

**Gerald M. Daub
Veteran**

**Mike Russert, Wayne Clark
Interviewers**

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MR: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

GD: My name is Gerald M. Daub, D-a-u-b. I was born in Brooklyn. I was born on January 26, 1925.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering military service?

GD: I went to grammar school in Brooklyn, I went to Brooklyn Technical High School in Brooklyn. And I finished one year of architecture at Broad Institute in Brooklyn.

MR: Where were you and what do you remember about your feelings when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

GD: I was playing touch football in the street. It was Sunday morning. I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was or what Pearl Harbor really was about except that I was stunned to learn that the Japanese had attacked the American Navy in Pearl Harbor. My original feeling was, well, they are pretty foolish and we will just wipe them out in a very short period of time. I had no idea that I might at some point wind up being in the service of the Government. I had a few cousins who went into service very early in the war. But I really never thought that I would serve in that conflict.

MR: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

GD: I was drafted. I volunteered for a program called The Army Specialized Training Program which would send young men to college or help them finish their college educations. I was in college at the time that I received my draft notice. I was deferred for my appearance in the Army for about three or four months to finish the year, my first year at college.

MR: When were you inducted into the service?

GD: In June of 1943.

MR: Could you tell us about where you were sent for your basic training and so on?

GD: I was sent to Fort McClellan, which was in Anniston, Alabama. I had basic training as an infantryman. I had the full basic training program which I believe

was about ninety days. I finished basic training in time to be sent from Fort McClellan to a college to study basic engineering. I was sent to the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina.

MR: Being a New Yorker, what was your relations with southerners? Did you find any...?

GE: Well, basic training, weekend passes were few. In fact, a long time in coming. It wasn't until late into the basic training period that we actually got a weekend pass to go to town. Going to Anniston, Alabama was not too much different than being down in the main part of the post, I mean. Anniston, was just full of soldiers walking around the street. There weren't too many civilians that we came in contact with. I had more experience with people from the south and the different culture of the south when I was at school at the Citadel. Because there I always had weekend passes. I usually had a pass to leave the campus one night during the week. So, I had opportunities to observe the difference in the southern culture.

MR: You said you were taking architectural courses at the Citadel?

GD: No, I was taking architectural courses at Broad Institute and my course of study at the Citadel was basic engineering.

MR: What did you do after you left there?

GD: Well, at just about at the end of what was the second semester, which I believe was late in March of 1944...and I believe in preparation for the invasion of Europe, the decision was made to close most of the ASTP [Applied Skilled Trades Program] programs down and use most of the men who were in ASTP and who were young eighteen, nineteen-year-olds to fill infantry divisions and to use as replacements in infantry divisions which would participate in invasions and the later campaign of Europe. In late March, I was transferred from the Citadel. The program closed down there and I went to Fayetteville, North Carolina to Fort Bragg, where the 100th Infantry Division was stationed.

MR: So, you were assigned to the 100th Infantry?

GD: Yes.

MR: Were you in there as a replacement or was it just being formed?

GD: No. The 100th Infantry Division had finished Tennessee maneuvers. They were a division that was probably close to being ready to go into combat. Then the decision was made to take about half of the men that were in the division and well trained and use them as replacements for the invasion in Europe. And so, they refilled the division with young men like myself who were in the ASTP or Air Cadets. Those two groups then refilled the division and we spent the summer training and getting the newer men integrated into the division.

MR: How were the newer men accepted by those that already had been in there?

GD: The older men were resentful of us. They called us the whiz kids because [laughs] of ASTP; that was a popular TV program [Quiz Kids] at the time. But I think in general, eventually as we performed and as we started to integrate into the division and each other, we were fairly well trained, we would make adequate soldiers to fight side-by-side with them. We were basically accepted as members of the division.

MR: After your integration into that unit and your training, what did you do next?

GD: Towards the end of the summer, we were alerted that we would be going overseas. Although, we weren't told where we were going. In late August, or maybe early September, I'm not sure which we were sent to...we loaded on troop trains and came up to New York. I believe it was Camp Kilmer that we were at for maybe a day or two. We got a weekend pass and I had an opportunity to visit with my family for the weekend. I didn't know where I was going, but I knew I was going overseas. When we all came back after the weekend, they took us on ferries and barges over to the Port of Embarkation in New York Harbor and formed a large convoy. We were on a very large troop ship called The George Washington, which I believe was the largest troop ship that the United States had. We went in convoy about 10 days. It was a very rough crossing. Through the Straits of Gibraltar. Then, of course, we knew where we were going by that time. We landed in Marseille. That was maybe three or four weeks after the initial landing in Marseille. We disembarked and went to a place called Delta Base and the division formed up and got ready to go into combat.

MR: Could you tell us about your first combat experiences?

GD: Yes. In the beginning, after we left Marseille, we boarded trucks. Actually, we were chasing the German Army up the Rhine, Rhone Valley. Eventually, I believe, the German Army, that particular Germany Army had prepared positions in the Vosges Mountains while we were chasing them up. We really had no combat experience with them while going up the Rhone Valley after them. Although, we saw a lot of wreckage of German vehicles along the sides of the road from air attack. Eventually, around Baccarat, we went into the line and replaced the 45th Infantry Division, the Thunderbird Division in very mountainous, snowy terrain, in Alsace Lorraine.

