Oral Memoirs

of

Herbert U. Stern

An Interview

Conducted by

Stephen M. Sloan

May 31, 2012

Collection: Special

Project: Texas Liberators of World War II Concentration Camps

Baylor University Institute for Oral History

General Policies and Procedures

A member of the Oral History Association, the Baylor University Institute for Oral History (BUIOH) supports and embodies the goals, guidelines, and standards of archival quality prescribed by the national professional association to ensure long-term preservation of memoirs. It is the policy of BUIOH to select memoirists whose recollections, as participants or eyewitnesses, are relevant to the institute's chosen research topics. Their recorded memoirs provide links between the immediate past and the present in a very human way. A scholarly but relaxed and conversational atmosphere exists during the interview. To encourage completely candid recollections, the memoirist is asked to regard the oral history memoir as a highly personal journal. The transcribed historical document which the finished memoir becomes is the raw material used by historians and professional scholars.

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Memoir Procedure

1. Initial contact with the memoirist
2. Arrangements made for interview(s)
3. Recording of interview(s)
4. Transcribing of recording in the BUIOH office
5. Editing of transcript(s) by memoirist. As such, transcript(s) may not match audio recording(s) exactly.
6. Archiving and disseminating completed memoirs: one printed transcript for the memoirist and online access to the memoir via the digital collections portal of Baylor University. The finished transcript of the oral memoir follows the interviewee's stated wishes as reflected in his/her editing of the draft transcript(s), with only minor further editorial revisions by the editorial staff of BUIOH.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) with Herbert U. Stern is unrestricted. The deed of gift agreement was signed on May 31, 2012.

Interview History

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Interviewer: Stephen M. Sloan

Videographer: Robert B. DeBoard

Video Editor: Steven Sielaff

Transcriber: Kody Jackson

Editors: Robert B. DeBoard
Courtney Lyons
Elinor Mazé

Final editor: Robert DeBoard

Project Detail

The Texas Liberators Project was an oral history project sponsored by the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission from August 2011 to December 2013. The project consisted of nineteen interviews with veterans of the Second World War currently living in Texas who liberated or witnessed Nazi concentration camps in the spring of 1945. Copies of the interviews were distributed to the veterans themselves, along with their children. Additionally, the interviews were deposited in the archives of the Holocaust museums in Dallas, El Paso, Houston, and San Antonio. The interviews were also deposited in the Library of Congress as part of the Veterans History Project initiative.

The Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission, coalesced by Senate Bill 482, was established to ensure that resources are available to students, educators, and the general public regarding the Holocaust and other genocides.

Stephen M. Sloan was associate professor of history at Baylor University and director of Baylor University Institute for Oral History (BUIOH).

Robert B. DeBoard was a graduate student in the Department of History at Baylor University and a graduate editor and videographer for BUIOH.

Elinor Mazé was senior editor for BUIOH.

Steven Sielaff was a graduate assistant and video editor for BUIOH.

Courtney Lyons was a graduate assistant and editor for BUIOH.

Kody Jackson was an undergraduate transcriptionist for BUIOH.

Herbert U. Stern

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Stephen M. Sloan
May 31, 2012
Houston, Texas
Also present: Robert DeBoard; Catherine Stern

Project: Texas Liberators of World War II Concentration Camps

SLOAN: All right, this is Stephen Sloan. The date is May 31, 2012. I'm with Mr. Herb Stern in Houston, Texas. This is an interview for the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission's Texas Liberators Project. Thank you, Mr. Stern, for sitting down with me today.

STERN: No, thank you, I appreciate your doing this because I feel—it is so important since so many survivors, either Holocaust survivors or people like myself, feel that we're at the end of our lives and possibly, in another few years, there are no so-called eye witnesses that have been through all this. Since you're talking about the Holocaust itself—over six million people that died in one form or another plus the huge casualties during World War Two—that I think it's so important for younger generations to at least have some knowledge that in past—many years prior to all this—World War I, Civil War, whatever the wars that you've had—that you have the benefit of a lot more detailed recordings for history that were not to that extent available. I've studied a lot about the Civil War. I mean, I'm not exactly a Civil War buff, but I've had the opportunity to study it a great deal. I was—minored in history and majored in economics in college and continued to be interested to a great extent in oral history. So I feel that the—anything that we do in publicizing that period which was so traumatic in the thirties and forties and even into the fifties is, I hope, of a great deal of benefit for future generations.

I think that—you know, we'd never thought as we were in these situations that it was anything of that importance because you never think in terms of history until many years later. Then you begin to think, especially if you're in your nineties. You think, My God. All the things that I have had in my life of major and minor consequences that throughout it—and had basically several changes of major consequences in my own life. I feel that, having been for four years in a situation in eight major campaigns in Europe, that this is a major watershed in my life, obviously. I feel that in being able to present these things to

not only my family, but to—whether it's colleges or even the Holocaust museums when they have exhibitions, things like that.

We've had—the Houston Holocaust Museum recently had a—back in July of last year—a traveling exhibit of—for some strange reason, publicists had commented that there were no such things as Jewish soldiers in World War II. That they were not allowed to serve in any capacity whatsoever. At least, it was inferred that that was happening. I contacted the Holocaust museum and said that this is obviously—somebody is very paranoid about this because it was—this exhibit tried to prove that Jewish-born men were just as active as anybody else in all the services. We had our share in our own division. Anybody that has ever seen overseas cemeteries will see that the Star of David is on many graves—just as much as anybody else's. So that's just a myth, unfortunately, that somebody concocted. For what reason I don't know. But I have to mention that because it's upset me a good deal because it is—especially when you—the first thing comes to your mind. Does anybody remember there was a draft?

SLOAN: Yeah.

STERN: And the draft didn't take into account—you had to be of a certain age, between age so-and-so and so-and-so. That meant you were drafted, period. That was the law of the land. If then you were—people were sifted out, well, that came as you went on. Should I continue with my—that kind of history?

SLOAN: That's good. You know, before we began recording, I asked you to talk a little bit about some of your early memories about your family in Germany. If you could share that now, that would be great.

STERN: All right, I wanted to mention that I had, unbeknownst to me—probably in 1934, possibly before my father was imprisoned—that he instituted with distant cousins in this country the possibility of getting me out of Germany. Because, had I stayed there, the inevitable would have been, just as has happened to many of my families and close friends, that we would have ended up either in Auschwitz or somewhere else. Because many of my people—one of my grandmothers, my mother's mother, was one of them. And numerous friends that I went to school with—who had actually moved to France to escape the Germans and, of course, were caught later on. So almost everybody that I grew up with was gone.

I think we were very fortunate. It took two and a half years for me to get a visa. We were caught up in a situation that is not a myth but certainly well-recorded, that the State Department particularly, the American State Department and the Roosevelt Administration, had a number of rather influential anti-Semites in there. One or two set up a very small quota of people that could immigrate. There were many specific situations that—one of them is particularly—which, just this last weekend we were talking about it at my daughter's house in Austin—that the infamous German liner, the *St. Louis*, had several hundred Germans, German-Jewish refugees that were taken first to Cuba. The Cubans wouldn't take them. They were trying to get into Florida, into Miami. They wouldn't take them. Eventually, the ship was taken back to where they were

eventually imprisoned and many of them died in concentration camps. I myself—the reason my mentioning that particular incident—prior to all this happening in 1936, in August of 1936, I came over on the *St. Louis*.

SLOAN: In August of '35?

STERN: Thirty-six.

SLOAN: Thirty-six.

STERN: Thirty-six. I arrived in this country on August 26, 1936, to New York and was met by a, you might say distant relative, my uncle and his wife in New York and stayed with them for about a week at that particular time. Talk about sweating it out. I was staying with my father's closest friend, who was an attorney. His entire family died at Auschwitz. My sister—when the Germans marched into the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, they fled to Prague. My aunt and her family first were taken to—flew to Italy temporarily and then to England. My sister was on the last plane out of Prague before the Germans marched in. By that time, all my—

I should also mention that two days before I sailed for the United States, my father was released. So I was with him and his friends for two days. And then he took me to Hamburg and from Hamburg to outside of Hamburg, Bremerhaven is actually where—you leave from there for overseas at the time. He a few days after that fled to England. My father eventually became an English citizen. He remarried a German woman that I vaguely knew while he was in prison at the time. They were—for a short time during the beginning of the war were interned before they got English citizenship papers. He was very fortunate to have close friends in a major Lloyd's Underwriting Firm and so remained in England and did fairly well considering that he really had lost everything, everything.

My sister then moved in with him after she fled from Prague, Czechoslovakia. During the Blitz in London and so on, she was one of the young people who was sent to the country. She was sent to a small farm family where she became a babysitter for an infant for a while. Eventually moved back to London, got a job at a well-known hairdresser. And lo and behold, in early 1943, she met a Texan, just by coincidence you might say almost, at a street corner in Hyde Park, London. He was on Eisenhower's staff, and she eventually became a war bride and moved over here in 1946 and moved to Austin where the family lived at that time. The last time I had seen my sister was in 1932, and we were reunited. Of course, I was working out of Cincinnati, Ohio, and eventually was transferred down here in 1949 by my company. We had a district office here that was virtually non-functioning since World War II. I took this whole Southwest region over at that time, so we were moved down here. Eventually—I mean, it's a really unbelievable story that we were reunited, of all things, here in Houston. She still lives in Houston. She will be ninety years old in December, and she has four children here that—(laughs) all in their sixties. (Sloan laughs) We do see each other fairly frequently.

I saw my father for the first time in December of 1943 because we were one of two divisions that were supposed to go into Italy from Sicily in the late fall of 1943. All of a sudden, they shipped us to England because we had combat experience, and we were to train newly arriving divisions that were going to eventually be in the Normandy invasion. While I was in England, I was sent to British Intelligence School for two weeks in London. It was an eye-opener because I learned so much more then what we were guinea pigs for in North Africa and Sicily.

Because I was in the medics when I came to the Ninth Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the late summer—or, I guess it was August or something like that of 1941. After a few weeks in the Ninth Infantry Division, all of a sudden, they announced that a specific number of what we called cadres out of each company in the division of all units were taken out to form a brand-new division which turned out to be the Eighty-Second Airborne Division at Fort Bragg. I can recall that, in the summer of 1942, most of us were shipped to Chesapeake Bay to get involved in amphibious maneuvers and that we were destined to go overseas. Many of us had no idea whether it was the Pacific or Europe or wherever. Certainly one of the things we never thought of is that we would go into Africa. In mid-October of 1942, we were taken to Norfolk, and we were in a convoy of about a hundred ships. I was very fortunate to be on the commodore's ship which was very much protected because most—the convoy was being highly protected by destroyers and cruisers throughout the journey because of the activity of German U-boats during that period of time. So we were at sea almost three weeks—four, almost four weeks before they told us that we would be landing on the French Moroccan coast in an amphibious landing. That meant you went on nets over the boat into these little PT boats. Like little—

SLOAN: I want to pick up there, but there's a lot I want to ask questions about that you've already put forward there. If you could go back and talk about—because we didn't get it on the recording—some of your earliest memory and the story of your family there in Germany. So prior to '32, yeah.

STERN: Well, I, of course, attended both, what you would call, a classical gymnasium, which meant that you were taught, among other things, Latin and Greek, but mostly Latin. But also, other languages were French. And I learned that after I was actually no longer allowed to go to school that one of the teachers actually started teaching some English at that time. I had—other than that my father—I would overhear business conversations and read some business letters that he would write. That he spoke almost fluent English, and his English was really what I would call Oxford English. I mean, it was—and I think I learned a great deal. Now, my maternal grandmother—I hadn't mentioned this—was actually born in New York. And this was a coincidence because her father was a tobacco importer. He would spend six, eight months in the United States, mostly in New York in trading capacity, in tobacco trading and stuff like that. They lived in Hamburg when she grew up, but she was just born then. So she spoke American English.

But again—not really knowing at the time that I would ever end up in this country—I just picked up on it. My wife always says that—not on her family's side but my family's

side—that we have an ear for languages and for music. One of my sons in Kansas has perfect pitch. I mean, this is more like a hobby, but he plays in his—Topeka is where he lives and plays in the symphony, plays first trumpet in the symphony. And Charlie, my son in Waco, is—plays trumpet in the jazz orchestra, the Waco Jazz Orchestra, and has for years. I mean, he's doing it for fun whether he feels it's a real release or not for him to do so. And I think this is probably picking up a language and speaking it. I cannot tell you—I don't know really why so many people that were my contemporaries who left Germany for English-speaking countries that you can tell the minute they open their mouths that they are either from Germany or from another country. *T-h* is a terrible situation for most people because they can't pronounce the *the* or *this*. It's "this" (speaking in German-accented English). It's that way. I have some people here in Houston that—I mean really—and I have a cousin in New York, that you can tell immediately. They have a very strong German accent. They can speak English pretty well, but they—

Anyway, getting back to that period of time. I was able to go to school till what we would call the eleventh grade, maybe like a junior. And at that time, anybody that was of Jewish descent was no longer able to—allowed in any school. I mentioned that, for our family, the complete breakup came in 1933. My mother had committed suicide. I think you had actually a number of people in Germany that are different ages who just felt that there was no way out to anywhere to do anything. I think my father—at least, I don't believe that he ever thought of leaving Germany at that time.

