day in the United States. We had two Thanksgiving Days in 1944 in the United States, the original one which was the last Thursday, and then they decided for some reason that they would have the third Thursday. So we got there on Thanksgiving Day,

the 29th. After our time in II-A it got very boring and I felt very sorry for myself. I didn't know what my mother and father knew, where I was, what happened.

They came around and said, "We're going to have work groups." So they said, "Anybody volunteer?" so I volunteered. They picked up twenty of us and they sent us to a place called Dunenwald which was just outside of Neubrandenburg a few miles–they put us on trains to get there. We had two guards, two elderly men, and twenty of us, and among those that were with me was a fellow by the name of Jack Yoles from Hudson Falls who I met. But anyhow, we went to Dunenwald and were told then–we were put into a barracks, just a small, one room, it had a stove in it–we were put there and we were going to be stump routers. They were building a new road. The two elderly men who I had met on the train, the two guards, they were the guys in charge. They took us out and they showed us where they had felled, knocked down, and cut down trees. The stumps were left so we had to dig around the stump and get the roots. They had a tripod such as the one that you are using and we put the tripod down and put chains underneath the roots and everything, and then with the pump handle you would pump them up. That was our job and we worked from dawn until dusk and we got our usual breakfast of ersatz tea. At noontime we had either potato soup or cabbage soup or turnip soup, and at night we had two slices of bread and that was our food. At the time we were there we had an interpreter with us–one of the twenty. His name was Hank. He was from Brooklyn, a Jewish boy. They came around one day and they checked our dog tags and they took Hank away from us and we never saw him again. We found out later that they did take out the Jewish-American boys so we had to play games with our dog tags. The Jewish boys always hid theirs or got rid of them somehow and the rest of the guys would periodically hide their own too–the Gentile ones. So we lost Hank, he took off. A fellow by the name of Nixon who was from Colorado–I don't know if he was related to the future President–he and I were pretty good friends. Then, all of a sudden he flipped. I woke up one night–we had to sleep on, there were two layers, not separate beds, but straw and then we had half a blanket to share–I woke up one night and Nixon's staring over at me and he's hollering, "You know who I am?" I said, "I know who you are." He said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Oh boy, he had really flipped. The next day I was walking out of the hole and Nixon was standing there and he clocked me on the jaw. The guys grabbed him and took him away. The next night he was standing over me again and said, "Tonight I am a spot on the wall and I am watching everything you do." They let him work the next day, and in my hole he took a shovel and he beat me on my back with the shovel, three shots, until the guys got him. They took him away on the back of a truck and I still can see him screaming; whatever happened to him I don't know. I had to work but the guys covered for me because I couldn't do anything. After quite a while, that job finished and we were taken back to the main camp. After a short period of time, I volunteered for another spot. While we were at Dunenwald with the guards and the civilians, I heard them speaking

in German and I traded some cigarettes that I got from the Red Cross bus. I got a dictionary from German to French, When I hear different words you can understand by hand signals and so on what the topic was and I asked them to tell me what the German word was and then I got the French out of it. Having enough French in high school and so on, I was able to pick up enough so I knew what was going on.

With my dictionary I volunteered to go on anther work group and this was a big one. They picked 160 guys. They asked me to be an interpreter and I was an interpreter with a fellow from South Carolina who had been captured in North Africa. He was a medic. So we marched with this pretty good-sized work group. There were an under officer and six guards and the usual wire around us and a small sleepaway tent. They brought us there and they said our job was going to be building a road block. Some of us were going to be building the scaffolding used to put the cement in, some of the guys were going to be mixing the cement, and the rest of the guys were going to lug it down and so on. So there we had two large barracks, eight rooms in each barrack with about twenty guys in it. We went to work building the road block. The under officer thought he was a pretty good opera singer and he kept singing to me all the time and I had to listen to him. While we there working on the road block, a couple of things happened. We had some information–a fellow by the name of Jack Dehoff from New Jersey was in charge of communications and his job was mixing the cement for the road block. But he had a friend who was a French priest and he used to clue him in on what was going on. So one day, early April, Jack said the priest said that Roosevelt died. So, that was the evening. The next morning when we lined up for [unclear]–they used to call it–they counted us out and took different groups to work. I called everybody to attention. I said, "Face right," and they all faced right. Some guy had traded cigarettes to get a bugle. He blew the bugle–Taps. The under officer could hardly understand what was going on. He said, "What happened?" I told him. He was shocked–he didn't understand how we knew. That was one of my first wins that had taken place.