MR: Did you have winter gear?

GD: We had winter uniforms. I had an Army field jacket and an OD [olive drab] sweater with a little shawl collar as I recall it. A little woolen cap OD that I wore under my helmet. Basically, we had winter gear. After a few days, I think, we were issued shoe packs to replace the leather combat boots that we had brought with us.

MR: So, your initial combat was winter fighting in the mountains?

GD: Yes.

MR: Do you think you were well trained for that?

GD: I think, probably the men who were in the division who had been in Tennessee maneuvers in the winter the time were adequately trained for that. Although, we weren't. Most of the training that I had was in Fort McClellan in Alabama in the summertime. It was a pretty warm climate. The late winter in Fort Bragg was cold. But certainly not as cold and snowy as it was in the Vosges Mountains. We learned to adapt quickly. After all, I was from the Northeast, so [laughs] I was used to the climate. Although, not used to sleeping outdoors in it or digging a fox hole in it every night.

MR: Could you tell us about your experiences in combat there?

GD: My job was, first gather the second squad of the first platoon of F Company of the 397th Regiment of the 100th Infantry Division. On many days I was... my job really to sort of be the first one to move out. After about...we were only in combat maybe three or four days and really hadn't had any fire fight experience yet. This particular day was not my day to be on the point; it was November 12th to be exact. We were near a town called Bertrichamps and our objective was a small hill or a mountain. I was walking out in this snowy, wooded area ahead of the rest of the company. When I got the job as first scout, I thought that was sort of an honor or a privilege. Because I was fairly athletic and a good runner and I was a fairly good shot with my rifle. I later found out that basically the job of the first scout, he was just about a target. Like if I was out there and somebody saw me first and shot, then the rest of the company knew something was going on. That was generally what happened. Anyways, on this particular day, I saw some movement in the trees up ahead and I dropped to the ground which was the best firing position. Apparently, that person saw me just a little bit before I saw him. We both almost fired at the same time. I just felt this burning pain in my neck. I don't know what happened to the other person. But fortunately, I turned my head to the side to shoot, so that kept me from being shot in the head. [points to his neck] The bullet went in here, went down my back and out just below my shoulder blade. It touched nothing vital! Absolutely nothing! I lay there in the snow there and the rest of the squad came up to me. Somebody helped take off my pack. I was told that I had the million-dollar wound and was going home. [laughs]

Unfortunately, it wasn't the case. Toward evening, a medic came by. They had marked my place by sticking my rifle in the ground and putting my helmet on top of it. A medic came by and helped me up and looked at it and sort of cleaned the wound a little bit. The two of us; he helped me walk back to an aid station. From there, I went by jeep to a station hospital. I spent about two and a half weeks at station hospital and I was pronounced fit for duty after that period of time. I was

asked if I would like to go to a replacement depot or go back to my company. Of course, I wanted to be with the guys I knew. Maybe it wasn't the wisest decision. I probably would have spent a month or so in a replacement depot. The next morning, they put me on a truck and I was back again in combat with my guys. Basically, combat was the same kind of routine. Moving out almost every morning. We were advancing all the time. Through wooded terrain, through the snow. Toward evening, digging a fox hole, getting in it for the night. Sometimes experiencing shelling or tree bursts. Most of the air attacks were American and fortunately they were at the other people. But once in a while we were attacked by German fighters. Until, around [thinks] just a little before the first of the year, after Christmas I think, we were up just about at the Maginot Siegfried line at a place called Bitche. A fairly large city in Alsace. Our advance by that time had stopped. We were in what was I guess would be considered to be the Winter Line. We think it was the Winter Line. Actually, the Battle of the Bulge had already occurred in the Hurtgen Forest. We were on the other side of Luxembourg, actually. Patton's 3rd Army was pulled out and was sent up to reinforce the Battle of the Bulge. We kind of spread out to cover the 3rd Army's territory, in our army's territory. I was in the 7th Army. Around New Year's Eve the German Army launched a big counter-attack with tanks and infantry. It was very celebratory, very pretty, I mean at night. All the flares were going off. There was a lot of noise and excitement. Then we were moved into a small town called Rimling. Which was sort of at a crossroads. Apparently, some roads and highways that the German Army considered to be important. We were cut off in this little town. We had two companies in there, E Company and F Company, which was my company. We were attacked by the 17th German SS Panzer Grenadier Division. Basically, we controlled the town in the daytime and they would come in with tanks at night and more or less take over the town because we had no tank support. They would withdraw the tanks in the daytime because the tanks were subject to being attacked by our airpower because they would be visible in the town. So, just around dawn, they would sort of withdraw and try to leave infantry behind. We would spend that day taking the town back and either capturing or wounding or whatever the troops that they had left behind to try to hold the town.

MR: Was there a lot of house-to-house fighting? Street fighting?

