

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: Emil Gustav Hirsch

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Also present: Emil's son Bernie Hirsch

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Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Editor: Teresa Bergen

Part 1, second night of reunion –

David Meyer: This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th, of the 95th Infantry. And tonight, I have the great honor of talking to Mr. Hirsch. Could you say your name, please?

Emil Hirsch: Emil, and here we... I will add my middle name Gustav, Hirsch. When I was in the army, the guys couldn't pronounce E-m-i-l, so they called me Gus. In this group, I'm Emil Gus Hirsch, emphasis on Gus.

Meyer: You're born November—

Hirsch: Sixth, 1925.

Meyer: And you were born where?

Hirsch: Chicago, Illinois.

Meyer: Chicago, Illinois. Do you have brothers and sisters?

Hirsch: One brother.

Meyer: What was his name? Or is his name?

Hirsch: Abraham Hirsch.

Meyer: What were your parents' names?

Hirsch: Jeannette Hirsch. And my father is David Einhorn (PH)] Hirsch. And my mother was Jeanette Hirsch.

Meyer: What did your father do for a living?

Hirsch: My father? He eventually worked for the state of Illinois, for the last many years, from around 1938, in the Department of Unemployment, until he retired when he was 79 years old.

Meyer: And your mother was a housewife?

Hirsch: My mother, we lived also with my grandparents, my mother's parents, on Oakwood Boulevard in South Side Chicago. About five miles, five or six miles south of the Loop, and about a mile from Lake Michigan. Called Oakwood Boulevard. It ran between, in those days, Grand Boulevard and Drexel Blvd.

Meyer: And Drexel Boulevard. Was your—

Hirsch: And [unclear] then ran into Hyde Park Boulevard. Hyde Park is now where the University of Chicago is, and where Obama was living and all that stuff.

Meyer: Okay. Okay. We have some of your earlier times in the war. Just to get you from Indiantown Gap, so you're at Indiantown Gap.

Bernie Hirsch: Before you move on, you should go back a generation or two.

Meyer: Oh good. Please cut in any time. A generation or two. Tell me about that?

Hirsch: I'm named after my grandfather, Emil G. Hirsch, who Hirsch High School was named after in Chicago. He was a rabbi at Sinai Congregation from 1880 until 1923 when he died. He was on the founding faculty, the Trinity faculty, University of Chicago, a Baptist university. He was the editor of the Bible for the Jewish Encyclopedia of 1903. And his father, Samuel Hirsch, was the chief rabbi of Luxembourg, but he was also a German philosopher. And there's a new book coming out—it's in English, it's being published by a major 300-year-old publishing company in Berlin. It's about Samuel Hirsch, on November first. And it was written by the head of the department in the Netherlands, whatever university is there. But also, it's actually published by Cambridge University. I haven't read it, because I haven't seen it, but it's coming out November first. You can get it through Amazon if you want. It's Samuel Hirsch, and what's the name of the—

Bernie Hirsch: I'm not sure.

Meyer: I'll take a look for it.

Hirsch: --the chief author. She's a Cambridge professor and all that stuff.

04:34

Meyer: So you have this—

Hirsch: Samuel Hirsch.

Meyer: The name of the book is *Samuel Hirsch Philosopher of Religion, Advocate of Emancipation and Radical Reformer*. (Editors: Judith Frishman and Thorsten Fuchshuber)

Bernie Hirsch: That's a postage stamp with his face on it.

Hirsch: That's a current postage stamp that they, a Euro stamp.

Meyer: From Luxembourg.

Hirsch: In his honor. Because there's great interest in his philosophical work.

Bernie Hirsch: Just wanted you to know who you're sitting across from.

Hirsch: Exactly. And I have another grandfather who was a rabbi named David Einhorn (PH). He came into the United States in 1855, preached against slavery in Baltimore. He came to Baltimore. In 1861, the federal troops—they were having riots in Baltimore—and President Lincoln sent federal troops in to quell them. Sixteen of the federal troops were killed, but they discovered a paper where my great grandfather, David Einhorn, was on the top of the lists of abolitionists that they wanted to kill. So the federal troops took him and his nine children and his wife in a covered wagon to Philadelphia. That's a whole story in itself. And that's David Einhorn.

And then my first cousin, Edward Levi, was president of the University of Chicago, and the attorney general, U.S. attorney general.

Meyer: Under who?

