

Emil Gustav Hirsch audio log

Narrator: Emil Gustav Hirsch

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Also present: Hirsch's son Bernie Hirsch

Date: October 21-23, 2022

Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Log compiled by: Teresa Bergen, July 2023

Begin Track 1

- 00:00 introductions; in the army, he went by Gus
- 00:38 born November 6, 1925 in Chicago; names of parents and sibling
- 01:10 father worked for state of Illinois Department of Unemployment
- 01:36 lived with grandparents on Oakwood Boulevard; description of neighborhood
- 02:43 describes his grandfather for whom he is named, a rabbi and scholar; biography coming out soon; Luxembourg postage stamp in his honor
- 05:17 his other grandfather, David Einhorn, was a rabbi and an abolitionist who came to the US in 1855
- 06:15 first cousin Edward Levi was president of University of Chicago and US attorney general under President Ford
- 07:02 relative who was an expert on progressive relaxation
- 08:00 publications of great-grandfather Samuel Hirsch and of David Einhorn
- 09:05 Hirsch family started the reform Jewish movement
- 10:10 story of a Catholic group hiding a German Jewish nun in a farmhouse for three years; woman who tried to save many Jewish children, but they got gassed by Nazis
- 14:47 Hirsch got to tour a farmhouse with a false floor where people tried to save Jewish children
- 15:36 Hirsch's speaking and writing as a witness bearer and liberator; Hirsch doesn't speak German

- 17:10 on differences of education within the army: “I wasn’t philosophizing or doing anything at that time. I was trying to stay alive with everybody else.”
- 18:35 Hirsch took the USS Mariposa from Boston to Liverpool, then to Omaha Beach, where he cleared mines
- 19:45 would have loved to drive the Red Ball Express, but didn’t know how to drive at the time: “My family couldn’t afford to own a car in the Depression.”
- 20:12 witnessing destruction in London while on a 24-hour pass
- 22:10 traveling in the dark by truck for three nights from Ensdorf on way to liberate Bastogne; warming their feet with a blowtorch; no headlights
- 25:30 maintenance truck fixed the other trucks in the column
- 26:30 captain emphasized that they were all expendable
- 26:55 Hirsch learned to drive backwards on dirt roads, got his military driver’s license
- 29:20 explanation of double clutch
- 29:50 Learning to drive a jeep on a French highway. Hirsch was told, “Everybody’s going to get out of your way. Go as fast as possible.”
- 32:40 seeing his first casualty while relieving the 5th Army west of Moselle, a friend named Sergeant Cadwood
- 37:31 reaction to his friend’s death: “I accept reality. That’s what it is. I can’t change it. You feel very bad about it, because it’s your particular friend... But you have a job that you’re doing. ... This is a real war. This isn’t a maneuver or something like that. You’ve got to go on.”
- 38:56 rough vernacular of Patton and soldiers in general
- 40:57 learning to operate the radio and use Morse code
- 42:05 learned to write his initials in Morse code
- 43:59 after he found a pipe, his buddies decided to teach him to smoke it; got very sick
- 47:02 Hirsch was the youngest person in the group; his buddies treated him as a mascot
- 47:53 late in October, the army decided to withdraw the 378th in order to attack Metz; Hirsch and about 20 others left behind to fool Germans into thinking they were still holding their positions in foxholes west of Moselle; loudspeakers simulated tank and motor noises
- 54:39 this ruse earned him the Combat Infantryman Badge and the Bronze Star; having to gauge just the right amount of activity without overdoing it