GD: There was a lot of house-to-house fighting, right. On this one particular night, the night that I was captured, was January the 8th. Another scout from my squad, he was a scout from the first squad, I was in the second squad, and I were assigned to go up to the upper most part of town, the town was on a hillside. We were to observe the German massing and what they were sending into town. Basically, our responsibility was to get back to company headquarters to report what was coming into the town that particular night. This other gentleman, Howard Hunter and I found a very nice house at a bend in the road facing up the street up the hill. We got into a second story window. As night fell, we saw the

outline of a German tank coming down the street. There were infantry men behind it sort of crisscrossing the street behind it. Howard and I shot out the window at them and they saw us and started to shoot back at us. And suddenly the tank rolled up right to the house and put his muzzle right in the window that we were in. We decided, mutually, that it was time to leave the house. And, so we did. We ran down the stairs and out of the house and opened the door. As I said the town was on a hillside, so we jumped over a garden wall and landed right in the middle of a squad of German soldiers. We two, maybe there were like five or six of them. Howard hit the German closest to him with his rifle butt and I grabbed him by the arm and dashed into the first house that we could find. We got into the house and we headed toward the other end of the house. It was our expectation to get through the house, out the window and head back down to company headquarters. As we got into the house, we realized that the windows were boarded over. Solidly boarded over. We got into the kitchen and smashed at it with our rifle butts and couldn't get the boarding off and we could hear the Germans come into the house. Because of all the fighting, there was a lot of shelling and the floor was very sandy, so we could hear their footsteps on the floor. As they would pass a room, they would throw a hand grenade into it. So, the two of us turned over a big wooden table, which was probably the kitchen table. It was dark. It was not easy to see because the windows were boarded over. We got down behind it. We heard the Germans come to the door of the room we were in and they tossed the hand grenade in. The table bounced up and down, but we were not hurt. The table stayed together. And Howard said "I think we better surrender, Ger." I said "Not me Howard, I'm Jewish." Howard was a good guy. He stayed with me behind the table and they tossed another hand grenade in. We didn't do anything. Then we heard a machine pistol cocked at the door. We knew the table wasn't going to resist that. I recall saying to Howard, "Howard, discretion is a better part of valor, I think we better surrender." I don't know which one of us said kaput, comrade and we both threw our rifles out. The German soldiers grabbed us, of course, as we came out and searched us and brought us back to this tank that was out in the street. Should I go on with this story?

MR: Yes.

GD: They had a very badly wounded soldier lying next to the tank. They ordered us to pick up the soldier and put him on the tank. And to get on the tank and hold him on. Howard and I got onto the tank with the soldier who was in great pain and crying for his mother. Then the tank took off and headed back out of town again with the infantry riding on the other end of the tank. Some of them walking behind the tank. As we headed out of the town, I can remember hearing this soldier's terrible cries of pain, and suddenly he stopped crying. And I said to Howard "I think he is dead." And we are in deep whatchamacallit. The tank stopped and we were ordered off of it. The tank commander waving his pistol. I thought surely, they were just going to shoot us and leave us there. But he turned

around and pointed at a shovel that was on the side of the tank. We knew that he meant for us to use the shovel and try to dig a hole for this soldier who was dead. We chipped away at the frozen snow. It was very hard to dig anything through this icy snow. We dug sort of a shallow hole and he said "Ok, that's enough." We rolled the German into it and covered him over with snow again and they marked the spot. They ordered us back on the tank again and the tank took off. The sun was coming up and this tank was going right across the ridge line. I am thinking to myself, boy we are going to get blown up by Americans, but nothing happened. We finally arrived back at a barn. A little house which must have been their headquarters or their command post. Howard and I were ordered into the barn. After a short while, somebody came in and got me and took me into a little room at the side of the barn. There was a German SS officer very well dressed and well-polished looking. He was sitting at a table and he had a couple of Reader's Digests magazines, fairly recent issues. Assumably, it was meant to impress us that he could read English and speak English. And he spoke English very well. He asked me a few questions and I gave him my name, rank and serial number. Which is what we were told that we had to do. Then he told me that I was a member of F Company of the 397th Regiment of the 100th Infantry Division. I had no insignia on. I was stunned to hear that he knew so much about me. I didn't realize until later that somebody else must have been captured earlier and maybe was frightened enough to tell him what he wanted to know. He told me the name of my company commander, Captain [William E.] Stallworth. He told me the date that I landed in Marseille. [laughs] So, I said "I actually wasn't with the company when they landed in Marseille. I am a replacement and I haven't been here very long and I don't really know too much about what you are telling me. It is probably true. But I really don't know. He looked at me with disdain because I was a dirty, smelly, looking like an infantryman, haggard, unshaven. And he said, "You're Jewish, aren't you?" And I said...I'm really not proud of this by the way, I said "No, I'm not." I'm Lutheran. My grandparents were German and I knew that they had friends who were Christian and they were Lutheran. So, I said I was Lutheran. He said "Take your pants off." I said "If you want to see whether I'm circumcised or not, that really won't tell you anything because almost everybody in the American Army is circumcised." He said, "All right, all right, that's all." He motioned for me to leave and the guard took me out. He called Howard in. Probably gave him the same kind of questions he gave me. The next morning, which was January 9th, the rest of my company appeared. They had surrounded the company command post, pushed everybody back into the command post and captured about, maybe the remnants of the company, maybe there were twenty-five or thirty men. Among them was this guy Bob, who I... Bob [Robert] Rudnick, who I had been a kindergarten companion with him in Brooklyn.