But then he was imprisoned in 1934 because the Germans had started—one of the early laws that they had started was you cannot take German marks out of the country. Since he was given money to buy foreign passports in various countries with the idea that the people that would receive them, receive these foreign passports, would have some semblance of protection from the Nazis. It was a myth, but, at least at that time, nobody thought about it in any other way. His phone line was tapped by the German secret police, the Gestapo. So he was taken off a train going to Switzerland at the time and imprisoned. Our belongings—all of our belongings were auctioned off in order to raise sufficient money primarily to find a defender for him, an attorney, former district attorney, who was quite prominent in these civil situations at that time, to get him as light a sentence as possible. He received a two-year sentence in a prison that was fairly, you might say, civil (laughs) in those days. I was allowed to see him every six months for an hour during that period of time. It took me about two hours to travel over there to see him, you know, to see him for about an hour.

He was able to get out two days before I sailed. I sweat it out living with two or three people (unintelligible). My sister was living—was moved to Czechoslovakia to live with my mother's sister and her family there. She went to a convent school while she was there at the time. My father, after he saw me off, spent two more days in Germany with family and then escaped to England. Of course, he had all the help that he could get from people that he'd done business with and were close. Not only business friends, but personal friends of his. So he was able to take up his whole life all over again. But he was then in his late forties or early fifties—I don't really remember exactly, but it must have been in the late forties. He was interned for a short period of time when England went to

war with Germany, but, other than that, he did quite well and remarried. As I mentioned before, I saw him in—first time again after 1936, in August 1936—I saw him for the first time in December of 1943 when we were stationed in the south of England around Winchester. I would have furloughs every few weeks and took the train up to see them and stayed with them.

I have to tell you one very funny story. They were nervous wrecks during the Blitz because their apartment—or flat, as they call them—was near what they call the Hampstead Heath in London. That was the major concentration of antiaircraft guns around that area. So in the middle of the night when those things went off, everybody took their ready-made bedding and went down to the tube, the subway, and stayed there the rest of the night. I remember staying with them and this was the first time in two years I had slept in a bed. I put a pillow over my head while they went off and turned around and went back to sleep. (laughs) It didn't bother me that much. And then when I was assigned to work with British Intelligence School for two weeks, I probably was the only American soldier ever that stayed with his family in London (laughs) instead of being billeted in an American facilities at that time. I was actually taking the bus every morning to work and back in the evening. So it was really a lot of fun.

And we—going back, I mentioned before that my sister and family she was with, which was my aunt and uncle—they fled first to Prague when the Germans marched in to Czechoslovakia. And they—that family fled to Italy and then to England and my sister was on the very last plane out of Prague to fly to London. From there, she was taken—shortly after she got there, during the Blitz, along with a lot of other young people—were taken into the country. And she became a babysitter on a farm for a while. And then she moved back to London about a year later or something like that. She married an American, a Texan. In London, they had met. He was on Eisenhower's staff, and they married—actually, the night I arrived in Liverpool from Sicily. It was Thanksgiving night of 1943. We arrived, and I've learned later on that they'd been married that day. So they lived in London for a while and he was eventually taken back to the United States towards the end of the war. She was able to come over with a bunch of war brides in 1946. I was the one to meet her in New York and then put her on a train to come to Texas. She lived in Austin for a while. Eventually she had four children. They eventually came to Houston because he became a financial manager for a number of Sears stores, Sears-Roebuck stores, here in Houston.

In the meantime, after I—well, I moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, because a number of my father's relatives lived there. Most of the families that came over in the 1840s were great-uncles of my father. They all became almost immediately involved in tobacco manufacturing, and they were pretty good at it. Three brothers that were in their—one was a teenager, two others were in their early twenties—moved to an upstate New York town of Saugerties in Kingston County. Only one remained in Saugerties. Eventually became the mayor there, became a prominent citizen. They all financially did very well in the tobacco business, manufacturing business. One interesting aspect is that the youngest one who started the factory and had about twelve workers working for him, and they had a strike. The workers had a strike because my relative didn't want to use any heat in the factory during the wintertime. So they started to strike.

The guy that started the strike was a fellow by the name of Gompers [Samuel Gompers, 1850–1924]. He was also actually an English Jewish family that moved to New York, also in the tobacco business. But he didn't want to stay with his parents, so he moved to Saugerties and became a labor organizer later on, became head of the AFL-CIO. That's part of the history. They, in turn, had several children, the young man there. Made his fame and fortune and eventually moved to Cincinnati after he became quite well-to-do. His older brother had moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. The oldest one moved to Chicago at first—all as very young men. Then he decided to move to a place called Freeport, Illinois, which was at that time an Indian trading post. He eventually became also quite wealthy in the tobacco business. Then became a banker and started a bank in there. He was head of the school board and so on.

I have done a lot of genealogy research on my families on my father's side. Therefore, I go back all the way to the 1750s in Germany and eventually—as I say, six brothers in the 1840s. Three of them moved to the United States. Three of them stayed. My great-grandfather remained—was one of three that remained there. He was in the textile business. Did very well. Eventually sold his textile business and moved to Berlin from a province of Pomerania, which was the breadbasket of Prussia—or Germany for that matter, because it was absolutely tremendously well-organized farms, of farmland. I studied a lot of work through—found an organization in Germantown, Wisconsin, called the Pomeranian Society. Became a member just to get historical data and facts, and met some people here in Wichita, Kansas, that were from the same town as all of my relatives were from. Got a treasure trove of materials from them—other than going through libraries and all kinds of other sources to get information on the family that I knew nothing about as I grew up, nothing. I didn't even know they existed. They were very—the people that took me in was really a second cousin of my father's. She became really a surrogate mother for me and was a highly intelligent woman and I think taught me a great deal from the standpoint of language, writing, and so on.

SLOAN: Can you talk about your transition to the—because we talked about earlier these culture shocks—

STERN: Well, I will tell you one thing. I was amazed to find myself joining the college newspaper and became editor of the paper after I was on it for almost three years. One other thing is I can remember getting into trouble in writing an editorial one time. Cincinnati had a very large Catholic population. Old German town. They had a good deal of influence on actually a municipal college, which the University of Cincinnati was. And I wrote an editorial that I think they felt—they thought was a little bit too nasty. (laughs)

SLOAN: Do you remember what your editorial was on?

STERN: Yes, it was basically mentioning that the college president was in the pocket of the local bishop. I mean, this is in a very abbreviated way of putting it. And I was called to the board of trustees and [they] said, You can write editorials about the trustees here and there. They don't mind because they were mostly big corporate people in the community, and they didn't mind that. But it came a little bit too close to—apparently to (both laugh)—I mean, it's sort of like my writing a few nasty things that I can think about

Kenneth Star, something like that. (both laugh) But anyway, and I enjoyed writing. At the time, it didn't mean anything really to me other than, you know, it helped me with my language and writing papers in various—especially in economics. I found that I liked writing. In freshman English, I was so lucky to have an absolutely wonderful professor that really inspired you. And he referred me to a lot of literature that I—specific literature that I enjoyed very much. And I think it helped me a great deal.

And there were periods of time that I had during the war to—one or two people in Cincinnati in a group that were close friends of my family decided to start a collection, that I still have in huge binders, of letters from people in our, so-called, Jewish community primarily, but others too, that he collected on a monthly basis. Letters from the Pacific, letters from Europe, people that were just in this country in the service, with the navy, army, whatever, air force. It was collected eventually over a period of three or more years. Some of us still have these bound things that are about this big and really wonderful letters that were written. I had an opportunity when I was in England to find out that the wife of a very prominent judge in Cincinnati was in London at the Savoy Hotel, where they had the old-fashioned large apartments, not just rooms, in there. My father and I went to see her and she said, "Sharing the apartment with me is—you might know him. Fellow by the name of James "Scotty" Reston of the *New York Times*." He was then a foreign correspondent. So I met Scotty Reston and he said to me, "If you ever make it through the war, come to see me in Washington, DC, because I might want you to write some stories for me."

Well, I thought, you know, for a while, I'm going to be a journalist. Then I thought, Hell, there's no money in that at all. So I went back to Cincinnati and went to work for my uncle for a short while, which was a total disaster because I hated the things there. I was involved—and I got involved with people that I knew socially a little bit—which became the largest scrap metal brokerage company in the United States eventually. After a training period of some months, I was sent down here to take over a defunct office that had been here since 1921. They were major during—in the 1920s, they were major exporters from Texas City, Mobile, New Orleans, Beaumont, and even Corpus Christi going to Japan and Europe. One of the people that I initially did some work for when I came down here used to say to me, "Kid," he said, "if you saw these boats they were like taxi cabs coming in and out of here." (laughs) These boats.

It's an interesting history that I wrote up with my own autobiography that my kids wanted me to do. In the early twenties, our company was the only employer in Texas City, Texas. There was not a single refinery, chemical plant of any kind around there. The only thing you had was the switch railroad, the Texas City Terminal Railroad, and the rest of it was—we had several hundred people that—we had [at] any one time two hundred fifty to three hundred thousand tons of scrap metal piled up on the docks of Texas City, Texas. And there was no place to go. There were no steel mills, no foundries of any kind in the Southwest at that time. When I first came here, I remember we were shipping barges out of Texas to St. Louis, Peoria, Illinois, Chicago, and some to Pittsburg even. That was in the early 1950s. Actually, I should say, a steel mill was started here in 1942 on the ship channel. Then, eventually one in Tulsa, Oklahoma—well Sand Springs,

Oklahoma, which is a suburb there. And lo and behold, the Arkansas River was made navigable into Tulsa, Oklahoma, so that was an important situation.

I stayed with that same company for forty years. I was retired by them in 1982, and I was sixty-two years old. Company policy had been that whether you were a janitor or the president of the company you had to retire at sixty. Well, I was already sixty-two by that time. They said, It's time for you to get out. My motor was running so badly.

So I happened to meet—not right away, but mideighties, I met a man who was solo, you might say, in a business that was some—oh, by the way, I was also told that, when I was retired, that I could not go into a competitive business. I had to sign papers and so on. I was actually an idiot to do that at the time. But in any case, once I met this man, he wanted me to work with him in acquisitions, mergers, and industrial recruiting in the valve business, in the pipe business, oil and gas, and things like that that we were in. I was with him for nineteen years, and I was eighty-eight when I retired. One reason was that he very suddenly died. He was seventy-two years old. I was left with some really major international things that we were working on. His widow said to me, "I really think we ought to close the business." So I spent six months here at home gradually closing up the business then. We were doing business in the Middle East, in England, over here, and I learned a great deal about what has been so much in the news in the last few years about off-shore, deep-sea exploration and the big projects that you get involved in.

So it was fascinating. I was with him for nineteen years. We really worked almost as partners. I felt a tremendous loss in having this man go because we were just—everything just clicked and just was the kind of a relationship that you can only dream about. I think I was very fortunate because it was totally different than what I had done for almost forty years in many respects. I felt I was good at it. It was difficult for me to—actually even at eighty-eight to stop, but I thought it was a little obscene for me to continue. (laughs) At eighty-eight, I thought—

SLOAN: You had two great careers.

STERN: Enough already. But the last few years with my former company were spent not here in the district. We merged with a very large Dutch company that was in the coal-trading business worldwide. I spent some time with them overseas not only in Holland but in France, England, Italy, Portugal, Spain, what have you. That was all very interesting. I became sort of a troubleshooter. We wanted to—considering that we were a so-called national company, we were beginning to do business with a company that we had an exclusive relationship in many other parts of the country. They were going to the West Coast, and we had absolutely no presence anywhere in the western states. So I spent from 1978 to early 1982 virtually living in California. I commuted back here to see whether I still had a family every three or four weeks. I spent a great deal of time in the Northwest Pacific area in Oregon, in Washington State, in Montana, in Idaho, in—oh gosh, all over the place. It was, in a way, fascinating.

One of the most interesting things I want to mention on a personal basis that—when I lived in Los Angeles, I found, partially by coincidence, a woman who was then in her

mideighties who was my mother's closest friend when—they grew up together. They went to school together and knew each other. She was in her eighties. She was a very—she had a most interesting life. She fled all through France ahead of the Nazis because she lived there. She went to Spain. She eventually ended up coming to the United States to the West Coast and started an antique business. She had connections in France with art houses that she was able to get very cheaply and become a buyer of art houses that she sold in Los Angeles, primarily to very wealthy people there, and was enormously successful. Among other things, she had an accounting background. So she really ran her own business. And her daughter married an owner of a radio station in California. Eventually they moved to Adelaide, Australia, because their only child, their daughter, had met and married an Australian law professor who was on—I think on, I think, doing some sabbatical work at UCLA.

Anyway, the old lady was close to ninety years old when she moved. A major move for her after being in Los Angeles for God knows—from probably the late thirties on. So this was a wonderful, you might say, contact even though she was a good deal older than I was. We could reminisce a great deal. She was a very feisty person who, I think, sort of took a shine to me. And I felt a—it was a lot of nostalgia in a way for us to—so I had at least somebody. I did make some friends out there that I still have as friends to this day. There was a time actually when we thought, Gee, I'd like to move out here. But we just felt it was too much of a move to make.