Hirsch: President Ford. And Bernie and I had a conversation with President Ford at his memorial service. How he was invaluable. Saved the whole Department of Justice after Nixon, of course. And Scalia was there. We talked about, Scalia told us how he had been his student, and all that stuff. And all these different things happened. So those are some of the-- Then on my mother's side, Dr. Edward Jacobson, whose book I told you about, was destroyed—

Meyer: Yes. When your best friend was killed.

Hirsch: --when my friend Cadwick (PH) was killed. He was a person who, the great, from 1900 at the University of Chicago and other places on progressive relaxation. He was a worldwide—

Meyer: Authority?

Hirsch: Not only authority, but he did all the analytical stuff. You can read about him. So I got a lot of--

Meyer: So you have this full pedigree of learning and philosophy.

Hirsch: Going back to the Middle Ages if you want to go back that far.

Meyer: No, you can go back to the Middle Ages.

Hirsch: That would take too long. And you talk about Metz. He even studied in Metz in the early 1800s. And my great grandfather, Samuel Hirsch, he went to the University of Berlin in the

1830s. And he wrote a 950-page book. It's in German, of course. And he called it *The Religious Philosophy of the Jews*. Which are still discussing. Einhorn wrote a prayer book, and his prayer book was used at least in half the congregations in the United States in the 1860s, '70s, and '80s. Because it was in German. But most of the congregations were German. And they used to call them Einhorn congregations.

Bernie Hirsch: But 8 million of the current 13 million Jews in the world are reform, which our family basically started.

Meyer: Started the reform movement.

Bernie Hirsch: The reform Jewish movement.

Hirsch: Actually, we went back to Berlin—

Bernie Hirsch: Dad and I did.

Hirsch: Bernie and I did. In 2010 for the 200th anniversary of the first reform school in Seesen, Germany. And that's because Napoleon came in and he freed everybody, in that sense. He didn't free everybody. So I have a whole family history of all this stuff.

Time 10:04

Bernie Hirsch: So it's kind of interesting, someone with a Jewish pedigree going to fight the Nazis in World War II.

Meyer: Sure.

Hirsch: And then among other things that you would be interested in is that I got in contact, they got in contact with me, with the Dutch underground. With one of the leaders of the Dutch underground.

Meyer: When?

Hirsch: It was I think in February of 1945, in [Diessen?], the Netherlands. Interesting thing, and you can follow him up in the, you can follow him up in the Yad Vashem. But the interesting thing about this whole thing is we all talk about the Shoah, and the Holocaust. I was actually asked to teach a class in Berlin in 2016 on the Shoah. And the class I taught was what I called the human side of it. Because Nico, N-I-C-O, Dohmen, D-O-H-M-E-N, he was Catholic. And the whole, everybody was Catholic. There were 250 total by his account, of children, of babies who were placed in Catholic families all throughout this territory. And he wanted me to—I was on guard duty at our CP. And he rode up on a bicycle. He was about three years older than me at the time. I was 19, he was about 22. And he asked me [unclear]. I said yes. He said, "Could you come with me to a farmhouse about a mile-and-a-half outside of [Diessen?]" And I did.

I went in and talked to my captain, because I was on guard duty at our company CP. He said, "Of course, take your M-1 rifle and be careful". So I said, sure.

So he took me. And then he wanted me to meet a German, a nurse, a Jewish nurse from Rotterdam who they had hid out in this farmhouse and showed me how it was done for three years. This is a Catholic group. But they'd also saved two American airmen who had been shot down, and they hid him there for three months, until they finally, they wanted to show me, take him to the Belgium underground, and returned them to the United States command. And so Johanna Van Borden (PH), I think her name was, she's also in the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. She had been picked up, she was a midwife, that's how she got involved in the whole thing. And they were able to take all 250 kids and place them there.

Meyer: So these are Jewish kids.

Hirsch: But the German commander caught her with six kids. And they took her in there. This is all in Yad, what I'm telling you. And they took her in there. And they sent the kids, they gassed the kids, they killed the kids immediately. They sent them away to be killed. But to her, they tortured her. And they got word to the Dutch underground in Amsterdam. And they sent a very attractive young lady there to try to see if they could. And she got there and she was able to entice the commander on the basis that he let this lady go. And he did. And then she disappeared. This is all part of the story I was told. I met that lady, Johanna. And her father, who was about 70. She was about 40 at the time. All these people were in this farmhouse with the false floor in the kitchen. And they took me down underneath. And they had a couple of cots. They had a clandestine radio. They had a mimeograph machine in those days. And they had paper with Queen Wilhelmina on the front, and on the back they would get messages. Whatever they wanted to do. And he wanted me to bear witness, and I'm doing that right now, to you.