MR: Were you carrying dog-tags on you?

GD: Yes. I hid them in my boot. It's interesting because your dog-tags gave your religion. H. In all the times as prisoner of war, I don't recall anybody really

looking except on one occasion looking for my dog-tags. Or looking to see whether they said HP or C on them. And certainly, when I was first captured, nobody did and this officer didn't either. But in any event, they questioned then the rest of the company and the next morning, I am not sure whether they loaded us up on trucks or marched us, we somehow got to a railroad siding. They loaded us into boxcars. There were soldiers from other companies that they had gathered together. They had about a train load of American prisoners of war. We went into this boxcar about; I would guess about maybe sixty men to a boxcar. They gave us a loaf of bread, locked the boxcar up. We had no toilet facilities. I can recall, we took turns at sitting or lying down because it was so crowded. Eventually we got into, what I later found out, was Frankfurt am Main. It was the night the British Air Force picked to bomb the marshalling yards in Frankfurt am Main. They didn't let us out of the boxcars during the night when the bombing went on. The next morning, they opened the boxcar and the rails were all twisted and messed up in the railyard. They surprisingly already had gangs of people working to put the rails back in order. They marched us away through the town. German civilians were very unhappy with us. They marched us to a very large prison camp in a place called Bad Orb.

MR: Did the German civilians throw anything at you or were they yelling at you or anything?

GC: They were yelling at us. I don't recall being stoned. They were yelling at us and they looked and acted very angry. We went back to this fairly large camp which contained prisoners of war, almost, a good part of the 106th Division was in the camp already before we arrived. There were also French, English, Serbian, some Indian soldiers, East Indian. We were in that camp, I guess for about a few days. We were re-examined and re-questioned again. In that camp, I had put my dog-tags back on again. While I passed by one of the benches, somebody did pick up my dog tags and look at them. In any event, we were in that camp for just a few days when the Germans announced that they were going to separate the Jewish prisoners and put them in a separate barracks. Our man of confidence, the man who was appointed to be the head of the camp...we were all of course basically privates because the officers were separated almost immediately after we got to the camp and sent to a separate camp. The non-coms were sent to another camp in a place called Ziegenhein. It was announced that the Jewish soldiers should stand forward at the next formation. Our barracks leaders told us that we should not obey that order. That it was improper for us to be separated from the rest of the American prisoners. The next morning when we were called to step forward, nobody stepped forward. Apparently, that night the man of confidence and the other barracks leaders were maybe abused and they were told that the next day the Jewish men would have to step forward. So, they came back to the barracks and told us that the next morning that we should step forward when we were told the Jewish men should do so. The man who was the leader of my group was a member of my infantry company and knew that I was Jewish and

I was resentful of the fact that they were so willing to give me up. I mean it was silly because...as events later turned out, the Germans would have separated us in any event because that was their intent. The next morning, Bob and I both stepped forward when we were told to and we were marched to a separate barracks. In a sense, the Germans were true to their word. They had said that we would be treated like everybody else and given the same food. The food, of course, if you know, if you had spoken to some prisoners, you know the food was fairly meager to start with. And the food was identical in this separate Jewish barracks. The big difference was that the barracks were in a barbed wire enclosure and we could no longer mingle with the rest of the men in the camp. We stayed and we were in that particular situation for about another week or two. I actually remember the date. It was February 7th.

It was announced that the Germans were opening a separate camp for American prisoners of war. And at random they would choose some barracks to go to this separate camp to get it started. At random, they chose the Jewish barracks. Another barracks were men who had committed minor crimes. If you can picture what the prison camp was like, that you would expect there to be some thievery. Men who were pushed into very uncomfortable positions and might be tempted to steal somebody else's bread or clothing if you left it around, took it off and left it around. As a consequence, everybody slept in all their clothing and their boots. A shipment of three hundred-fifty men was put together. Some of the people in the shipment were men who were picked out at random who looked Jewish or had Jewish sounding names. And, of course, we were loaded back into these boxcars again in a similar situation for another week's voyage. When the train stopped, of course we didn't know where we were going or what the situation would be, it stopped in a very quiet, nice little German village. It looked pretty good. The boxcars were opened and we got out. As we marched through the village and into the countryside, we suddenly came upon this camp surrounded by barbed wire. We marched into the camp and we noticed that the camp was basically filled with civilians, not prisoners of war. The civilians were wearing blue and white striped pajama suits. They were obviously concentration camp victims. We went to the barracks and went to sleep for the night. The next morning when we were awakened, we were marched through the camp and over a little footbridge to a worksite. The worksite was a large mountain that they were digging tunnels into. We didn't know what the tunnels were for, what the material was that we were taking out. Basically, the mountain was stone rock mountain. We were divided up into little groups and each one assigned to a tunnel. In each tunnel was a civilian German miner who oversaw the operation. And the German guards basically left us there. There was no military supervision. We worked twelve hours a day. We worked the night shift, which was part day time part night. The political prisoners worked the other shift. Food was the same as it was in Bad Orb for breakfast. A cup of tea or coffee or some kind of an herbal

mixture, hot drink. Lunch was a bowl of soup. For dinner, we got a loaf of dark brown bread to share with about six or seven men.