SLOAN: So with her you could reminisce about your mother and you could discover more—

STERN: Right. More things that I, as a small child, didn't really know very much about. So that was a very interesting period for me in being out there. I really did a lot of pioneering out there because the company now, virtually, has taken over almost everything that were competitors of ours on the West Coast. (phone rings) So that was (phone rings) essentially a period that I felt, sort of, like I've been there at the creation (both laugh) of everything that was going on. Today they are very big. My company, my former company is—because I say my company because I still have pensions from them—probably one of the best-known steel companies that bought out our company called Nucor Steel. I don't know whether you've ever heard of them, but Nucor Steel has got plants in Jewett, Texas, near Buffalo, Texas, and halfway between here and Dallas. They have plants all over the country now. They were one of the few companies with their methods and their policies that was able to compete with the foreign steel that was such a shock to the old big steel companies.

Some people really complain, like the oil companies do, about what the government is doing to them on regulations. The (phone rings) steel companies had the thought that the government should protect them, big steel, whether it was US Steel or the steel mill here which became Armco Steel. All these companies had cried their eyes out about how the government should set up protection, tariff protection not to bring in foreign steel or something like that. Anyway, I've felt that I had a pretty successful career.

SLOAN: Yeah, well, you saw a lot of change in the global market.

STERN: Yes, I saw a great deal of change in the global market. I should mention to you that, fairly typical of not necessarily all the German Jewish families—but I was very much aware that there was a lot of bad blood between my father and numerous relatives. He had one sister who was married to a Catholic who turned out to be the great-nephew of Johann Strauss, the Waltz King. So she was protected all during war in Berlin, Germany. She became quite ill towards the end of the war and was hospitalized there, but always well taken care of by the Nazis and everything like that. They had one son and they sent their son to Austria and they eventually moved to Austria at the end of the war, to Vienna. Now, she had not talked to my father. He had not talked to her and numerous other relatives for almost forty years. This was probably—well, quite frankly, I thought it was crazy. There were Hatfields-and-McCoys situations throughout a lot of these families. I mean, you know, it isn't a specialty of these people there, because I've seen it happen in this country, too.

But the reason I'm mentioning this is in 1973, I decided that whoever was left, I'd go to Europe and spend about two weeks and see all of them. Being the guy that would make links with families that either had helped me when I was a kid without a father and a mother around and really took care of me in a sense. So I went to see my mother's sister and her daughter in London and spent a little time, two or three days, there. Then I flew to Frankfurt or Wiesbaden to see my stepmother and saw her. Actually, before that time in the midsixties, I think it was, my wife and I went to Europe for three weeks. And at that time, I wouldn't go to Germany. I just didn't want to travel to Germany. I had my stepmother come to Paris and stay with us for a couple of days. I saw her in 1973. I did go to Germany. Then, I went on business to Germany to the Ruhr area to visit steel plants. Some of the Dutch people that were our partners at that time accompanied me, and we had one very interesting thing that happened. At the Krupp Works, the famous Krupp Works, we were asked to stay in the executive dining room for lunch, and they were all very much in uniforms, the waitresses waiting on us. I think the director of purchasing turned to me during our conversation at lunch. He said, "You speak awfully good German. Where did you learn German?" I said, "Oh, in school." (both laugh)

SLOAN: Which was true.

STERN: Yes, yes. Yes it is. And the Dutch across from me, of course, knew my story. They just had to go like this.

SLOAN: So you were able to see your aunt on that—

STERN: I saw my aunt. I saw my aunt in Austria, in Vienna. I was there. So it was two weeks with various relatives that I spent. In 1975, I did the same thing again. At that time, unfortunately my stepmother, who lived in Wiesbaden in a very lovely retirement home—I learned from one of her relatives—who was a woman doctor—contacted me at the hotel and said that you better come fairly quickly because she is dying of cancer. And she was conscious really only for a few minutes when I went there to see her. In Wiesbaden, Germany, is where she was in a very lovely retirement home that they had at the time. I remember at the Frankfurt Airport renting a big, fat red Mercedes. I drove about ninety miles an hour on the autobahn to get to this place. (laughs) So I was—I saw

people honk against me. This guy—I said, "I own this piece of land. Go out of here." Anyway, I had a very nice visit the first time and actually the second time, too.

I think it was 1978, I was in Holland at the time, and I called my aunt, my father's sister in Vienna. She was then in her early nineties. She said, "Are you coming to see me?" I said, "Look, I'm here on business. I don't think I can get away at all to do that." If you travel within Europe at all, your airfares are very, very expensive. I just didn't—for a day or two just to do that, I just didn't want to do that really at that time. In a way, I'm sorry I didn't do it, because she was really only one of the close relatives that was left at that time. And now, we don't have anybody left there. They're all dead. I guess I was lucky, in a way, to do that. But it meant a lot to me to visit people that—

You know, in a way, you could say I made a complete break. I became not only a US citizen, but I sort of left everything behind. During the war, you don't think about that necessarily, that you have relatives close by or whatever. I was lucky enough to be able to be in England for six months to see my father and stepmother. And that was not really very often. Every couple of months you could spend overnight there. I think my outfit was very generous in giving me passes because they knew that I had a father living in England.

SLOAN: What do you think fueled this irreconcilable situation between your father and his sister?

STERN: I think it was probably very foolish in many ways. It was probably resentments over some stupid family situations. They were—if you were to sit down with a psychotherapist today, you probably would think in terms—was this necessary? It was just a—these were things that—it's sort of like somebody saying that you have a very steady personality, always mad at somebody. Some people just have a chip on their shoulder. I think a lot of it was just paranoia about virtually nothing that is important, but they all thought it was. I think, frankly, that coming to the United States, you don't have that intense relationships, I've found, that you have. I mean, you either have friends or you have family that you get along with or you—you know, you take it or leave it, almost, kind of a thing. It's not the same over there. I think people—if you said one bad word about somebody, it was taken to heart to such an extent that—I learned a great deal, I think, fortunately in this country in not taking everybody too seriously about a lot of things.

I think I was very fortunate to be with my family. Of them, they had three children themselves. They were younger than I was. My cousin who lives in Washington, DC, is the oldest. Bob is eighty-seven. He has a sister that is in her—she's eighty-six or eight-seven. She lives in Chicago and has been in assisted living for years and years. She's not in very good shape. And the youngest one is in her early eighties, and she decided to leave the family altogether and move to—they had some summer homes in Ontario, Canada, on a lake and she decided to move there. She was married to two, three different people that she came across, that kind of thing. She has three or four children, each by the different people. It was that kind of a thing. She was the rebel of sorts.

Then, my cousin in Washington, DC, I'm in touch with pretty regularly. He was the best man at my wedding. We've stayed in pretty good touch with each other. Bob was in the Eighth Air Force. He was in thirty missions over Germany. He was lucky to get through. He was a navigator. He decided not to stay in his family business. They sold a family business to—what you hear so many times these days—to a major corporation and the family profited handsomely to set up trust funds for all their children, stuff like that. He decided, after he went to Harvard Business School and also studied at Columbia and Dartmouth—he became an FTC, member of their Antitrust Division. He writes a great deal and gives talks on economic issues. Got himself a nice trust fund for their wages.

Anyway, those are really the few direct families that I have left. I tell you one thing. I've given some talks here and there to veterans' groups and also to high school children about the war, things like that. I think one of the things that always comes to mind when I speak to them. I said, the older you get and you're around, it gets to be very lonely because almost everybody's gone that you've known, whether they're family, whether they're friends. And gradually, you lose everybody that is around you. Being—that's not exactly a nice thing about living as long. But when I think to myself overall, of having been born at the end of World War I and living through this period, you begin to really appreciate history a great deal because you've seen an awful lot, and you've been through an awful lot of things. So—

SLOAN: Well, I'd like to go back to the summer of 1941.

STERN: Okay, the summer of 1941 I found myself needing one credit, so I went to the draft board and I said, "Can I get a deferment for about a month and a half?" Something like that, to finish a course that I had to take during the summer. And then I was drafted and was sent to a place called Camp Lee outside of Petersburg, Virginia, which was brand new at the time. I found myself being in the medics. Why, I couldn't tell you. You know, you learn a lot about what you were supposed to be doing in the field and how to treat wounded people. I thought, Well, so I'm in the medics. After about two or three weeks there, I got a message that I had to come back and get a pass to get back to Cincinnati, Ohio, because they had a district court there, federal district court there and that I was to get my citizenship papers. I was interviewed by a couple of the newspapers there because I was in uniform, and they had never seen anybody in an American uniform that was sworn in to become a United States citizen. (laughs)

Then after, I think, four or six weeks there at Camp Lee, we were—many of us were transferred to the Ninth Infantry Division at Fort Bragg. I thought to myself, What the hell am I doing here in a place called Fayetteville. It was called Fatalburg. Just a terrible town, really. Typical army town. It was a huge camp and was known as an artillery training camp, primarily. Later on, it was shared by us and—I think I mentioned to you that we were—sort of became the mother of the Eighty-Second Airborne. I found myself with, I would say, 80 percent Brooklynites. Really a bunch of tough guys, many of them Italian or German descent, some New Jersey people, mostly from the East. They all—you know, either a high school education or were people who had been in some capacity—there were a few people, by the way, who had been in the regular army, including some of the officers. There were some officers who had been in the cavalry here at Fort Sam

Houston. Many of the officers were from the South, and most of the enlisted men were from the East, eastern states: New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, so on. I was one of the few people from Ohio at that particular time. So I learned basically a new language altogether. It was fascinating. We all became, sooner or later, very close friends. It was just—it was—including the officers, for that matter.

At first, I was in the medics in the medical battalion of the division. Only when we—we were in a bivouac area in a place called Port Lyautey, French Morocco. Again, this was a fascinating period, because if you were at all in any contact with the natives, the women all wore veils. And it was very primitive in many ways, although the French had settled that part of Morocco since the 1870s. Port Lyautey was named after a General Lyautey. By the way, I should go back a minute and tell you—which is an interesting thing—that our landings were covered by the Battleship *Texas*, which is over here in this (unintelligible) little monument now, in mothballs or whatever else you could call it. And I think to myself when we happen to once in a while to go out to one of the restaurants out there to see that thing that dates back to November 8, 1942.

It so happened that there was another landing by one of our regiments. They were formed into combat teams in a place called Safi, which was right near Casablanca, the landings there. Ours was further north, north of Rabat, which was then the capital of French Morocco. The French were very smart in colonizing Morocco in the 1870s. They induced—through tax situations and various other incentives—induced surprisingly a lot of French Jewish people, merchants, to move there to start businesses, to grow orchards, to do a lot of exporting from those areas. All sorts of materials. So, surprisingly enough, when we got there—the Vichy French were the ones that opposed us and opposed the landings. And they had both native troops and some French noncommissioned and some officers there. We fought actually in Port Lyautey. In Safi, they marched right in. There was no opposition. At Port Lyautey, we had three days of fighting.

We landed actually at a sea resort place that had cabanas and swimming pools and everything else. And a lot of dead bodies around there that our—the first wave or first two or three waves—we were strafed by French planes when we landed. It was amazing. They actually had a huge mountain area at the entrance of a river that was going—here's the beach. Here's the mountain. Here's a small river, and right above the river on the embankment was railroad tracks. And they had a naval gun that was moving back and forth on these tracks shooting at us. This mountain was called the Kasbah, which now is an American cemetery for some of our people. We had, I think, some—between thirty and forty casualties actually during that fighting.

Interesting thing, they had a big stadium at the edge of town, and all the Jewish people were assembled and stayed out on the grass of the stadium. They were herded there. I've also found, interestingly enough, that towns further inland into the desert like Meknes, Sidi Bel Abbes, which was the headquarters, still is, I think, of the French Foreign Legion. By the way, they did have some legionnaires fighting also against us at that time. They were rounded up there by the Vichy French. What they were going to do with them, I don't know.

But in Meknes, which is a—let me go back one second and tell you that these cities are all very modern cities. Beautiful highways, high-rise buildings all over the place. Back in the early forties I'm talking about now. For some reason, we had a chance to go to Meknes, a town in the desert that had a synagogue that looked like an old Berlin synagogue. Beautiful old ornaments and everything else. I think that a lot of the population were what they call Sephardic Jews that were originally from Spain and, of course, in France also that lived there. Commerce apparently built up all these cities over the years from the 1870s on into the twentieth century, early twentieth century. Surprisingly, a lot of these towns were quite modern.

In December of 1942, we were taken out of these bivouac areas in what was called the Forty and Eight. I don't know whether you've heard of that. Forty and Eight was forty men and eight horses, little freight cars. They were World War I freight cars, and they were called Forty and Eight. They took us up into the mountains, the Berber Mountains. It was snowing. It's hard to believe this, but it was snowing, and then into the desert from there. We were—that's when we started meeting the—in the Kasserine Pass and El Guettar and all these places. That's where not only we met resistance, but we were absolutely clobbered. We were as green as grass. I mean, we'd never been in combat before. The Germans had an air force. They strafed us. They bombed us. We had lots and lots of casualties. I mean—many stories I could tell you. It's just too lengthy and involved.