[Time 15:33]

And I also did it through the Holocaust Museum down in Naples, Florida. They asked to interview for the same purpose. As a liberator. So when I talked to the German class in Thalfang, Germany, which is in New Trier, and this was in 2016, I talked about what I called "The Human Side of the Shoah." I became friends with Mr. Ittenbach (PH), who's the Catholic scholar. He's written a lot of books. He's interested, and has written a lot of books. And Samuel Hirsch, got a new one coming out. He asked me to do a preface for him, which I did. It's in German, I don't have any-- he translated what I said.

Meyer: There's this irony that you have this whole pedigree in Germany, who write these books that are 900 pages long in German. And you know them from translations, but you don't speak the German.

Hirsch: Yeah, that's just an incidental. Bernie asked me to give you a background; I'm giving a background.

Meyer: Sure. But with all this learning and everything, we're at Indiantown Gap and my father would talk about the people from Tennessee, the people with no learning. The people who were illiterate and all this. How did, did you look at them with compassion? Or did they, were they rum dumbs? Or—

Hirsch: Look at who?

Meyer: The other people. You're learning your job as a young soldier.

Hirsch: I don't live in that, I live in the present world.

Meyer: I mean, just going back to talk about your experiences then as a young man. You're eighteen, you're there, and you go back to the war. Just at this moment. As you say, the human side. You're there at Indiantown Gap—.

Hirsch: I wasn't philosophizing or doing anything at that time. I was trying to stay alive with everybody else. We were being shelled, we were a mile-and-a-half from the Maas River, where the Germans were all on the other side, they were sending shells over. It was not an exploration that you--

Meyer: Well, let's go there Because I was taking you back to Indiantown Gap, taking you chronologically over. But where did you first see combat? I know that people got shipped over on the USS America, or the Mariposa.

Hirsch: Yeah, I went over on the Mariposa, from Boston to Liverpool, and from Liverpool to Winchester. I stayed in Winchester six weeks and—

Meyer: Camp Barton Stacey?

Hirsch: I don't—

Meyer: Maybe.

Hirsch: I went from Liverpool to Omaha Beach, like everybody else did. It was an English thing. At Omaha Beach. I would have loved to be on the Red Ball Express. Our trucks and drivers were there, but I never drove, so.

Meyer: So what do you do during the time of the Red Ball?

Hirsch: So the mine platoon was clearing mines out at Omaha Beach. So we started clearing mines. We weren't just sitting around waiting.

Meyer: No, no. So you're clearing mines from Omaha Beach.

Hirsch: Yeah, because I didn't drive. I would have loved to be a driver, just because I wanted to learn how to drive. My family couldn't afford to own a car in the Depression.

Time 20:03

Meyer: So when you're on Omaha Beach clearing mines, just a question. Do you just see where they are and you explode them? Or what do you—

Hirsch: They have a mine detecting thing, a handle with a thing. I don't know, we did a lot of different things. Remember that everything has to come together. You have to do all, whatever it was, then you moved on. When I was in Winchester, I got a 24-hour pass, but not allowed to sleep there but I could be there. And I went to London, and I saw all the destruction there. I was there when they were sending buzz bombs over. So you didn't have to go to Omaha Beach to see the destruction. It was horrible. There was a lot of destruction in London.

Meyer: Was that the first time you saw destruction of that magnitude in war was in London, where you saw the buildings?

Hirsch: Yeah. I went to visit what was supposed to be Westminster Abbey, and all the stuff you—Tower of London, and so forth—and everything around you was just total, just rubble. The only more rubble I saw was Aachen, when we came through Aachen when we were attacking to the Siegfried Line, after Metz.

Meyer: So you took the liberty ships, I think, to Omaha Beach, and now you're clearing mines.

Hirsch: We took whatever the British gave us, the British. The boats with hammocks.

Meyer: Did you ride in the forty-and-eight trains?

Hirsch: No. The reason I had the trucks was so I could ride in the trucks. I was royalty.