MR: Did you get any kind of Red Cross packages?

GD: We got one Red Cross package in Bad Orb before we left. It was packaged to share with four men to a package. We took turns in selecting things from the package. I recall, Bob and I decided, although we did smoke, we would not select cigarettes. We would select food. And we selected a bottle of vitamins, which was a pretty good choice [laughs] as I look back at it now. We were very careful about it. Eating. It was one-a-day vitamins and we each took one a day. We did have an incident when we were in the second camp at Berga an der Elsta. In the very beginning [looks up to think], five or six men, I believe, were pretty sick after the train ride. They were sent to a hospital, a German hospital. And I believe some of the medics who were with us went with them. Apparently, it was mostly English prisoners of war at that particular hospital. In some way they found about the conditions in the camp and how bad it was in the camp we were in. In some way, they managed to ship some of their Red Cross parcels to us. It was interesting that...they arrived maybe half way through our time in this mining operation. It was not in the very beginning. The German officer who was in charge of our group called us bandits and said we were dirty and unshaven. He had Red Cross parcels for us but he wasn't going to give them out until we were properly shaven. Now mind you, we didn't have toiletry kits. A couple of men had managed to hold onto razors. They used to come in a little black plastic box. I don't know if you know what the shaving kit was like. It was a razor that you screwed the handle onto the head and you could put a blade in it. We maybe had, I don't really know the number of them, several of the men had them though. So, in our off time at night, we managed to get just about everybody shaved after about two or three days. And those Red Cross parcels were also given out. We shared them again, one to four men. Those are the only two Red Cross parcels that we got in all the time that I was a prisoner of war. Also, when we were in Bad Orb, by the way, we got an opportunity to write home. We wrote a letter and a post card. My parents got both of them after, after, after the war was over.

MR: Were you aware of what was going on in concentration camps prior to being captured?

GD: I had a cousin, as I said, my family was German, I believe he was my father's mother's sister's son. In any event, my parents signed some kind of a form or statement saying that he would not be a burden on the government of the United States and he came as a refugee. I was about thirteen or fourteen at the time, so it was before we were in the war. He lived with us until he went into the service. He was about two or three years older than I was. He and his brother, his brother went to someone else in the family, they came to the United States. They had two other children, a boy and a girl who went to what was then Palestine. The parents never got out of Germany. I heard a lot of stories about how the Jews were being

persecuted in Germany during those early Hitler days. So, I was somewhat aware. I don't think anybody outside of Germany was aware of the total impact and the totality of the Germans quote "Final Solution".

MR: I notice that it states here that this was a satellite of Buchenwald. Were you aware of what was going on in that camp? Could you see it from where you were or were you aware of it?

GD: No, we couldn't see it, but we could communicate with the civilians who were there. A lot of us, in fact if you get an opportunity to read that decision by the United States State Department. One of the people who was interviewed was a gentleman who was in that camp as a civilian. He was shocked to learn, and he says so in his statement, that there were American, that we were American soldiers when we came in. He was also surprised that they could communicate with us because a lot of the American soldiers were Jewish, spoke Yiddish. That was a language that was almost international. So, these people from all over Europe apparently understood Yiddish and could communicate with us. I couldn't speak Yiddish although I knew a smattering of some words of German from just hearing my grandparents talk. My buddy Bob had studied German as a language in high school. We could communicate a little bit with them. But we didn't have too many opportunities to stand around and talk to anybody. Frankly, we worked long hours. When the day was over, by the time we got our meals, attended to our personal needs, we just would drop off and fall asleep. There is a picture here of what the sleeping barracks looked like. [shows photograph of sleeping barracks]. It was pretty crowded and not too comfortable.

MR: Were you given any blankets or anything like that?

GD: In Bad Orb, we were issued what appeared to be like a half of a gray blanket each one of us. Between Bob and I, we had almost a full blanket together. [points to photograph] On these bunks, we slept two men to a level to each one of these compartments. Bob and I chose to sleep together. We were able to keep each other warm with those little half blankets.

MR: Are these the mattresses? Are they stuffed with straw?

GD: Burlap with straw ticking. We were supplied with these mattresses to put in these wooden slat bunk beds. The straw was full of lice and so were we. As time went by in this place, some of the men became sick, diarrhea was prevalent and once they got sick, they usually died. You could see that somebody was going to be dead the next day at nighttime or whenever it was that we went to sleep, people would have this look of the mask of death about them. We knew that they were going to die.

MR: What kind of facilities were there for going to the bathroom there?

GD: Outside the barracks, there was a large hole with a log over it. That was it. Men who escaped and were recaptured, and as far as I know, no one ever fully

escaped, they were given the additional duty of having to clean out this latrine pit. That was usually a fairly fatal assignment.