Oh, let me go back one second and tell you what I was doing then. When we were still housed in buildings in Port Lyautey, the Assistant G2, intelligence officer of the division, came to meet with me and my company commander and said, "I want him. We have an idea that we need people that can do interpreting and interrogation work and whatever. We're all new at this. We've never done it before. This is kind of a new concept. Could he be on detached service with us?" So that's when I went to division headquarters of G2 and became, for the rest of the war basically, out of the medics. I would on many occasions be housed with my old medical company. I actually was doing a lot of clerical work when I was free to do so for them. I handled all the insurances, the GI insurance, payrolls, and there were a lot of, you might say, personnel files that I had to take care of along with our first sergeant who also was from Long Island. He called me Stern (speaks in New York accent). My nickname became Gestapo, by the way. Everybody in the division knew me as Gestapo (laughs) because I was doing—so the idea was, if you spent a lot of time with the medics, then the first thing that you want to do is, if you have wounded German prisoners from the Afrika Korps—which by the way was probably as professional an army as you would ever have in any army in any country. I mean, they were truly professional soldiers from top to bottom. A formidable opponent, you might say, a foe.

Anyway, we were doing a lot of improvising. We had no idea of how to go about doing all of this and how to do it. For the first time I began to—in talking to some of these people or interrogating them, I suddenly realized that I hadn't spoken any German in several years. It really became frustrating at times not to be able to fluently—you know, it had to come back after a while. So little did we know that—in the Second Corps, which was Operation Torch really—that we were the guinea pigs for what later on, back in '44,

I think, they formed a Camp Riley [Ritchie] in Maryland. From those experiences that we had, the army had gradually set up manuals and everything else to recruit people who had foreign languages, particularly German and Italian possibly or French, to set up a camp eventually to train these people in what we were doing. We wrote the manual, so to speak. We were the first ones both in Africa and Sicily.

We were in North Africa and ended up in Bizerte when you finally had the German surrender. Being on top of a mountain and looking down into a valley with probably as many as eighty to a hundred thousand German prisoners that you looked into. They were all rounded up into cages of sorts that they had there that all were the original major prisoners. And, of course, we also worked closely with the British Eighth Army, Montgomery, and that crowd over there. And I found out for the first time what a class system they really had when—we were always starving. We were always hungry. Never had enough food, even C rations. Sometimes it didn't get to us at all. So I went to one of their camps and I found that they had a special section for non-coms, special section for the lower-class people and whatever, to beg them for a tin of biscuits that we had from them. They seemed to be better supplied than we were.

Our division actually became known as having stopped the Germans when they made a major thrust through the American lines with concentrated artillery. The guy that set up this concentration of artillery became—was our chief of staff who—was not chief of staff then. He was the colonel in charge of all artillery for our division. His name was William Westmoreland. You may have heard of him.

SLOAN: Oh yes.

STERN: He decorated me later on in Germany, by the way. Anyway, through a concentration of opposing tank forces that the Germans—*Panzer* forces that opposed us near the Kasserine Pass area. I don't remember the town right now. I was, by the way, for two weeks, attached to French native troops. They were called the Goumiers. They were Berber mountain troops, and they were natives. The first day I was there, they caught a sheep and they strangled the sheep, put it on a tree limb, and, with their wonderful knives that they had, they slit the belly open a little bit and blew into the area to be able to open the outer skin of the wool around it. Then, one guy was building a little fire with some stones surrounding it. One guy took out the liver and the heart and everything like that. They had these long sticks that had sharp points and they would put this meat on there. Then they held it into the fire and they said, Here. Eat it. (laughs)

SLOAN: The entrails?

STERN: There's a write-up about me that I was supposed to have said—supposedly said, which I didn't, said, "Well, it beats C rations." (both laugh) They were people that had these huge belts and these what looked like nightgowns, these striped nightgowns that were very warm. I mean, heavy wool nightgowns. They wore mostly bands around their heads, and they all had beards like this, huge beards. They were people that could go into the—at night especially—into the German lines and cut off their ears. They would have

ears all around their belts. These ears (laughs) whatever when they slit their throat. Anyway, they were fierce-looking guys.

And I remember, in Bizerte—I don't know where—I was going in a jeep. And I saw this small formation that looked like a platoon of Goumiers with a French noncommissioned officer who had a swivel stick under his arm like this. They were supposed to be at attention. That meant their rifles had to be like this. And this guy goes up to one of them that apparently was a little bit out of line, and he hit him with that swivel stick across the face. I began to think, you know, Don't they rebel against these guys, these French? These were French natives. No, they didn't. That was apparently par for the course. Have you by any chance ever read or know of a famous writer for *The New Yorker* Magazine called A. J. Liebling? Does that name ring a bell?

SLOAN: Um-hm.

STERN: Liebling was one of the people Ernie Pyle—I met all of these people while I was in—because some of them traveled with us. There's a famous story about a soldier with our Sixtieth Regiment, which was one of our three regiments of our division, that is a famous story that was made into a book that was written about him and all of his exploits in Algeria and Tunisia in there. I mean, you talk about primitive living. It was—there were areas where we would be and, say, set up tents near a wooded area, and everybody would have dysentery. Everbody. I mean, you would hardly be able to get up and get going. At the end of the fighting, they took us near, outside of—we wouldn't go into town, no. Sidi Bel Abbes, where the French Foreign Legion was, was two miles away. We were in a wooded area. We had to be setting up shelter halves in there, and most of us were just, you know, like this. If you went to the kitchen to get something to eat, your mess kit would, the minute you have under your face, was covered with flies all over the place. Our commanding general made us—this is after the fighting. All we were wearing is boots and underwear, no tops. They made us put full field packs on and walk a mile and run a mile. No matter how much you were—in order to keep your physical strength up with it.

Eventually—I think it was—I think they moved us to a town called Oran, which is near Algiers seaport on the Mediterranean. There we embarked on ships, small merchant ships, to go to Sicily. And I remember we, at night, landing—or after dark—landing in Palermo, outside of Palermo harbor. And we were strafed again on the boats by Germans. The British had already landed in another part of Sicily. We were landing near Palermo and we had to walk with full gear, after we disembarked, about two miles to a railroad track. We were taken inland from there. Sicily was really interesting. I mean, I could tell you a lot of stories of—individual stories.

One of them, I can recall being overnight in a jeep on top of a mountain in the interior of Sicily. I mean, you felt like you were in New Guinea or someplace like that, far from any civilization. There was nothing else around. And you'd wake up, and we had one of these huge aerials on this jeep. The guy turned on the radio and the armed forces played Glenn Miller tunes in this godforsaken place. It just felt—you know you went—your spirits were lifted all of a sudden. (both laugh) It was just great to have. Little things like this

were just terrific. It was near a place called Troina in Sicily. I remember swimming in the Tyrrhenian Sea and thinking to myself, Here goes Odysseus. *The Odyssey*. (laughs) And one time in the bivouac area, a farmer comes along with—looks like a wheel this big. It was some goat cheese that he gave to us. In France, I had a guy in central France that came late one afternoon. We had set up pup tents outside of this town and this guy came along with a bottle of champagne that he had kept for about sixty or more years that he wanted to give to somebody, one of the liberators. Things like that.

SLOAN: That's great. Well—

STERN: I could—you know, there are an awful lot of different incidents that—I've written some essays that I can remember specific situations about that I felt like writing about and did. I would say that actually I was lucky because there were many times I was with the aid stations. When we landed in Normandy on Utah Beach, I probably had a field day with both wounded and non-wounded German prisoners. I have a commendation from the general about establishing a plan or method where either ambulances would take me to the aid stations or a jeep that I had available to me. I probably was the only soldier in the American army in combat that had—you might say, could go anywhere I wanted to. I met French Resistance fighters, townspeople in these villages in Normandy that I spoke to. Fortunately I had enough French still that I was able to speak. Gradually, as you go along, you learn more about it. In many ways, I was everywhere.

But I was very lucky because it wasn't until we were in the Hürtgen Forest that I was wounded the first time. I was actually standing near some ambulances when all of a sudden I said to one guy, "God, something is stinging me." Well, a piece of shrapnel sliced right into my calf. Fortunately, it was just a flesh wound. And I went to my old company, which was called the Clearing Company. And they gave me a tetanus shot, bandaged me, and said, You're sticking around here for about a week. Don't you go anywhere. And I did. The next time around, we were on the east bank of the Rhine River. We had captured the Remagen Bridge. We only called it the Remagen Bridge. It was really called the Ludendorff Bridge after the famous World War I German General Ludendorff. You know, history tells you it was intact. They were ready to blow it. We captured all the guys that were—those guys later on were—actually, we didn't capture them. They ran away, and they later on were shot by Hitler's personal command. They were all shot because they didn't stand their ground or they didn't do the job that they were supposed to do.

Well, over there, one interesting thing happened that we were in a—right on the banks of the river, there were small houses around there. We were looking for a place to stay. I went up to this house. An old guy, must have been in his seventies, comes out, and he said, "I'm the only one here." He speaks perfect American English. I said, "What the hell?" He said, well, he spent twenty years in the United States, apparently. But he moved back and his whole family was gone. He lived there alone in this house. I said, "Well, we're taking it over." And he said, "Well, I have some eggs here, some fresh eggs." So, you know, anything that you could get in the way of regular food or semblance of regular food was wonderful. So about four of us went upstairs. And he had a complete empty

room with a huge plate-glass window overlooking the Rhine River. At the other end of the room was a dilapidated old couch. So we sit there on this couch, all of us, and just joking around, kidding around, whatever. One guy even had a bottle of wine that he swiped from somewhere.

The Germans, by this time, tried to demolish that bridge. (unintelligible) artillery, whatever it is. I swear to this day that I saw, out of the corner of my eye, a huge—almost looked like a fireball. Then this enormous explosion. It lifted us from the couch, and this glass from this plate-glass window is all over our faces and body and all of it. Not very deep, but sufficiently so that we all were bleeding, whatever. So we went to the aid station to get us fixed up. That was the only two times I was hit. Today, you can say, having a Purple Heart gets you free passes and you get free municipal—at airports and everywhere, whatever. Any place you're in town where you have a—you can park free, whatever. You can go on the Beltway. You don't have to pay for anything like that. So this is what's leftover. (both laugh) Whatever.

Anyway, by the way, I want to mention one more thing. In 1993, I learned through my cousin in New York that—or her husband who's also from Mannheim, Germany, that the city of Mannheim asked them to—all expenses paid, to pay a visit to his old home in Mannheim for a few days, whatever it is. All expenses paid. I learned that a number of German towns had set up what they call reparations for people. My sister and I got a small amount of money years before, back in—I think in the sixties or seventies for school interruption. I know. We got each of us around twelve, fifteen hundred dollars or something like that.

It turned out that one of my closest friends that I grew up with who was a year older than I was, father was Jewish, mother was Gentile. And he was drafted into the German Army, lost an arm on the Russian front. Was kicked out of the army, went into hiding in Berlin for two or three years, and became, eventually—he was a brilliant guy—he became one of Willy Brandt's—I'd say, assistant, so to speak. He became a—Germans call their councilmen in a major city like Berlin senators. So his name is Lipschitz. Senator Lipschitz became in charge of developing reparations for people that were alive and living in, whether in Israel or Australia, United States, or wherever, to find them.

One of the things happened was that we were contacted by the Berlin government, my sister and I. No, I was first. Then I told my sister about it, and I told her who to contact in the Berlin senate. They arranged for—I think two or three times a year they take two hundred people in Berlin—that's what I—because I'm familiar with this. All expenses paid. A flight, luxury hotels in Berlin, and a week or seven to eight days they take you to—the first night, they take you to one hotel and have a meeting there. At the end of the meeting, they give you a check, German check to cash for $350 or something like that as spending money. Then they have buses and they have all kinds of transportation. Theater, musicals, opera performance, sightseeing in Potsdam and the Baltic Sea, trips on the Wannsee outside of Berlin, that wonderful lake they have there, and free time.

My sister and I, my wife, and one other lady went on the subway to my old apartment. It was a two-story apartment. It was down in the basement in the regular apartment. The

way we got in there was interesting because you had to have either a key or special pass. Some lady went into the vestibule of the apartment house, and we scooted in with her. I knocked on the door of my old apartment, which was on the first floor and the basement. And a lady answers, and she said, "Who are you?" in German. I said, "I used to live here and I want in." So she didn't say anything, was absolutely frightened. And I said, "I want to go first downstairs." Well, it turned out that our whole apartment, which was huge—an architect, an accountant, and an attorney, they all had offices there with office staff in there. I went downstairs and the attorney is in there. And he speaks almost perfect English. I said to him, "You know, this used to be my room. I used to play with an electric train down here and—" "Oh," he said to me, "Oh, you're with the group." He'd heard about this reparations group or something like that. He said, "The German Jews were my best friends." I said, "You should live so long."

I think—so anyway, then a secretary comes up to me when we went back upstairs, and she said, "Oh, if you want to look around, you should see the bathroom. It has this beautiful blue tile." I said, "Yes, I know." (both laugh) So we spent about an hour there. Then we went over to—my sister said—you know, it's a big girls' school that was in the neighborhood also. So we went there, and I find out that my old school had been completely bombed out. And a brand-new building—which was an office building for a big chemical company—had— brand-new building, very modern building. So we went over to her school, which was never bombed at all. It was huge. So we went to the office. And they also spoke perfect English. I said, "Is Dr. So-and-so—is he still alive?" "No, his picture's on the wall here. He died in—I think—1950, something like that, and he was an old man." I said, "Well he was one of the really best teachers I had. He was also the headmaster of the school." She said, "Would you like to buy a sweatshirt that has the German logo—the Berlin logo, the bear, which is a black bear on it." I said, "I'd love to." I said, "If you can find one in my size." (laughs) I still have the darn thing. Hardly ever worn it.