Meyer: You were! You got to ride in a truck all the way to--

Hirsch: And then you talked about relieving of the boats. The biggest thing was that we were trying to take pillboxes across a small river and we were having tremendous casualties. And the captain called me in and from my foxhole to his and said, "The line companies are being decimated. Did you take machine gun?"

I had not, because I had gone to the funeral of my grandmother, an emergency. I said, "No, but I think I can learn pretty fast."

He said, Well, go to your foxhole and wait, and I'll send notice if you have to go to relieve the line company." And that was the night of course, that Patton pulled everybody out and sent us. So what happened is we were pulled out there in the, as I recall it, in a farmhouse or something around there. We were told that we were going to do it every night. We didn't move during the day. And that we were going to move in complete dark, complete blackout—we just had a luminous thing on the back of every truck—that's how the driver could see. I wasn't driving; I was sitting in the back. So in the back it was bitter cold. Bitter cold. You never could imagine. So one of the guys had liberated a blowtorch. And so we decided it would be a good idea, and we had liberated a bunch of comforters. And we had them all over heads, and things. So he lit a [laughs] to warm our feet with this blowtorch in the middle of the truck. And that's the way we merrily rolled along at a very slow pace all night. And we did this for three nights until we got to Bastogne. To relieve Bastogne.

Time 24:56

Meyer: I know that some trucks had cats' eyes; they had small headlights and most of them were covered?

Hirsch: They did not have any headlights on, that was a complete no-no. They just had this luminous disk on the back of each truck. No headlights whatsoever. None. If a truck broke down, it got pushed off or pulled off to the side. The last vehicle in the line was a ¾-ton maintenance truck. And they would come, and do the repair. And then they eventually rejoined the column if they could repair them. But they wouldn't move until they repaired them. This was to keep the line going even if the truck was disabled.

Meyer: So it took you three days to get from Ensdorf, or where'd you leave from?

Hirsch: From Ensdorf, somewhere in there. I don't know, I say I was not consulted, I just went along with the ride. So, wherever it was, I was riding. The captain told us one of the things which didn't make us happy. He was explaining that we were going to relieve this thing that we're all expendable [laughs]. That was his word, you're all expendable. So if you want to be expendable you're in a good group, [laughs] He wasn't very optimistic.

Meyer: No. I want to go back to where you start relieving, go back a few weeks. So where you relieve the 5th Infantry. Were you in Nancy? Or were you up--

Hirsch: No, the 5th was before Metz. This was, from Omaha Beach we reformed. You know, Patton was stopped and he ran out of fuel. So we moved first. I remember it being at a dog track outside of Paris for a couple days. And we had our tents, and all this stuff. We weren't treated with box seats. I remember some of the guys jogging around the dog track. I think it was a dog track, or a racetrack. Whatever it was. Then we went to Paris. In the convoy. We all went through Paris. And then—I should say that the guys knew I wanted to learn how to drive. So one of the things, when we were held up down in back with the Red Balls, was that they took me in a ¾-ton truck, I believe it was, and this is a French farm area. And there was a dirt road going all the way for miles. And they said, in a truck, in a car, or anybody, if you can drive backwards then you can, you know, so they taught me. So they put me in the truck, and I had to drive backwards for miles. So this actually happened. So I drove back for miles. And they said, "Good, you're good. You passed the test. We're going to give you a military driver's license." [Meyer laughs]. So that's how I got my military driver's license. He said, "If you can drive backwards you can go forward." Of course you had a double clutch. You know what that is.

Meyer: For people who don't know, explain what a double clutch is.

Hirsch: Double clutch is that you had to, when you shifted gear, you put the clutch down, you shifted it, you let the clutch up, you push it back down again, and then shifted it into the gear. And then whatever gear you're, either reverse, or whatever gear you're trying to go to.

Meyer: So you drove backwards for miles. And they're right. If you can drive backward, you can drive--

Hirsch: Yeah. So now, I graduated to being allowed to drive a jeep. This was rapid.

Meyer: It is rapid.

Hirsch: Well, they weren't being paid extra to delay it. So they said, "Okay, now we'll teach you to drive a jeep." So they put me in a jeep, and we're going down this highway and there's all these French people, and there's refugees, and so forth. "Everybody's going to get out of your way. Go as fast as possible."

Time 30:23

Which is about 35, 40 miles an hour. So they were having a great deal of fun. We didn't have nothing else to do. I'm the baby of the group. I'm one of the guys that they sent to train. So they're training.