MR: Who were the guards? Were they older soldiers or young or the youth?

GD: The guards were similar to our ages. They were soldiers. They were soldiers who were no longer able to fight because they had been severely wounded in some way. I recall a guard who, we spent most of our time with, had one arm that was stiff. He couldn't bend at the elbow. It's my recollection that he was injured at the Russian front. The guards really were, basically followed orders and didn't do anything outward on their own. The gentleman who was in command of the group was mean and did the most that he could to make us uncomfortable. The first prisoner who escaped, was a man by the name of [Morton] Goldstein, Jerry Goldstein, was captured, brought back and shot through the head. His body was displayed for three days in the compound, obviously as a lesson to all of us that it was not a good idea to try to escape. But, some of these people were so desperate that they tried to escape in any event. In fact, three men who were the Men of Confidence in the large camp, because they had refused to turn over the Jews the first night, they were sent with us. They became our leaders in this camp.

MR: They were non-Jewish?

GD: The three of them were non-Jewish as far as I knew. One was named Johann Kasten, one was Joseph Littell, who I know was the son of a minister, and the other's last name was [unclear]. I don't recall his first name. The three of them escaped, they spoke German very well. We really don't know what happened to them because they didn't come back. We found out later, that they were recaptured and sent off to some other camp and kept in solitary confinement for the rest of the war. But they were not shot. Which was good for them. This story will be told in this documentary film that was made about Berga and will be on Public Service Television on May 28th of this year.

MR: I don't know.

GD: I will go on with this story.

MR: Ok.

GD: Ok. As time went by and we just got weaker and weaker, the frequency of death became more and more frequent. In the beginning, maybe just one man died and then after a few days, somebody else died. After a while, it became almost like...it seemed every morning, somebody would be dead and would have to be taken out. We had a regular burial detail by that time.

MR: Were there any more new Americans put into the camp?

GD: [shakes his head no] No. No new people that I knew of came into the camp. That was it. After a while, I don't know whether it was the proximity of the American Army or whether it was just that we were not suitable to do this digging

and dynamiting. The work in the mine usually was...there were fourteen of these [holds up photograph of mountain and tunnels] I think something like fourteen or seventeen of these tunnels in this mountain. They were about a story and a half high.

MR: If you hold this back. I can't focus in on it. Do you know what you were mining at all?

GD: No. We were drilling with a large drill about a six-foot bit. Holes in the face of about a story and a half high tunnel. Then we would all leave the shaft, the fellow who was the experienced miner, the German, would attach...tamp dynamite into the holes and attach fuses. We would all leave the shaft and he would blow the face of the shaft. Then we would just pick up the rock by hand and put them in these little carts [points to a cart in the photograph] along the side of the railroad. We would just push the cart along here until it came to a little switch off at the bank of the river and dump the stone into the river. We didn't know at the time what we were mining or what we were doing at all. Since then, I've been told that we were digging some kind of underground munitions factory. We thought that it was perhaps launching tubes or tunnels for rockets. Anyways, we were told that... I've been told since then, that it was some sort of underground factory that they were building. [shows a photograph of a tunnel] This is the entrance to one of the tunnels. It's a little obscure, but you can see it's a fairly tall hull. Two American soldiers who came to the work site after we were long gone from it.

One day, we were told that we were not going to work that day and we were marched to a little building and told to take our clothes off. We wondered what was going to happen. We were told to put our clothing in a little pile. And then the doors to a room were opened and it was a large tiled chamber. We were ordered into the chamber. The doors were closed. It was a shower room. We got our first showers. Our only shower, in fact. Our only washing in the time that we were in this place. In fact, it was... I had maybe gotten one shower after I got out of the hospital when I was in combat between then and the time I was captured. So, in maybe five or six months, this was the first shower I had gotten. We had no bathing or washing facilities. If you wanted to wash or clean your hands or your face, you had to do it in your tea or coffee water that was supplied in the morning.

So, you can just guess that in this stone working operation and the fact that they were blowing a stone face in these mine shafts, that we were just...we looked like concrete statues, really. We were just totally covered with stone dust. Of course, after the rock was blown, we were ordered back in to pick up the rock. It was a pretty choking place down in this tunnel. Not really a good situation. In any event, after the shower that I mentioned, we were told to go back, the doors were opened again and we went back into the room where our clothing was, we were told to put our clothing on again. Which was the same clothing I had been

wearing in combat. By this time, was just full, every seam was just full of louse eggs. Our bodies were covered with sores from the lice that we had living on us. Then we went back to the barracks. The next morning when we woke up, the gates to the camp are open and we were marched out. All of the civilians who had been in the camp before us were gone. We didn't know what happened to them or where they were. But there were no civilian prisoners at the worksite anymore. We marched down some roads. After about a day or so, we came upon civilians, the civilians from our camp, who had been marching; apparently, they were marched out ahead of us. They, what appeared to me anyways, to be almost the whole day, lining both sides of the road, they were shot. Now, it might have only been an hour or half an hour, but in my memory, it seems like the whole day. And I can just recall them in these grotesque positions. Pleading for their lives and shirking [gestures using hands to shield face] and trying to get away from whatever it was that was happening to them. Apparently, they were shot because they were no longer able to keep up with the march or not doing well or the Germans were just tired of marching them. I don't know.