But in any case, so we went there. We saw the old school. It turns out that apparently they merged our old school, after it was bombed out, with them during the war and still had it there. But one of the other apartments that we lived in later on, I think before my mother passed away, was also completely demolished and had a brand-new high-rise apartment there. But it was interesting to see all that and to see how Berlin had been rebuilt and everything like that. Then, at one of the meetings that the Berlin government people wanted to have at these huge city hall buildings, I saw a guy—no, I think he raised his hand to ask a question, and he mentioned his name. I said, My God, this was a kid that we used to play with. And his family were good friends of my family. I went up to him later on, he and his wife, him and his wife. He said yes, they had moved to England. They fled to England. And he and his—he moved to the United States. The rest of his family stayed in England. He lived in California. He said, "You know, I have a car. I rented a car here." Apparently he went out—which I was really unfortunate I didn't get to go there. There's a very famous old German-Jewish cemetery way over in the east part of Berlin. He went there because most of our families have these big mausoleums in there. My grandmother, my father's mother is buried there and all my relatives that died before the Nazis ever came in.

So this was one of the things. But we had so little time really to see everything. But it was amazing how everything was much modernized. Every six months I get a pamphlet called *Aktuelle* which touts the wonderful new developments and buildings that are going up and all the wonderful things that they're doing for the Jewish population. They just bend over backwards to show you everything. The pitiful thing is that, in the back of it, for two or three pages, are letters that are written to the magazine that says, I went to such-and-such a school. And I'm wondering if I could send greetings to such-and-such friends, and mentions if so-and-so is still alive and wherever they live. They could be in Argentina. They could be in Australia. They could be in Israel. They could be in the United States. All these letters—most of them are in German, by the way. A few of them in English. And it really is heart-wrenching because these are people that are thinking back to their childhood and the people that they've known. Anyway, I'd like to read you, if I may—

SLOAN: Before we get to that, I'd like to go back. One thing that interested me, you were talking about the development—once you got into intelligence, developing, kind of, techniques and improvising some things. Can you talk a little bit about what sort of work that involved?

STERN: Well, interrogation, basically, in the field means that if you have a prisoner the first things you ask are, What outfit were you in? Where did you come from? What concentration, what outfits were in that area? Did you come by train? What specific area did you bivouac in? Where—whatever it is. You want to get basically the idea of what's in front of you right now. Where are the concentration of troops? What outfits are they? Are they *Panzer* troops? Are they infantry? Are they artillery? Are there railroad guns here, whatever, did you see? Then, you frisk his entire pockets and all, whatever he has, like a passport. He has all—everything, where he was born, where he was raised, whatever. He may have family pictures. Is that your wife? Is that your son? Is this your—whoever it is. When were you decorated? Where? Where'd you come from? By the way, when we landed, among the first units that we found were conscripted Poles. They weren't even Germans. They were fighting for the Germans. And of course, they were lucky and happy as hell to be American prisoners at this point. So that was easy.

Then you come across somebody, especially in the more elite units like the tankers, *Panzer* units and SS troops, they become very arrogant. They don't want to do anything. So a lot of the times, I—Geneva Conventions, they go out the window. I remember one. Just before we got into the fighting of the Battle of the Bulge, we captured a guy like this that was really, really, I'm not going to tell you anything, whatever it is. So we'd hand him a shovel. And I said, "You start digging." And I said, "You know what this is? This is going to be your grave, right here." We would—I'd take a .45 and just play around with him while he's around there. On occasions, I had—a guy was my first sergeant. The guy was about six foot three, huge guy, big guy. I said, "You know—" He wanted to get slapped a little bit. So you would—and eventually, especially when they—one of the things we learned with a lot of people was, "When we get through with you, we're sending you over to Russia." That was really the key because that, whether men or women, civilians or army people, that was one thing. I said, "We can send you over to Russian forces in no time at all." That's what made them talk, for the most part. I didn't have a whole lot of trouble.

But I have to tell you that one of the things I was really ashamed of was we had a guy that came in on a stretcher who was apparently a captain of a tank unit, of an elite army unit. You talk about a guy that was—talk about arrogant. I mean, it wasn't simply about, I'm not telling you anything. It was just, he talked back to you. I don't know. I was so mad that I just hauled off and slapped him. Here he was on a stretcher. He was apparently not just conscious; he was in pretty good shape, actually. They'd brought him in. Some people—you know, some of the officers around me just looked the other way, but I felt, Jesus, I'm not—what made me do something stupid like that?

Another time, this was—and part of this is just briefly mentioned in there. We had virtually—this was in the Ruhr area, virtually have over thirty thousand soldiers give up. By that time, this year—in 1945, in March or whenever it was. You had people that were sixty years old. You had people who were twelve years old. Most pitiful looking people in uniform. Well, they brought in a general to me. And we were in the schoolhouse at the time. The colonel of the medical battalion said to me, "I understand you're going to be interviewing a German general." He said, "I'm going to give you my jacket with the epaulets of colonel on there so that you look like a professional interviewer for this guy." Well, this guy was about as—you know, he seemed to be in his sixties. And was so—you almost could feel pity for the guy. It was sort of like saying, Thank God it's all over for me. There wasn't really a whole lot that I wanted out of him. I just wanted to know, Were you in charge of these people? Yes, he was. This large group that had given themselves up. He said, basically, It's all over for us. I asked him some questions: where he had been? Were there any staff people anywhere nearby that he knew of? Was there any additional fighting going on in there? Essentially, he just answered, but he was so listless in a sense that you felt like, This isn't even really an interrogation.

Now, the other thing is that you may have maps that you take from them. You ask them who was here, there, wherever. Is there anything at all that I should know about of any value that you can, I guess. A lot of this was taught to me by the British. They were fabulous. I mean, they had done this for so many years, and they knew just all the techniques and all the specific things that you were looking for and how to interpret a map and a lot of things like that. I mean, we were there for over a week. It was almost two weeks. Really, different classes that you went to. I thought to myself, My God, this is like day and night from what we—we had to pick up by ourselves of what we wanted to know. You had papers prepared—not I. I was always using a field telephone to call in what I had learned because you were in the field. But then, G2 would put all of this information that was fed to them from different areas into a memo, secret memo, that was going around that showed all the units that were opposing you; what towns were involved, where they were bivouacked, where they were here, did they have any air force left, did they have any special forces left, was there any kind of weapon that you had to look out for. It was in great detail. It was all spelled out so that you had a corps or an army that would consolidate all that information that was in front of them. It was probably one of the more important things that made them make strategic moves at that time.

A field guy was really just—to this day—when we were still in the bivouac area, the day, actually, several days before—it was right around Thanksgiving as I remember in

Belgium at the German-Belgian-Luxembourg—right before the Battle of the Bulge started. We had somehow picked up a few German prisoners. Several of them mentioned to me that their major concentrations around the city of Aachen and Cologne and whatever. And nobody seemed to pay any attention. It was sort of like saying, Oh well. This is nothing special. Well, that was this huge concentration here, probably over 250,000 troops and tanks that were in the breakthrough. I almost would have been caught because, when we moved, we were supposed to be moving north, and I was going south on this highway towards Malmedy, the town of Malmedy. And this became famous because some American troops were captured there, and they were mowed down by SS troops in the snow. Right near that area is when I realized—when I heard this shooting was just wild going on by artillery and everything else. I said, "We've got to be in the wrong area." I was in a personnel carrier with six other guys and my driver. I said, "We better turn around. We went to the wrong direction." We hightailed it back to find our units. But those things do happen. Oh, we were very lucky, because if we had gone maybe another mile, we would have been—we wouldn't be here. That's for sure. None of us would be.

Anyway, I could tell you about the absolutely huge breakthrough area at Saint-Lô in France, the Normandy area, where the German concentrations were. That was the area that we needed to go through to start a large pincer movement in France. Being in the *bocage*, in the fields of Normandy that are surrounded by these hedges, the hedgerow fighting. The way this whole thing started was—first thing was that they used fighter planes to start the bombardment. I was in a field where the next field over was the headquarters of our engineer's battalion. They had two trucks filled with mines in there. One of our P-40s flew over. The P-40 was really a navy fighter plane. The P-40 used to have five-hundred-pound bombs under each wing strap. They had a tendency that if they banked too steeply, one of the bombs would roll off, and this happened and right into the engineers' field.

Well, it killed a whole lot of people. And there was this—it was this huge black cloud that went up. We thought—I mean this is like a hundred yards away or two hundred yards away at most. We thought, at the time, that this is going to be a signal for the bombers that are supposed to follow. We knew that 3,600 bombers would fly over and bomb that Saint-Lô area in front of us. It is well-known that over four hundred American troops were killed, including General McNair who was one of the top—he and Marshall were probably as close to the top army people in the American army. McNair happened to be an observer at the time in that area. He was among the killed there.

Well, they didn't bomb us. But if you are a half mile back of where they were bombing, or maybe three-quarters of a mile, and you're lying on the side of the embankment in there and have dug yourself in a little bit—not a deep foxhole, but you're in there. I was lying on my stomach, and I swear to you I was going like this. My stomach like—after a while, I was black and blue. This bombing was so intense and so huge; 3,600 bombers after the P-40s and Mustangs and everything else had done their work in there, strafing or bombing, whatever it is. These clusters, you see them coming down right near you. And you feel any day now is your—you've had it. It was a sight that you never would ever want to see again. If you picture, they were a British and American combination of—

practically the whole air force in Europe was flying over there to soften up that line. Then the breakthrough came. And we were able to get through and then make this big hook to the Falaise Gap and enclose several German armies that were still opposing us in the Normandy area.

In the meantime, we were going through practically, almost central France on around in that way. I don't know. We captured two or three armies, German armies, that way. It was probably a brilliant move. We always felt, most of us, that General Bradley was the real general that was—the GI thought that he was not only the most brilliant tactician. But also we got to know him in North Africa and Sicily, so he was kind of our guy, so to speak. But we had our division general, who later became a corps commander. General Manton Eddy was also—he was a real disciplinarian, but I think he was also a very good tactician. Our division, as being one of the experienced divisions, captured the—or cut the entire Cotentin Peninsula. At the bottom of it was Cherbourg, and we captured the whole German Seventh Army there. Many years later, Eddy became a close friend of the General von Schlieben. They became close friends after the war. As I say, there's so many details that you could—here and there that come to mind. They're really not anecdotes. They're the real thing. What you go through and the experiences that you have in different situations. Our medics were—any number of times in France and Germany became obstetricians. German women that were pregnant would come in and have their babies delivered by our medical officers. (laughs) Things like that were—as I remember, situations of this kind ended up.

My division has an association in California that started several years ago a library. I call it almost like a Smithsonian or Library of Congress, for microfiching. There probably are forty or fifty books that were written by GIs during the war, some pamphlets, and every kind of decorations. Not our decorations, but captured stuff of every kind. Documents, anything and everything that you would collect as something worthwhile that is being kept like in a museum would be kept. I've sent them hundreds and hundreds of photographs of situations. They have copies of some of this. And I had all kinds of documents that were no longer classified, and I sent them over there. We, I would guess now going on five years, have—well, back up a minute.

In '45, in occupation, we started to form an association that would be perpetuated after the war. Starting in 1946, we had annual reunions in major cities; originally in Washington, in New York, in Philadelphia, Columbus, Ohio. Gradually, we moved out into other parts of the country. We will have, in August of this year in Pittsburg, our sixty-seventh reunion. And the veterans will turn over the whole operation of the association to the sons and daughters. They already have formed an auxiliary several years ago. Gradually, over the years in the late forties and early fifties, they formed chapters in different parts of the country. In 1992, we formed—I mean, that late, you might say—we formed a Texas Greater Southwest Chapter. At our original meetings in Belton, Texas, we had over seventy veterans there and their wives. I've been president and treasurer of what is left of us. In the last eight to ten years, we've been meeting at a place called, you may know it, Summers Mill.

SLOAN: Um-hm. Yeah. Right outside Belton, yeah.

STERN: Outside of Belton in the country there. We meet twice a year. Our last meeting was in April, because there were only three of us left, and lot of widows, some of the sons and daughters. And people that come from mostly Dallas, Fort Worth, Arlington, Houston, Austin, Waco that have been meeting in there. I decided to close the chapter. We had a meeting overnight. We have usually a catered dinner, breakfast, and then business meeting there. We meet, as I say, twice a year at their facilities. Wonderful facilities because it's located so centrally that it has made a lot of sense. Lo and behold, at the end of the meeting, I said, "You know, we're closing this meeting." Everybody raised their hand and said, We'd like to continue this as a friendship group. So we're—I'm arranging for November to meet there again, and we're continuing it and on.

SLOAN: Well, fantastic.