- 56:15 spent first night in Metz in somebody's cellar
- 56:31 during mail call at Metz, he received a tin of fudge from a friend, which he shared with his buddies: "You're not thinking about the world or the overall picture. And here there's fresh fudge."
- 59:10 on leave, getting a driver's license in Chicago based on the many miles he'd driven in Europe; didn't have to take test
- 1:01:27 more about the family friend who sent him the fudge
- 1:02:59 his nineteenth birthday was about the time of the attack on Metz
- 1:04:07 people would knit abnormally long scarves for the war effort
- 1:04:37 writing and receiving letters, or V-mail; all mail was censored
- 1:06:28 job duties: guard duty, reporting sick calls, and especially typing, since Hirsch was the only one who knew how to type
- 1:08:43 German plane flying low over the fort Hirsch's company was occupying; sergeant caught at latrine with pants down; fortunately, nobody was shot
- 1:12:30 noticing differences in farmhouses when crossing country lines; use of human fertilizer in farmlands
- 1:14:03 differences in European latrines
- 1:16:10 used helmet for everything, from carrying toilet paper to using it for shaving and cleaning clothes
- 1:16:53 going up to eight weeks without a shower; cold field showers that lasted a minute
- 1:18:34 use and cleaning of a mess kit
- 1:19:50 soldiers shared packages from home, whether it was fudge or pickled pig's feet
- 1:21:06 his company was very active moving from place to place, and they were lucky to be motorized and not have to walk everywhere
- 1:21:41 crossing river to get to Metz; stories about his idol and mentor, McKenzie
- 1:25:53 tricking a German woman into giving them fresh eggs from a farm
- 1:28:27 McKenzie really wanted an SS officer's ring and was willing to kill to get one
- 1:29:20 capturing a bridgehead in Saarlautern before the Germans blew it up
- 1:31:31 seeing the town of Aachen reduced to rubble
- 1:34:00 always slept in his clothes and shoes, because you never know when you'll have to get out; got discharged with 10% disability due to trench foot

- 1:35:31 sleeping in a sleeping bag; no tents
- 1:36:53 story about Patton getting blocked by traffic
- 1:42:46 Patton's emphasis on getting soldiers hot Thanksgiving meals and fresh socks
- 1:44:20 lingering effects of trench foot
- 1:44:57 sick call
- 1:45:25 remembers a time in a foxhole he got scared enough to pray; recites a prayer he knew in German; that was the moment he was most scared in his life
- 1:50:10 Meyer mentions a prayer his own father taught him
- 1:50:50 reflects on prayer, fear and hopeless situations, such as tremendous casualties going on during the war
- 1:54:05 end day one interview

Day 2 interview

- 00:00 arriving in Bastogne; "And the stench was terrific. Dead horses as well as people."
- 1:00 a lot of artillery was moved by horses and mules; animals still were widely used for power in French villages
- 1:53 human feces as fertilizer; use of holes and outhouses
- 3:16 use of the term "fuck"
- 3:34 talking to a professor about changing use of words while both were hospitalized with pneumonia at Indiantown Gap
- 5:10 Hirsch mostly avoided using military vernacular
- 6:00 sign off; son Bernie Hirsch identifies himself as an air force auxiliary search and rescue mission pilot
- 7:24 recording ends

Part 3, Before Metz Hour Speech, Sunday Oct 23, 2022

- 00:00 current ways of copying research materials; use of phones
- 2:32 left the service in January 1946
- 3:00 after the Battle of the Bulge, went to Amsterdam; joined a special combat team attached to the British Second Army
- 3:38 got a presidential unit citation; looking at a 1944 photo of the company in Indiantown Gap

- 5:04 mentions a German slide rule he took from a Nazi
- 5:26 shows his Bronze Star, Congressional Medal of Honor, Combat Infantryman Badge, four battle stars, Good Conduct Medal
- 6:30 shows his army-issued Bibles, New and Old Testament, which he kept with him all the time
- 8:00 British Army shut down every afternoon at four for tea
- 8:24 night patrols in Germany with the British Second Army, looking for enemy Germans or Russians, while fighting to take Bremerhaven
- 9:40 in a small German town, meeting a family who had hidden a Jewish nurse and some escaped American airmen in a hidden compartment under their house
- 13:10 in this same town, a local midwife placed 250 Jewish babies in Catholic families for protection; “I’m talking about the human side of the Shoah.”
- 14:35 Germans caught the woman who owned the farm with six children; they tortured her and gassed the children
- 15:30 Hirsch holds the responsibility of bearing witness
- 16:47 liberating a Russian POW camp: “And these skeletons came out. Literally— looked like Halloween skeletons... There was all these skeletons running around the street and these are Russian prisoners of war that we were liberating.”
- 18:06 learning of Roosevelt’s death
- 18:40 no knowledge of Truman
- 19:00 news of V-E Day: “We were all happy. We were all ready to go home right that day.”
- 20:20 returned to the US on the Mariposa; had 30-day leave in Chicago
- 20:55 while staying with his parents in Chicago after the war, a woman mortally injured in a fire insisted Hirsch take her baby
- 23:31 end recording