When the guards were asked what happened to these people, they said that the American planes strafed them. Which, of course, was untrue because they were all shot in the head. In any event, that was the story we were given. As the days went by, we would be marching and sometimes they had food for us and sometimes they couldn't get food for us. Sometimes they were able to get, the guards were able to get potatoes from the farms. Sometimes they were able to get a shipment of bread which we then would divide up. An interesting aside, we had a way of making sure that each of us got a fairly equal share of bread. I don't know if other prisoners or other people told you about this. If we had six men, we organized into a group and somebody would have a knife. Some people are surprised to hear that we did manage to have a knife or two amongst us. But you had to have a way to cut the bread. We would appoint a different person. We would rotate the person who was called the tsushnayder, the cutter, the bread cutter, each day. He would get to pick his slice last. So, if he did his utmost to make every slice equal because he got the last pick. It would be the smallest one if you are a poor judge of cutting. Or didn't do a good job that day. Your punishment was to not get very much to eat. [laughs] It was a very good way of everyone getting their equal share of the bread slice. The marching went on basically and eventually as days went by, more men weakened and died. Of the three-hundred-fifty...now, one of the medics tried to keep track and keep a dog tag, if there were some available for each prisoner who died. So, this guy by the name of Massa Vito had a count of seventy men out of the three-hundred-fifty who died. Now, mind you, these were combat infantrymen, healthy young men of eighteen years of age or nineteen as I was by that time. Basically, in the prime of health when we got there because we were infantrymen and had training and were hardened. I was taken prisoner on January the 8th. I was liberated on April the 23rd or the 27th, I'm not sure which date. We left Bad Orb and went to this

worksite on February the 7th. So, [counts on fingers] February, March, April, no more than two-and-a-half to three months that we were working and, in that time, one out of every five of them died. It was really a perilous situation.

As the journey progressed, I can recall one night, the guards being sort of upset or different. We had heard from people as we marched through towns from people who were farm workers and sort of impressed laborers to hang on because the American Army is very close by. We could hear firing. And we seemed to be marching ahead of it all the time. This one night and the next morning, our guards were all gone and there were different guards. Very old men looking like they really didn't know one end of the rifle from the other. As we woke up in the morning in the straw was this young man by the name of Jack [unclear] who didn't wake up. He seemed to be like gasping for air, breathing, but having difficulty, but it looked to us like he was breathing. We decided that everything is in disarray, the guards are new and I said to my friend Bob "Why don't we see if we can just sort of walk out of the barn with him and maybe the column will go on and they won't even notice that we are gone and it'll be over." This other fellow, Joe Mark, Bob and I and Joe, the three of us went over to the corner of the barn where there were some poles stacked in the corner. We took two poles and buttoned Bob's overcoat over the two poles to make it like a stretcher and put Jack on it.

We walked to the door of the barn and we said to the guard at the door "This man is very sick. There is a little hut over there. We would like to take him into the hut and see if we can revive him and he can rest a little bit." The guard said "Yeah, yeah, yeah, ok, go ahead." So, the three of us trundled over to this little hut and went inside with Jack. The hut had obviously been some kind of a candling hut because it had a goose egg in it. We took the egg and made a little hole in it and tried to get Jack to suck it and he wouldn't or didn't or couldn't. Just as we were doing that, it was a sound of, but to me was unmistakable, an American tank. I threw open the door to the hut and over the rise of the hill came this tank with a big white American star on it. Behind it, a jeep flying an American Red Cross flag on it. I stumbled over to them, to the guy in the jeep. He was a medic. I said there is a man in the hut who is very sick. He said "We've been looking for you guys for days." He said "I will go in the hut. And by the way, there is a lot of food in the jeep. Take whatever you want." [laughs] I can remember going to the jeep and pigging out and getting sick on it. He went into the hut and he came out and he said "He's dead. I can't do anything for him."

He said what we saw moving through his mouth was probably rigor mortis. He has probably been dead for a while. His mouth was going up and down. I describe this day as being my bitter-sweet day. We were liberated, the ordeal was over. The men in the barn were all coming out and everybody was all excited and happy. Then some trucks rolled up and they took us back to a German little hospital. I can remember there were nuns in it. I remember just trying to crawl

up into this bed with sheets. They deloused us with kerosene. We stayed there for a while. And an army doctor came over and then they put us all back on trucks and they took us to this place. [shows photograph, points to himself] This is me. It was some kind of school or something. They had us all in separate rooms.

MR: Whereabouts were you? Just point to where you are at.