STERN: So I have to make a bunch of calls to people to set up the specifics; whether we're going to have a catered dinner, whether we're going to barbeque, do our own cooking and all this kind of stuff. I said, "I'm tired of it. I've been doing it for so many years. I don't want to do it anymore. Some of the younger people can do it." Well, they say, Yes, we'll help you. So in August, my three children are coming, my wife and myself, we're all going to Pittsburg to a three-day meeting, at which time we're—historically, we're turning over. The bylaws and everything we turn over to the younger generation. Because they're really—last year in July, we met in New Orleans. I can tell you, we had about a hundred attendees. And of the hundred attendees, there were fifteen of us were veterans that were attending the group. Now, there might be some people who still can't come to these things because of their health or something. Anyway, that kind of gives you a long, long thumbnail sketch. (both laugh)

SLOAN: Well, I know we want to transition to this. I'd ask, in any of your intelligence work, did you hear of any information about the camps or about these sorts of places?

STERN: Of course, I knew about them anyway through either relatives or family members. I knew that we'd lost a number of my father's cousins. As I say, I knew that one of my grandmothers had died there. I knew of a number of people I went to school with when I was in Berlin that—with the exception of those people who fled to Israel with their families. I always felt in '32, '33, that things looked so ominous to us all. What would happen to us? You just don't know what's in store for us. A number of families that I was close friends with, their children all moved with their entire families either to France or to England. Or some of them actually even went to Argentina, which seemed to be, for some reason or another, the Germans are enamored with Argentina. For the last hundred years, or maybe less than that, Germany is just enamored with South America for some reason. It ended up—Brazil also. Not just a bunch of SS people that escaped there, but long before that.

It was interesting to see when you had these groups, the reparation groups in Berlin, how many people were not Americans but had come from as far away as Australia, New Zealand, South American countries. Israel, of course. The ones that stayed in any European country, it was a given that they would not make it, that they were captured. Just a few of them—this lady I told you about in Los Angeles. Her husband for a while

was conscripted into the French Army that was opposing the German invasion then, there. And they were separated. And she went with her daughter. Somehow made it over the Pyrenees into Spain. It was a harrowing kind of an experience that some people had like that that were escaping Germany.

I didn't realize, obviously, at the time that my moving in 1936—how lucky I really was to be able to start a whole new life. We had nothing to look forward to in any way, shape, or form. It was just a dead end for us. It was almost like being snared somewhere. You know, you're in a maze and you can't get out. You felt sooner or later you would be taken away. It wasn't that long thereafter. There were—I think in the midthirties there were people who just plain disappeared. And you never heard from them again. To tell you that, if you were in an apartment building and you looked downstairs, particularly on weekends, and you'd see thousands and thousands of Brownshirts marching. They were always just doing—the SA and SS were always marching in these huge formations. You may have seen pictures of Nuremburg where they had a hundred thousand uniformed people and Hitler speaking to them and this kind of thing. We all saw this, whether it was on the news or in pictures or actually in person. It was frightening, because you felt this was a new force.

I remember going to a wooded area outside of Berlin on my bike that I had. I'd love being on my own in a way. I'd love to go off somewhere. I had some sandwiches with me, and I went off into a wooded area. Lo and behold, on two sides of me were Germans in uniform practicing with their weapons in there. They were on a maneuver. And I began to realize—this was in 1934, '35 that I saw this. And I thought, What the hell is going on? But it had to be something that they were doing that was, supposedly, under the Versailles Treaty not supposed to be. It was *verboten*. (laughs) That kind of thing.

[Interviewee addition: At the time I set foot in Nordhausen in March 1945, I had no specific knowledge of slave labor or exterminations camps. On the other hand, in the mid-1930s, while I still lived in Berlin, we heard instances where prominent Jewish residents of Berlin were taken away by the *Gestapo* in the middle of the night. In some instances, they were released after brief periods of detention in Berlin. Others disappeared. Around 1940-41 (I was then in the US about to enter the US Army) some of us heard about what came to be known much later as concentration camps. My father had written (from England) that he had received word that a number of cousins and my maternal grandmother had been sent to a detention camp in a town called Auschwitz in Poland. Unfortunately, no one ever heard from them again. By 1942, it became known to the Allies that "The Final Solution" had been instituted by the Nazi High Command. This was the expanding roundup of thousands of Jews, political opponents, Gypsies, and homosexuals, and others, not only in Germany but also in the newly occupied countries. I also remember, in 1942 in England, my father knew friends who owned shortwave radios which picked up the daily clandestine French Resistance Calais calling, and, on occasions, they heard of mass killings in camps. But not until the camps were liberated in 1945 did anyone become aware of the extent of the barbarities that were taking place.]

You think about—as you, your memory comes back on some of these things, some of these minor little incidents that you become aware of. And like I say, not even knowing

that I had all these relatives from a long period of time in this country. By the way, one incident when I was in New York. My so-called uncle or great-uncle took me to another uncle that was not in very good shape. At that time, he was a widower, and he lived in an apartment hotel in mid-town Manhattan. I remembered that, when I was about three or four years old, that he and his wife had come over to Germany to spend some time with our family at that time. So I knew him. By this time, he had really aged, and he was in bed. He reared up, and he said—I went by the name of what is now my middle name—Ulrich was my real name, but I took my father's name, Herbert. He raised up, and he said, "That name is too damn German. You got to change it when you're living in this country." So I said, "Yes, I will." So I said—well, I turned to my great uncle and I said, "I'm going to have arrange to get my name changed to Herbert." But, you know, Herbert U. Stern, people ask me, What does the *U* stand for? I usually tell them, Useless. (laughs) Or Ulysses, something like that. Actually, in a lot of places around here or Austin County where we got a place, the name Ulrich is not at all unusual.

SLOAN: Yes.

STERN: There are a lot of German settlers, Czech and German settlers over here in Austin County where we got a place there. So it's just—I don't even like the name at all anyway.

SLOAN: You were glad to be rid of it.

STERN: I'm glad to be rid of it. Anyway, if we—if I could read this thing.

SLOAN: Please, please.

STERN: I will—this is what I sent to Peter Berkowitz for the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission.

[reads following essay:]

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The capture of Nordhausen Slave Labor Camp April 1945. To the best of my recollection, the American First Army—its VII Corps had no specific plans to "liberate" the Nordhausen slave labor camp. For historic purposes, the events in which I was involved and will describe took place during the period of April 11 to April 14, 1945 (President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945.)

I was a member of the Ninth Infantry Division and assigned to the G2 Section of the Division. Since I spoke German and French (I was born in Berlin, Germany and lived there until age sixteen. I escaped from Germany in 1936 and came to the US to live with distant relatives in Cincinnati, Ohio), much of my work in the division was interrogation, document interpretation, and in liaison assignments with Battalion S-2's, medical field personnel, engineers, etcetera. Some of these assignments were in forward combat areas (I was twice wounded in combat). In specific instances, there were contacts with

resistance fighters in Normandy and, at times, I was on detached service in Tunisia and Algeria with native Goumiers under the command of Free French forces, actually also called Corps Franc d'Afrique.

Between April 11 and April 12, 1945, we were clearing pockets of resistance in the Ruhr industrial areas. At one point, an estimated 30,000 German soldiers surrendered to us. The newest assignment was to start a 150 mile motor march to the Harz-Nordhausen area. In this area, remnants of the Eleventh SS *Panzer* Army was bottled up, refusing to surrender. German high command had also formed three new divisions. They too were among the holdouts. Two elite divisions began facing the Ninth.

The Harz Mountains had few equals for national fortifications: approximately twenty-two miles across and sixty-eight miles long, up to 4,000 feet, excellent observation posts. Unquestionably, the Hitler government chose this area to become a highly-industrialized enterprise.

According to my recollection, the First Army planned to bypass the Harz Mountain Fortress then encircle the area. The reduction of this pocket constituted the last major obstacle facing the VII Corps of which we were a part.

As we were motoring, mostly in two-and-a-half ton trucks, towards the town of Nordhausen, we came upon a railroad yard and saw, on flatcars, fins and other large components of V-2 Rockets. Approximately a quarter-mile from the railroad yard was a well-camouflaged entrance to a mountain tunnel. Inside the tunnel were rows of highly-placed electrical lights. We could also see small-gauge railroad tracks, long steel tables, some benches, scattered chains, and other unidentified paraphernalia. There were no signs of human beings inside the tunnel. I recall that we walked about 400 to 500 yards to the slave labor camp coming face to face with one of Germany's most notorious concentration camps. The carnage and horror had been uncovered earlier that day by tankers of the Third Armored Division and infantrymen of the 104th Division.

Here, the living and the dead were lying side by side. The living were too emaciated to move their limbs. The dead were unburied or half-buried. SS troops had stacked bodies in ditches. The stench was unbelievable. Many of us threw up. Yet, we took photos with newly-acquired cameras (while fighting on the Ruhr, we uncovered a German AGFA plant with large inventories of new cameras, tripods, and lenses).

We learned that one group which could not walk had been chained in the mountain tunnel for three months without seeing daylight. I also spotted a bank of very large ovens on the premises. There was no doubt that camp personnel burned the dead in these ovens. On the grates, you could see bones.

I recall that we commandeered the mayor of nearby Nordhausen to round up able-bodied men to dig additional long trenches to bury the skeletal bodies. I also remember that several townspeople exclaimed that they knew nothing about the slave labor camp. This infuriated us even more at the time.

In due time, we learned that Nordhausen had a long, drawn-out system of torture. One method was to crowd several hundred prisoners into a courtyard. There, on a raised platform, the condemned were hanged. Others were taken to the mountain tunnel, chained to work benches, and worked to death or beaten to death. They were there to assemble parts of the V-2 Rockets. Almost all prisoners were simply starved to death.

It is of course well known that the British Royal Air Force in 1942 bombed the original V-2 Rocket assembly and launch facilities in Peenemünde on the Baltic Sea. The entire program was obviously moved to the Harz Mountains. The prisoners of this notorious camp were French, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, Romanians. I'm not certain that any Jews were at that camp.

Somewhat later, I learned that US field hospital facilities were temporarily stationed at the camp to minister to those who were still alive and could be treated there.

Considering that we had been through eight major campaigns in combat, 1942-1945, Nordhausen slave labor camp was the most traumatic experience we encountered.

Since it took place during the same period in April, 1945—Again, for historical purposes, I want to mention that units of our Forty-Seventh Infantry Regiment came upon a castle in Degenerhausen a few miles from Nordhausen and uncovered the archives of German Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1929-1942. Included was the entire library of the Berlin Academy of Arts intact.

I'm sure that numerous GIs took photos during this period. It would be difficult to establish where they may be. At the time, I accompanied several of our medical officers and S-2 officers of one of the battalions of the Forty-Seventh Infantry Regiment, all part of the Ninth Infantry Division. We were at the camp for about five to six hours and, two days later, we linked up with the Russian tank forces on the Elbe River.

[end of essay]

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You have all of that in the copy, what I've written up. This was all from memory that—but he asked me earlier in the year if I would—for the photographs I had, if I would write this up for him.

SLOAN: Can I ask you a couple of questions about? One of the things you say in there—that you say, despite the eight major campaigns that you had been through, it was the most traumatic experience. Can you talk a little bit, why?

STERN: Well, we go back to what my interview was with Leah Levinson and this young lady that she brought along with her. I think, she seemed to feel that—possibly, I'm thinking this. But the way she kept asking me the question was that this had to be so traumatic for me and for other people there that—seeing this—that it was not anything like anything else. I don't know whether you could put yourself in my own mind in this.

We had been in combat for three years. The kind of things that you see, people blowing up in front of you. I still, to this day, on occasions have a vision again of a P-40 that dropped the bomb and—obviously not intentionally—right near our division headquarters in France. A guy right in front of me—not more than as far as you are from me here—a guy that I knew was in the MPs, his whole face was gone all of a sudden. Right in front of me. And he kept walking. When you're in shock, you keep—somehow, bodies keep moving. You see that.

I've seen pictures of—pictures. I've seen people who, when the bridge over the Rhine collapsed, that whole girders fell on them. I've seen people with their arms, you know. You see all this stuff, I think. You see so much, so many different—the devastation, the bombing of—whether it's buildings or whatever it is. I remember being in a field in France, and you hear a railroad gun that's going off. You don't know whether it's hit in your area or what. Like I say, yes, in some ways, you get numb, but, at the same time, you're constantly like this. You're just on your guard. You are—you never know whether from day to day you're going to be hit or not hit, or whether you're still alive and so on. Seeing this was, in some sense, been there, seen that. Similar things. So this was—yes, it was a terrible shock, but, at the same time, it—in a sense, you almost felt more—you can't believe the stench of human beings. Again, we were, in some sense we were attuned to it. We would set up overnight, dig foxholes within, say, as far away as this wall of dead cows all bloated up. You cannot imagine the smell, whatever it is. I'm not saying anything that you'd become blasé about any of it, not at all. But she couldn't understand this.

SLOAN: Yeah, well you've seen so much.

STERN: A lot of these people that were in this tank unit and the 104th Division that came there before us, these were units just like in Dachau and Buchenwald, whatever it is, that hadn't been in combat very long. There were so many people. I couldn't put myself in that position because how few units were still around after two or three years? These divisions turned over. I mean, the replacements that we have are—you know, when somebody says to me, "I came into the division in the Hürtgen Forest or in France—" whatever it is. You say to yourself, You haven't seen anything yet. I mean, the turnover was enormous. And people coming direct from the United States right into combat, no experience whatsoever, and two days later, they're dead. It happened over and over again. So you always had to have somebody around.