Part 4, Metz Hour Speech

- 00:00 Cliff introduces Hirsch
- 1:14 remembers some of his dead comrades
- 2:41 shares photo of his buddies in the Anti-Tank Company of the 378th Infantry Regiment at Indiantown Gap, PA, shortly before deployment
- 3:54 all soldiers who serve on the same side as you are your buddies

- 5:44 at an international Rotary Club meeting in Germany in the 1980s, he met the son of a fallen soldier from the 378th Infantry Regiment; the son was going to France to visit the grave of the father he'd never met
- 7:02 meeting an older couple in Winchester, England, who were very kind and sympathetic to Hirsch as a soldier far from home
- 9:09 sings a song about buddies; applause
- 10:06 recording ends

Part 5, after Metz Hour Speech

- 00:00 talking about the buddy song, Meyer mentions a recording with a harmonica
- 1:15 Hirsch still recommends entering the service if you have certain talents, such as a grandson who works in cryptoanalysis; examples of people who maximized their military training and educational opportunities
- 4:33 changes in modern technology make many concepts universal
- 6:10 Hirsch took classes from Milton Friedman while studying economics at University of Chicago; he looks at world from an economic point of view
- 7:20 going to war broadened his understanding of the world, made him braver in seeking opportunities
- 7:54 challenged to a duel in Mexico City
- 8:22 accompanying a Mexico City bullfighting empresario to pick out bulls for a bullfight
- 9:18 seeing his parents again after war; his uncle couldn't pick up Hirsch's heavy duffel bag
- 10:30 no problem reintegrating into civilian life
- 11:00 his hobby in the army was boxing
- 11:35 he was on a troop train returning to Camp Shelby, Mississippi when they heard about the atomic bomb dropping; "I didn't know what dropping an atomic bomb meant."
- 12:44 hearing about the war ending
- 13:08 on the Mariposa, soldiers played poker and craps
- 13:47 worked as clerk/typist in company headquarters helping get everybody discharged
- 14:37 somebody else asks him about his time at Indiantown Gap, where he spent about six months; they talk about being replacements
- 16:30 other man mentions crapping on a street corner in Paris; reprimanded by higher-up

- 17:21 sightseeing in Paris in May 1945; paying his way with cartons of cigarettes
- 18:40 during combat, duffel bag kept in storage; “All you had was what was on your body or on your helmet.”
- 19:35 the important thing in life is to learn to be human; reflections on religions; Hirsch’s forebear Samuel Hirsch was looking for a religion of humanity
- 21:12 discussion of *Mein Kampf* and Hitler’s motivation
- 23:26 Hirsch toured the Reichstag in 2016
- 24:08 Meyer carries a picture of a child being terrified by Nazis to help him remember what is worth fighting against
- 24:51 Hirsch met a man who was left on the street in Budapest as a child by a Jewish mother hoping her son would pass as a Christian
- 26:34 Hirsch has given talks on the Holocaust to students in Germany
- 28:30 “I am not a philosopher about wars or anything else... If your country calls you, you should serve. Period.”; you use whatever talent you have to help out
- 31:31 “You’re not just an individual in the military. When you join a company, all of these guys are your buddies. You’re not standing alone.”
- 33:05 they say their goodbyes, repeat their names
- 35:11 recording ends