MR: How did you feel when you found that out?
JJB: Pretty much upset. Roosevelt–he became quite a man once Pearl Harbor took place. He was on our side. He was a leader. He said, "They are not going to get away with it." He was good–he was right for the times. At that time there are people who are really specially made for various times–it was Roosevelt, Churchill of course, de Gaulle, yes, maybe–but they were all pretty strong people at that point in time. Although, I couldn't vote for Roosevelt because you had to be twenty-one. You could drink when you were eighteen but you had to be twenty-one to vote. It changed quite a bit.

After that we had the Red Cross parcels come in. We used to be able to split them, maybe two boxes among twenty guys and they had various stuff–the usual

cigarettes, soap, D-Bars, etc. We got some softballs and bats from the YMCA and we also got a record player with two records. One was, "Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall," and the other one was, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." Well, to have a bunch of American guys over there… We used to pass the Victrola around. It was a hand cranking thing; we used to pass that around with the two records. So we had the balls and bats but we couldn't do anything with them; we were working seven days a week. Soon we could hear the artillery. We were not far from Szczecin which was Poland. The Russians were not that far away, they were almost to the Oder River and we were not far from there. So we could hear the rumbling and so on.

And finally, in true American style we had elected a leader in each one of these eight rooms and me as the interpreter. We met and the eight fellas said, "We decided we're not going to work anymore on Sundays." I said, "Okay." They said, "Okay, you tell them. Sunday morning we are just going to go back in our rooms and we are not going to work. And you tell them." So that Sunday the guys did what they said they were going to do. Everybody went back in their rooms. I'm standing there with the under officer trying to tell him that this is a strike. We are striking. But I didn't know the word for strike. So he took me down to the guardhouse. He called in the Bürgermeister who is the mayor. And he called in a couple of majors and they came up in a truck with twelve German guys, all military guys. So I tried to explain to them. They said, "No, you are going to work Sundays." It became an argument. He said, "I'll give you two hours off this afternoon." So I went back to the representatives of our union. I said, "They are going to give us two hours." They said, "No, all day or forget it." So I went back down again and this went on until about 2:00 in the afternoon. I went outside and one of these groups was having a drill or something. Anyhow, a shot was fired. Somebody had a hair trigger or something. The next thing I knew there were two guards and a fellow, Earl Cross. Earl was from Oklahoma and he was half Native American as they call it, half Indian. He had taken over as interpreter when we lost Hank on the previous job. Earl came down and he said, "What are you doing? We thought we got you killed." Thanks a lot, fellas.[Laughing] Anyway, the upshot was–negotiating–I kept going back and forth. Finally, they said, "Okay." My big ploy was you could hear the Russians, you could hear the artillery, the Germans were not in good shape. This was April. Finally, they said, "Okay, no more Sundays." They put me in solitary for the week. The following Sunday, the guys are out there playing softball in the Eastern part of Germany and we were probably about two miles from a women's stalag with Russian and Polish girls and they used to walk by us in their blue and white uniforms. Well these guys were out playing softball and showing off for these girls as they walked by. We never worked another Sunday after that. The only other thing that happened was that when we were finally ready to show them what the road block was, which was two pieces of cement going this way[demonstrates with hands several inches apart, facing body], each going halfway to the road, so you could go

through them but you couldn't come directly at them. They had the Bürgermeister there and they had two guys with drums and we had the morning off and some of the townspeople were out there and they had some speeches and everything and they started to take the scaffolding off. Then something that Dehoff had told me that nobody else knew started to appear. Up at the top of one side, you could see a crack start and a little bit of cement sand would come down. Dehoff had reversed the amount of sand and cement so that not very long after this whole thing was going to fall down. He was putting in four or five times the amount of sand as he was cement instead of the reverse. Well everybody was pretty much upset about that and that was the end of our work there.