People don't know how many times we starved. We didn't have food or the little C ration or K ration that they had with us. It was gone in no time at all, and it was dreadful. Or these canned Spam and stuff like that and how sickening it was. In Sicily, outside of a town called Cefalù, we were bivouacked in a grape orchard. The grapes were to be made into Marsala wine. You were lying there in these ditches between rows and rows of grapes in there. You reached out from it and after two days, you didn't ever want to see any grapes again. You never in your life wanted to see any grapes again. (laughs) You got so sick and tired of it. If a farmer or anybody would bring you something to eat, or you found some eggs that you could fry, cook, or whatever it is, or anything unusual, it was just—it was heaven. It was just heaven.

In Port Lyautey—now, keep in mind, we landed on November the eighth, so around Thanksgiving time, somehow or another, our kitchen units got ahold of a great big sow, and killed that sow, and they built a pit. For all day long, they rotated that damn thing. And I remember at night somebody had gotten some bread in town that were these big round loaves of bread. We had this bread with nothing on it whatsoever and they sliced this up. It was like going to the most famous French restaurant you ever could imagine. I mean, little things like this were just unusual. It's a lot of the little things that you encounter and that you can remember.

Again, going back to what your question was. I could, to this day, remember that our reaction was, yes, a tremendous amount of shock. At the same time, really not all that much different. I mean, it wasn't the kind of a thing that caused her father after he had ministered to them—you know, whether you're a doctor or whatever and given situations that are that traumatic, I suppose it could happen. I don't want to have her feel, or anybody feel that I look down upon anybody that had that kind of reaction.

SLOAN: Sure, sure.

STERN: I tell you that we, back in the days long before you had post-traumatic stress syndrome, stuff like that, we had people in these so-called hospital tents that were in the field areas. Put them on a cot, give them what we used to call blue heaven pills. They were sodium pentothal. They slept for thirty-six hours. Then the doctors would say, Now you're ready for—go back in combat. I couldn't tell you how many people. There isn't anybody that, if you saw—when we go to Summers Mill today, every car has a Purple Heart license plate on it. Anybody that I know personally has been wounded at least twice, many more than that. And some of them, pretty severely and come back. It's not that terribly different than these rotations that they have in Afghanistan and Iraq that you had. You go back. Of course, the motivation was very different.

I think that there were—one specific instance that I think would illustrate what I'm talking about. There were two brothers that were—their parents were from Italy. They looked like the epitome of the Mafia, both of them. One brother was killed in France. The other brother went berserk. He went into the German lines with a bayonet and just killed as many of them as he possibly could.

There's a guy in Arlington, he's been dead now five years, who was in one of the outfits that I was with. He was from Rhinebeck, New York, upstate New York. His father and he were masons, stonemasons. A great big guy. I would say, for the most part, he was not one of the nicest guys that anybody would want to meet. He was always—on board ship going to Africa, he was the mess sergeant. And all of a sudden they made him a first sergeant. Now, in North Africa, he found himself on one of these mesas because that's what they had. You had these dried streams, and then you had these mesas. He was on top of them. He was surrounded by a hundred Germans. He was with one or two other people there. I call him Sergeant York. I mean, he killed a hundred Germans around there. He is highly decorated. This guy has a room—his wife still lives there. John Miller was his name. John Miller has a room in his house that's like a study. You would think it's a war room. I mean, he never could stay away from it. He stayed in the army both in

France and all over Europe and eventually came back and he was in the reserves. He stayed in it.

When he was made in charge—by the way, he started our chapter—when he was in charge of one of our unions, whatever it is, he acted like he was first sergeant in the army. He told everybody what to do and how to do it. It was sort of like saying, Don't argue with me. You know, that kind of thing. One time, I told him, "Get over it." He said to me—it was like people like that that bluffer—"You shouldn't talk to me like that." (both laugh) You can imagine, over a period of three-and-a-half or four years, of the kind of things that you encounter.

I think, if you keep your eyes and ears open—I was probably the only one or maybe one or two other people that had a college education, number one. That came from a background totally different. I had to have people help me at first to make my bed in the proper way to have bed inspection, that kind of thing, because I'd never—in my household, that never happened. What I'm talking about is I guess I really came from a somewhat different background. Then, at the same time—I mean, you were still learning the language. Or having had so many really traumatic experiences coming to a new country, adjusting yourself to people I'd never seen before, living with them and going to school in different areas. It's difficult to describe that and picture it because you're living in a constant adjustment period. Constant, different time.

SLOAN: You know, as you were talking and thinking about your response or what you thought of what you saw, you also had the unusual experience that Nazi injustice—you weren't surprised that there was Nazi injustice, right?

STERN: Not at all. I think people thought, in the service that knew my background or knew some of it anyway, how would I react to what I was doing? In many ways, I found myself acting or reacting in no different way than American soldiers around me, my buddies all around me. They knew what I was, what my background was. Because you're close and personal with a hell of a lot of people. These companies were made up of 182 some-odd people per company. You know, that's a lot of people. You lose some, and you have some replacements. You live together all this time in danger and nice situations, whatever. You never even think about getting home or going home or thinking about it. Because you just feel, How long is this going to go on? When you finally are through with it all, you're numb. You're just numb. You just don't feel anything. My wife will tell you that, when she was on a co-op job in college in Washington, DC, at the time, her father and my surrogate mother—that's another story—were living in Washington, DC, at the time. They were sitting around—Honey, was it on the porch or the living room?

C. STERN: Yeah, it was on one of those metal gliders, yeah.

STERN: And a plane went over. I just reacted. I automatically slid halfway under this couch or whatever it was.

C. STERN: He couldn't get under it, but he tried. (laughs gently)

STERN: It was just a natural reaction that you had.

C. STERN: He just got up and tried to crawl under something that was impossible. I thought then, What is he—took me a minute to figure it out. I thought, what is wrong with him?

STERN: Honey, you want to ask these gentlemen if they would like something to—

C. STERN: Well, I would. I would. I was just waiting.

pause in recording

STERN: You had some—

SLOAN: Yes, sir. I had a couple more questions. I wanted to ask you in particular about Nordhausen. One of the things that you mention when you read the piece you wrote was this issue of local knowledge of the camps. The citizens in the nearby towns, their knowledge of the camps. If you could, talk a little bit about that.

STERN: Well, almost everywhere you would ask people in these communities whether they knew that places like this—especially where there were some very unusual things that were going on. Especially in a camp like that where the town is less than two miles away, I mean, within walking distance. They claim, We never knew this place existed. This was just a plain defense mechanism to say, We're not involved in this. We didn't know anything about that this existed. You found that in the German Army a whole lot.

In this comment that a guy makes when I'm at my old apartment in Berlin. Of saying, My best friends are Jewish. You know, as if to say—he didn't have to say anything to me. He could have said something about, Is this place the same as you remembered it when you were a small child? Or something like that. No, they have this built-in—and this is almost like a trait on the part of the Germans that throughout, whether in the service, in the army, or in civilian life that I found was a kind of thing. We're not involved in this. No, you were just wonderful people that just obeyed the guy at the top.

So I think the interesting thing to me was that our own people who were Americans, not like me at the time. I mean, I knew what was going on. I knew what they were saying. Our guys knew exactly what was happening, too. They were, at the same time, just infuriated. Most of them were saying, These SOBs don't know what's going on? Well, don't tell me that. I think it made everybody—their reaction was just anger at that feeling. It seemed wherever you went that they, whether soldiers in combat areas or civilians, they—

An interesting thing happened. We were going through the Siegfried Line, and lo and behold, we come upon a lot of wooded areas, hilly, wooded areas. We happened on a beautiful, absolutely beautiful, big mansion. A hunter's lodge, so to speak, but very, very fancy. We just walked in. There was nobody around at the time. I saw all these paintings and beautiful frames on them, deer heads all over the place. It was a typical hunting

lodge, but it was very fancy with Persian rugs and all this kind of—in a very remote wooded area around there.

All of a sudden, this guy who was very distinguished-looking in a hunting uniform, white haired, tall guy comes up and talks to my company commander. I said to the company commander at the time, "You know, this could be an area where we could set up headquarters here, even if it's just for a night or two nights, whatever it is." He said, "No, I'm not going to ask him about that." I said, "You mean to say that we're supposed to stay overnight here on the ground or in foxholes, whatever it is, when we can tell this son of a bitch that we're going to stay in your place and we're going to take it over?" No, I remember this because I was furious. Because I thought to myself, This arrogant, no-good, son of a bitch was apparently just, "This is my place. You don't come in here." We could tell him what we wanted to do instead of him telling us. That was a different incident we had.

For the most part, people were scared to death. Civilians for the most part. They were very servile in many respects. I think the comments by the mayor and people that were in some governmental capacity in that little town of Nordhausen—they were the ones we talked to. We didn't know any of this place was—this was here. Professed not only ignorance but any kind of horror. They just went about their business like somebody looking the other way, and this kind of thing. But we said to him, You're going to take able-bodied people from your town. And we want it right now, and your shovels that you have available to you and you start digging these trenches. That was it at that particular time. I think, at that point, most of us—and not just myself, but many of us in our outfits were so attuned to their way of thinking and the way they reacted.

Our guys, in a way, were much more sophisticated than I realized that they were. I thought, Was I very different from the rest of our guys who were Americans—and I had been brought up in a different country that not only threw me out, but was intent on killing all of us—that I would feel different. They didn't. They felt pretty much the same as we did. I think that, whether it's in combat or in general feeling about what the Nazis were doing to us, that we were really basically defending our country, our way of life and everything like that. I think they felt as strongly for the most part. There may be a few people who, to them it was a day-to-day way of life and really didn't matter. We had our share of guys who were Virginia farmers or Pennsylvania farm people. Or we had people that were in the fire department of some little town in upstate New York. Everybody from all walks of life, really, were just mingled together. There were people who were truck drivers in civilian life. They were—the motor pool was always guys that were mechanics, something like that. You had truly a mixture of everything.

I didn't mention to you earlier that, when we first came into the Ninth Division, there were people that, because of the Depression, found that the army was the only thing. They had been in it since the late thirties. And do you know that most of them had been in the CCC, in the Conservation Corp [Civilian Conservation Corps]? They knew that kind of life. That was, in itself, an experience of something. The hangover from the Depression was all over. I experienced it when I came over in 1936, mind you. The remnants of the way people lived, the way people thought about money, the way people

thought about jobs, your entire life was still very much in—you sensed that—was very much, not a recovery, but coming slowly out of a terrible, terrible situation. I sensed that very much so. Because in Germany, we were too preoccupied with what was happening to us and what would our life be like that we—you didn't have that intuition or that feeling that you felt. When my great-uncle's wife took me around New York for a whole week to museums and Radio City Music Hall and all over the place, you didn't pay anything. There was no admission to anything. Everything was free. Compared to what, not necessarily now, but in the last ten, twenty years. These cities were as drab as anything you've ever seen. I mean, everything looked drab.

In 1937, we had a terrible flood. The Ohio River was flooded up and down the whole—Louisville was half underwater. The downtown of Cincinnati, which was actually built fairly high up, was all underwater. I worked for the Red Cross. Those of us who were in high school, we worked for the Red Cross at the time. For a whole week we had no water nor electricity in our homes. We went about our business smelling a little, but we did what we had to do. (laughs) I learned a lot of things fairly quickly. But it was a period, when I think back, that took a long, long time to get out of. That terrible period that we were in. By the way, the house we were married in was a—Cathy here?

SLOAN: She's gone.

STERN: —was an old brownstone house in the lower part of Manhattan. We were married there. The uncle that owned the house was one of the brain-trusters in the Roosevelt Administration who wrote a lot of the original New Deal legislation. A number of their people. And I met, through him—or met through them then, some of the people that were very much involved in writing all the legislation. There was a man by the name of Corcoran [Thomas Gardiner Corcoran, 1900–1981], there was a guy by the name of Ben Cohen [Benjamin V. Cohen, 1894–1983]. They were all the Harvard brain-trusters, for the most part. Were interesting people, very interesting people. When I came back from the war, there were a number of people who had been in the Roosevelt administration that were either distant relatives of mine or had been working in various capacities heading certain branches of either the War Production Board or some legislated units that had been in some branch of the administration at the time. It was interesting. Did I mention to you that I had an interview with James Reston at the *New York Times* after I got home, and I decided that I would not want to become a journalist?

SLOAN: Oh, I didn't know you went to see him, but—

STERN: I actually went to see him because my family urged me to. That this would be so interesting for me to write war stories. I thought to myself, I don't know. The future doesn't look really very bright in journalism. I just felt that, having been exposed in college to some journalism, I thought that was not exactly—was more like being a Gypsy (both laugh) than having a real job.

SLOAN: I'd like to ask—again, in your description of Nordhausen, you talk about spending five to six hours in the camp itself. Can you give me a little more of a description of what you did during that time and interactions you may have had?