GD: Here I am. Able to sit up. It's about three or four days later. I'm fairly cleaned up by then. This dog-tag that you see is my German dog tag. Not an American dog tag. My number is [unclear]. One of my few things I can remember to say in German. We were in this place for about maybe four or five days. My buddy, Bob was terribly sick. He probably was on his last legs. He was diagnosed with having double pneumonia so they took him away to the hospital right away. After a few days of being here, they put me on a plane, a hospital plane and flew me to England. I was in England until early June and then I flew back to the States. I was in Army hospitals then for just about the same length of time that I was a prisoner of war for four and a half months. Until I gained my weight back and got over this persistent dysentery. When the ordeal was over, I was sent to a rehabilitation and reassignment camp in Asheville, North Carolina. And I was pronounced fit for duty and sent back to an infantry division. [laughs] Fort Jackson, South Carolina. [thinks] It was the 32nd division or the 23rd division, I can't remember now what it was. They were preparing to go for occupation duty in Japan. Fortunately, I was there a day or two, they put the list up on the bulletin board of points. That was the way you were eligible to be discharged by how many points you accumulated. I had enough points to get out and I went to a camp in Alabama, I'm not sure I remember the name now. I was discharged and went home. I got home in time for Christmas. I went back to school. And was back in school...

MR: Did you use the GI Bill?

GD: Actually, under public law sixteen. Because I was...that was a separate law under the GI Bill for disabled veterans because of my wounds. When I finished college and got my degree, I still had all my time left on the GI Bill, I went to school in Europe for a year. End of story.

MR: Do you know if they ever prosecuted or caught the commandant?

GD: Oh, yes, I do. A boy...one of the men who died, his uncle was an attorney. He formed us into a group here in New York. We would go to give testimony. They tried Sergeant [Erwin] Mers and his next in command, one was Metz and one was [Ludwig] Mers. The one who shot [Morton] Goldstein was sentenced to death by hanging. The second in command was given twenty years in jail. Their sentences were later appealed and found to be excessively harsh. Metz' sentence then was changed to life and the other guy's sentence, I think, was changed to five years. Later Lucias D. Clay declared some kind of an amnesty. Metz' sentence was reduced then to time served and I believe after six or seven years, he was free to

go home. I didn't follow his career, so I don't really know too much about it. I did give some kind of a deposition for the court in that trial. None of us were called to come to Europe to identify or participate in the trial in any way. But they were tried.

MR: What happened to your friend Bob?

GD: Bob came back home. He came by hospital ship. He arrived a short time after I did. I was in Halloran Hospital in Staten Island when he showed up. He went back to college. Became a lawyer and an accountant. We both married. I had two sons, he had two daughters. We lived in [unclear] county at the time. Lived maybe three or four miles apart. Were friendly all through our lives. Bob died about four years ago. He became, not uncontrollable, but he had a lot of difficulty not eating the wrong foods and not eating too much. He became a diabetic and eventually he just passed away.

MR: Do you think your ordeal affected your health in any way?

GD: I think it affected me probably mentally. I had a lot of bad dreams about it.

MR: Do you suffer from post-stress?

GD: Yes, I do. I still see a psychologist at Montrose, FDR Hospital. About once every two weeks I talk to him. I see some of these men. I'm in communication with some of them. Oddly enough, the large prison camp, Stalag 9B, the one that was in Bad Orb, where most of the 106th Division was, has an annual reunion and they include the men who were shipped out to Berga. They thought that we all were dead. They had heard gone quote [makes quote gesture] gone to the salt mines. The Germans had killed us all. They didn't really find out about us until maybe seven or eight years ago and included us in their reunions. I've been to maybe four or five reunions around the country with them. Some of the men who were in Berga, where I was, show up. Four of them. Maybe six or seven each time.

MR: I know you said earlier that felt when those officers kind of told you to step forward, are any of them still living?

GD: You mean the Americans?

MR: The Americans who told you that the next day you should all step forward. The Jewish should step forward. Are any of them...?

GD: One of them is passed away. I had seen him at several infantry division reunions later on. One of them I saw at a division reunion. He was really not an officer, but he was a good friend. In fact, he was the other person who was with me the night I was captured, Howard. I made a training tape with him at a 100th Infantry Division reunion in Louisville about three or four or five years ago. I'm friendly with him. I was angry, I was upset, but it was not something...I mean I came to realize that it was something that was out of their control really. They were not doing it out of meanness. That's what they were doing. That's the

situation that they were in and I was in the situation I was in. It took a while to realize that.

MR: Did you join any veteran's groups? Or any groups after the war? Or even now, are you active in any groups?

GD: Now, I am very active in American Ex-Prisoners of War, the Hudson Valley Chapter. I didn't join any things like the American Legion or the DAV or anything like that. I really, in the beginning, I really just didn't want to have anything to do with my Army experience. As the years went by, Bob and I went to a few division reunions. And then we started to go every year. At one of the division reunions, one of the principal topics was prisoners of war. They usually like to have a theme at a reunion. A gentleman from the American Ex-Prisoners of War talked about the fact that they had an organization and they could be very helpful to prisoners of war. He suggested that everybody join and so I did. Bob and I both joined. They were very helpful to us with helping us to get treatment for post-traumatic stress syndrome; helping us to increase our disability compensation. I regularly go to meetings. We meet at West Point once a month. I enjoy the company of them and their wives. We usually meet at a Saturday luncheon about once a month.

MR: Well, thank you very much.

GD: Ok.