On the 27th of April, which was just after this occurred, the under officer came to me and said, "Some of your buddies are going to take off and take you guys to Denmark and you are going to continue the fight out there." I said, "When?" He said, "Tomorrow morning." So I told the fellas that we were leaving the next morning and we were going to head towards Denmark, walking. So the first thing we did was throw away the Victrola and the two records–they went flying out. So the next morning we took off. We had the six guards and we walked all that day going west and we got to a barn and we stopped there for the night. I went to sleep. The next morning, I got up at daybreak. A couple of fellas came over to me and said, "We are ready to go." I said, "Where are the guards?" They said, "Sorry, they're not with us anymore." They gave me the under officer's pistol which I had always recognized, so I kept the pistol and they left one guard, Kurt Popke was his name, and he was the only guard left. So we started going west and we kept going through woods and everything. Finally the road was clogged with people. Everybody was going west because the Russians were right behind us. It was time to get out of there. There were men, women and baby carriages, so we went on the road. Some of the guys were pretty weak–had some bad legs and so on. So we kept looking. We finally found a horse alone and we got the horse and we got a wagon. Eventually we got a couple more horses and another wagon. We picked up a Latvian woman who said she was a barber from Riga, Latvia, and we picked up a 12 year old girl who was walking alone. She came with us. We kept going west. Periodically the British and the Russians would strafe us and the British, if you are going down the road, the British would go right down the road after you, not necessarily hitting us–they were strafing us–but looking for any military people, vehicles or such. The Russians would go crossways; they didn't pick out a target, they'd just go crosswise. We got strafed a couple of times. Civilians got killed. It was a real mess. I hid one time under a culvert–I was just small enough to do that–but we finally got to a town called Teterow. We had Kurt with us all the time. Kurt and I used to talk about beer and girls, because we were both twenty-years old and, I don't care where you come from, single guys talk about girls and beer. So, we'd talk about that. He was always with us. We came to a town called Teterow. We always had a couple of scouts going out–true military style. A couple of them

came back and said, "There's a train leaving and there's room on it. We're going–does anybody else want to go?" I think there were a dozen of them took off and got on the train and it was just ready to take off. And the Russians came by and strafed again and bombed the train and we lost these twelve guys.

MR: What happened to the Russian POWs that were in the camp with you? Did they travel with you or did they stay there?
JJB: No, they had their own compound. And the Americans stayed in that camp and they were finally liberated by the Russians. But the Americans had their own compound and the Russians had their own compound and they were treated terribly. Almost every day we saw them march by us with a body covered in brown paper. The Germans didn't feed them well and they just kept working them. But anyhow, we ended up when we reached the 8th Division of the Americans, it took us a little over a week; I think we covered pretty close to 150 miles. We reached the 8th Division, saw the MPs. I said, "What do we do?" They said, "Go find someplace to stay." So we took over an opera house. We still had Kurt Popke with us. We asked what to do with him. They said, "Keep him and we'll pick him up later." So after five or six days they came and said, "We are ready to take you out of here." They put us on trucks and took us to a German airfield in Hildesheim, Germany. A C-47 took us to Namur, Belgium. I weighed myself then. I weighed eighty-eight pounds. From there they took us to Camp Lucky Strike.

MR: How much did you weigh before that?
JJB: Probably 120. About all I could lose. Took us to Lucky Strike. One day, they called us out. Mike was on a C-47 standing on the wing, and said, "Does anybody want to go home?" Of course, we all hollered, "Yeah." A couple of days later I was on the SS Explorer, sleeping on the fantail, a liberty ship. It took us twelve days to get to Norfolk, Virginia. From there I called my mother. They shipped us to Dix and then sent us home for seventy days. So, I was home all that summer of '45. Then they sent me up to Lake Placid for R&R. At that point, I had lost a bunch of teeth, so I was up there at Lake Placid with linen tablecloths, waiters and waitresses. Sent me from there to Camp J.T. Robinson down in Little Rock, Arkansas. I knew how to type so they made me in charge of the typing pool. I had fourteen beautiful southern gals working for me. I roomed with a guy by the name of Dean Williams who later became a minister. I was discharged from there after I had enough points in December of 1945 and went back to Niagara and finished up. The credits I had picked up at North Carolina State they said were okay at Niagara. I got my degree in October of 1946. In February of 1947 I met a beautiful young girl on a blind date and on June 19, 1949 we were married. I have four kids, eleven grandchildren, six great-grandchildren at this point and one more due.

One thing that took place if I can just back up a little bit–when I first got to Limburg, they took us in for delousing. We piled our clothes up and they took us in the shower. They came out and poured all kinds of white dust on us and everything. Most of the clothes were gone; they took the American uniforms. We couldn't understand why. One of the pictures I have of Kurt and I leaving this group–you'll see GIs back then but you wouldn't know what they were because they had all kinds of outfits on, just clothes and some had wooden shoes and stuff. We found out later that they used them for the Battle of the Bulge. Two other things we heard about the Battle of the Bulge from the Germans–that they had taken Antwerp, and one day back in probably in January or so I heard the first Jap airplane go over me. I'd never heard one, never seen one. The Germans were now coming over in jet airplanes.