STERN: Actually, I suppose in a sense you could say, having a lot of freedom, we were there, and there was no combat situation at that particular time. I hate to say it that way, but, in some way, we were sightseeing. It was more—suddenly, you come upon this thing, and we were concentrating more on taking pictures. Like one of them, in taking pictures of these ovens, and you climbed over and get—all along with it. You watched these people dig these trenches. You told some of them what they should do. I recall it just was almost like a flash that you were here, there. Because so many things—you were always on the go. This was, in a sense, the same way. I tried to explain to Mrs. Levinson this same thing. I said, We didn't—first of all, we came upon there by accident, really. All of a sudden we see these railroad yards. One of the pictures—they're not very good. I got out of the truck and said, "I want to climb on that flatcar, these little flatcars, and see—" reaching up like this, "to see how high these fins really are." Several other guys did the same thing.

Then, get back in the trucks and, lo and behold, here two minutes later you come upon this tunnel. And this big netting around there. And these great big poles that looked like they're made like a piece of knitting that are stacked up there outside of the tunnel, that are apparently part of the rocket that go. What part, I still don't know to this point because everything was disassembled. Seeing this narrow-gauge railroad thing going right into this building. And we went in there first, to take a look there. But other than these benches and these chains and other things that you saw there—and it was fascinating to see how these lights were spaced all over the place in there. That tunnel was all lit up. It looked like a factory that had been emptied out completely. Then you walked a little further and, lo and behold, you see all these people lying there on the ground. We started taking pictures. In a way, cruel as it may sound, it's just—you almost—it wasn't a matter of having a bunch of people come at you and say, Oh, I'm—none of that happened. Because the few that were alive were virtually dead. You had people that were dead on the ground and living, barely living, and that's what you were concerned about.

You walked around. There were no barracks. There were no facilities. If there were barracks, they had been bombed out. In the periphery of the camp, there were any number of buildings—some of them are in the pictures—that were completely bombed out. Just the structure, the steel structure was still standing here and there. Then, along with it, you were constantly feeling, I'm going to throw up because it's just overwhelming stench. At the same time, it was so quiet. It was just dead, this dead silence. It was like a cloud was overhanging everything. It was just eerie, a very eerie feeling of no sounds or anything like that. It was highly unusual in that respect. That I remember. And then, it was a matter of also—some of our medical officers apparently did get involved in sorting out and seeing whether somebody was still alive and keeping them going. And having the townspeople take the dead skeletons, virtually. That's what they were. People were just skeletal remains of people that were put in these trenches alongside. There are, probably even in well-known magazines at the time, *Life* magazine, other places have pictures of this. Because sooner or later, journalistic people were always accompanying the units, one way or another. And you had people that took pictures of it.

You know, I was always interested. There were some really well-known people; like Ernie Pyle was with us on several occasions in North Africa and Sicily and France. A guy that used to work for *Time-Life* magazine, by the name Wertenbaker, was a famous writer or foreign correspondent. There were some English correspondents. People that worked for the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* and things like that that were going around. My father would send me clippings from English papers where our division was mentioned, some fighting or some things that he would send me.

One thing that I remember—I don't know whether I still have it somewhere in my files or not—was a cartoon of a Churchill figure talking to a guy who looks real drab, an older man. Churchill's saying to him, "You would do me a favor if you kept that date to yourself," meaning the sixth of June. (both laugh) It was a—at the time it was really telling a photograph—I mean a cartoon. It was the typical English humor. I would say that, again, it wasn't something that you—with everything that was happening to you and what you were doing on a daily basis or weekly basis or whatever, that made that experience into something that you have in your memory day and night. I mean, I could see it in front of me just like I could see the guy that's not any further than you are sitting there. Suddenly his whole—that part of his face is gone all of a sudden, and all this blood spurting out. Or seeing people crushed not more than ten feet from you, something like that, or blown up. It's just—in a way, I have to laugh when I think to myself that my parents were—every night were nervous wrecks. As were all the hundreds and thousands of other people going down into the subway—which are quite deep in London, anyway. And so they were protected. And hearing all these guns go off at night. I said, I'm sleeping for the first time in two years in a bed. Jesus, that is just—what fortune that I have. To hell with whatever happens if a bomb hits or something like that. (both laugh)

SLOAN: I'm in a bed.

STERN: I'm in a bed. So, you know, a lot of little things that you could think of that are really not of any great importance. My father would greet me at the train coming from Winchester into London and would say—my stepmother's name was Annie—"Annie's going to have a roast for you. And she had to pay with all kinds of points." You know, or whatever it is at the time. Because she knew the butcher, and you did a little finagling with getting some really good—"She's going to have a roast for you tonight." (both laugh) Just the greatest.

SLOAN: Those are the good memories, yeah.

STERN: Yes, they are. But little things like that come to your mind of what you had. We were stationed outside of Winchester, roughly about five miles outside of the town of Winchester. We were on an estate that had a manor, but where were we stationed? I had a room that was for the stable boy. And I was sleeping on some sacks that had straw in it in a stable room. The stable itself was large enough where somebody had built some type of bunks where a lot of our guys were living there. They fortunately had a double-decker bus that shuttled back and forth from this estate to take you into town. They were going, and even late in the evening. If you had a pass to go into town, whatever it is.

In 1967, my wife and I rented a car in London, and we went down to Winchester. I had taken her to a place that was a very famous seafood place in London. And she got violently sick, got food poisoning or whatever it is. She was in the backseat of the car moaning and groaning. We get to this very old inn that we on occasions went to that had a pub and had a little dining room. As we got our luggage out, the guy that helped us with the luggage—and I said, "Do you have something like a soft drink that has—a carbonated soft drink?" "Oh, you mean a Pepsi." "Yes, I think that would be wonderful for her to have." Later on in the dining room, she—I would asked the waiter, "How about a brandy and soda?" So she got better. And I remember we had the only room—which was on the third floor in the attic practically—that had a bathtub in the room, not down the hall. Before you went to breakfast, you turned on the faucet, because it was dripping. By the time you'd get it half-full, you had—

But the interesting thing was that we had a plaque. Our division had a plaque in the cathedral, the famous cathedral. We now have plaques on the Ludendorff Bridge, which was 2011. They had a big ceremony there. We have a plaque now in the Hürtgen Forest. So the Ninth Division is marked very well, and there are several little towns, Barneville in Normandy and one or two other places that have plaques about the Ninth Division. We've been there. (both laugh) No, it's really nice to have something that is a real memory. That is a more or less permanent marker of sorts. That we can say that we've had major engagements there, or things of that nature. I think, you have a lot of pride in being, in a sense, lucky enough to be in that kind of a unit that you have a lot of pride in. I think this is why we maintained this kind of an association that we have and to have a lot of long friendships. Even with a lot of the widows, we see a lot of them. We spend time with them. And like I said, these are the kind of times that are very special to us in many ways. Because, like I say, if anything in my life—as varied as it has been, if that's a word to describe it—this has been really the watershed in my life because I think it—in many ways, you feel you've grown up. You experience something with all the different experiences that I described to you briefly here and there that I've been through in my life. This is something that we've always held on to, those of us who are still alive.

I have a friend of mine who I knew socially a little bit. Was a captain in the artillery in our outfit. He's from Cincinnati. We correspond. He's going on ninety-four now. He goes to one of the downtown clubs virtually every day and plays bridge. He's still—they've been married even longer than we have because he married just before he went overseas. You know, we see him at these association meetings, but we write to each other. On occasions, you've mentioned some particular aspect of the division that has happened.

One of the horrible things that happened to us, we've had for the past six, seven years, we had—the treasurer of our national association lives in Maryland, near Washington. He was in the engineers. I never knew him in the army—I mean, until we were in the association. He was always the guy that arranged for the hotel and where we were staying and all the meals and made all the arrangements for everything, transportation, this, that, and the other, whatever. Turned out that about a year ago they found that he had not paid any of the bills to the hotel, the Sheraton Hotel in New Orleans, from last year's national meeting. The money is not accounted for anywhere. So he's been under investigation and all kinds of stuff. You sort of feel, the few of us who are left, Why would something like

this have to happen to us? After all the things we've been through that you have a guy—and apparently—you trust everybody. There were no bonds. This guy was treasurer. There were nothing to have him—basically a structured accounting that has to be for somebody like that in that position. Because you're dealing with thousands of dollars. Fortunately, the association has some investments that go back a number of years. At some of the meetings that we've had, three-day meetings usually, they've made a little money on it. That was put into investments for the most part. This happened to us at this late stage in our—this is really something most unfortunate.

SLOAN: Yeah, yeah that is. But you're still having your Pennsylvania meeting.

STERN: We are having a meeting, and the sons and daughters are just doing a wonderful job. They are just—

SLOAN: That's great.

STERN: A lot of their people are in business or in professions, and they're people in their forties and fifties and early sixties. They're vigorous. They are. They just love to do all this stuff for the old-timers. Even the thing of, if you're coming there in wheelchairs, stuff like that, they push us. They'd do anything and everything for us.

SLOAN: That's great.

STERN: Just wonderful. Can't say enough about them. It's just a wonderful feeling that we have so many, including my own kids, that are so intent of doing things for their fathers. It's just a wonderful thing. Here, my three kids volunteered and said, We're going to come to that meeting—(both talking). So we're all going.

SLOAN: That'll be fun.

STERN: Anyway, if you have any other questions, let me know.

SLOAN: Well, I think we've done a good job. I know we haven't covered it all. I know you've got more stories, but—(both speaking)

STERN: Oh yeah, lots of stories. I just—in a way, you go through that period, and in my case, my whole life was in kind of a turmoil. In a sense, you could say that. But there have been some awfully good periods, too. I think one of the things that I've mentioned to you that has nothing to do with the war is just that—this gentleman that I was working with—just the two of us in a quite successful business. Not only was he—I mean, the integrity that he had, his reputation, was just stellar. I mean, it was just terrific. You felt that you had a relationship here that was so, so good. It was nineteen years. I didn't realize it until after he was dead. Somebody said, "You know that you worked with him for nineteen years?" And I said, to go out after forty or more years in business, and the tremendous experiences that you had. These were probably the best years of my entire career, and to look back on them as so satisfying, not only financially, but I think in relationships. In the kind of business friendships that you've built with people in this part

of the country. Some very, very important businesses in the energy-related businesses. That has meant a lot to me. It's been a very gratifying thing.

But, at the same time, I rebuilt a defunct business. When I came here, competition was absolutely fierce. What we called the consumers, the mills, the foundries. There were situations that were pretty unsavory in many instances. You went into a business where there had been—our competition had done a lot of payoffs. There were some unsavory things that were going on, and you had to break through a lot of that over a good many years. There were a lot of headaches and a lot of heartaches that went into a lot of these years to build them up. I tell you, the kind of business that we were in, there were many, many years where I didn't see my kids grow up. My wife was doing a lot of it because I was always gone somewhere all over the country, always traveling. Among other things, I was, I guess, the representative from the Southwest in a huge national trade association where I had to attend meetings in mostly either Chicago or Washington, or whatever it was. Did a tremendous amount of traveling, whether just in the Southwest—in my case, it's almost on a national basis. Like I say, the four years on the West Coast, where I would come home for a long weekend maybe every three or four weeks, something like that. Then you're going right out there again. When I think back, it took an awful lot out of you because it was a long—a real drag.

If you can think of anything else that you—pertaining to Nordhausen. But I wanted to particularly explain to you, because having had this meeting with Lila, I felt that she was—it surprised me in a way. But at the same time, I think she was apparently very close to her father.

SLOAN: She was, yeah.

STERN: And I'm sure in some ways that his breakdown must have been a—especially some of the people she interviewed in this book, you could tell that they were—I think much more so than our guys and myself were—it stayed with them in such a way that it was a very, very strong, traumatic part of their lives that they could think back. It had to be partly because most everybody she interviewed had very limited combat experience. The length that we were in—I mean, I had no idea how long I would be in the service when I went in, nor what I would be involved in. Both from a mental or even physical standpoint that was so severe. I think she really—I think she was in some way disappointed that I didn't say to her that this was a terrible, terrible blow to me to see those—

SLOAN: I appreciate you sharing your experience the way you experienced it. That's what I wanted to hear today.

STERN: Well, that's—it has to be that with me. Because I just feel that—I told you some very personal things here about my life and about my family that I feel is—but, at the same time, it is part of my history, my life. It's a long history.

SLOAN: It's all connected, yeah.

STERN: It is all connected in some ways. You know, you feel sometimes, How could you survive all this and be halfway normal? (both laugh)

SLOAN: That is a great point to end on right there. Mr. Stern, thank you for your time today. I know Robert wants to thank you as well.

STERN: I appreciate it. And doing—as I say, I think, to me, what you're doing is—either from a historic standpoint, and I hope for generations to come—is really something that—it's lucky that we are around to be able to do this and to do it in great detail. I don't know what interviews you have, whether they are in that same depth or length. But I think, if it's recorded for future generations—I hope somewhat more in detail and differently. Certainly the media that is involved allows people to see and hear what has really gone on. It's just impossible for me to understand that there are people around—and lots of them apparently—who will say it never happened. It doesn't have to come from Iran or anything. It's right here in the United States. It's just amazing to me, just amazing. With all the photos, the direct accounts, the fact that there are people alive who've been in the camps, it's amazing to me how some of the people that I've met, although they were very young at the time, what they've gone through. Virtually everybody has lost one or more family member, close family members. Some of them, a whole lot of family members. It's just a period that—how anybody could possibly even say this never even happened. It's amazing to me.

SLOAN: Yeah, it is. All right.

end of interview