Meyer: Yes. So they're having fun with you, too.

Hirsch: So they said, "Go, go!" Sure enough, the French people got out of the way when they—

Meyer: When you're going 35 miles an hour, they just spread out of your way.

Hirsch: You don't slow down, you don't wait, you just keep going. And so I did. Then it was raining and all that sort of stuff, and I'm learning how to drive. And then a couple of lieutenants wanted to go to, I think division headquarters. So the jeep driver who's training me how to drive the jeep, and I'm the driver; he's sitting next to me, he's the instructor. So the two lieutenants get in the back and we're going as fast as possible. They're bouncing back and forth. [laughter] So I got them to the headquarters, and it's raining and it's miserable out in this whole place anyway. I got them to the other end of, to where they were going. I said, "Want me to pick you up?" They said, "No, no, we'll find somebody, we'll be able to get a ride."

Meyer: (laughs) That's a great story.

Hirsch: Well, this is how my teachers were, training the trainees.

Meyer: Sure. That's great, the idea of what happens, of how you were trained. Now if you want to, you know stories, you know things. anytime you want to come in and just give a prompt, feel free. What I try to, go ahead.

Hirsch: No, I'm not—

Meyer: I was wondering, so where were you when your friend was killed and you were on guard duty? What's the name of that?

Hirsch: Oh, I don't know. This was our first night that we actually took possession of, the foxholes were there. I think it was the 5th Army, but I--

Meyer: Yes, 5th Army and 90th—

Hirsch: --division or something like that we were replacing.

Meyer: So you go into someone else's foxhole. Had you slept in foxholes before?

Hirsch: I had not slept in a foxhole where somebody's shooting at me, and having artillery come at me before, no.

Meyer: What did you think?

Hirsch: I didn't think. My first job that night was to be—remember, I was a basic. So now I'm given the guard duty. And I think it was raining and so forth. It was cold. So I'm at some intersection outside of our CP, on guard duty. That's one of the things that I, was utilized. What you're supposed to do. You get a password, if I recall, every day. A pass and counter pass. And I'll tell you another training story that I got on that one which will amuse you. But before, to answer your question, they came. And I think it was raining and so forth. At any rate, this jeep pulls up with a small trailer back of it. And I halt them. And the driver says, "Yeah, Sergeant Cadwood (PH) was killed, and this is his body." So I went and lifted the tarp, and sure enough there was a body there. Close it. And that was when I said goodbye to Sergeant Cadwood. You can go. And I don't know what else—you were on guard duty for X number of hours, like four hours maybe, or whatever it was. Then somebody relieved you. I don't recall exactly what all that was about at this stage.

Time 35:13

Meyer: Let me ask you just a question there, because this is, is this the first death you see? Had you seen Germans dead, or different things? Or was Sergeant Cadwood the first person? And he was a friend of yours.

Hirsch: This was the first casualty that I had ever seen. I'd seen the bombings in London and all this stuff, but it was the first one that actually a deadly, that actually happened. There were shellings. We knew there were going to be shellings. You know, .88s—the Germans had. And these were all pretty well honed in to where they wanted to go.

Meyer: You're still west of the Moselle.

Hirsch: Yeah. We haven't moved across yet. We were just relieving the 5th, and we were taking their foxholes. Which was fine. We didn't have to dig our own. So that was the first casualty I ever saw, yeah.

Meyer: So you're on guard duty. The first casualty you see is a good friend of yours.

Hirsch: In the evening, I don't know what time. Who coincidentally was a friend of mine.

Meyer: Was a friend of yours. And then you end up working another four hours of guard duty.

Hirsch: I'm on guard duty. I'm still on guard duty. You don't go off of guard duty. You're there to stop and make sure that you don't have somebody infiltrating the lines, or patrol.

Meyer: Sure. I just wondered, because you're still eighteen, nineteen now. You have this thing and you see this man. And then, if I were there and they left me for four hours—

Hirsch: I was eighteen at the time.

Meyer: You're alone with your thoughts and your feelings. What do you do? Do you clamp them down? Do you just concentrate?

Hirsch: In my particular case, 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. And you do all that. You know that. But you have a job that you're doing. You're still trying—

Meyer: You're still trying to do it.

Hirsch: This is a real war. This isn't a maneuver or something like that. You've got to go on. So the driver took it on, and I just went on with whatever was doing. I was on guard duty. I wasn't doing anything except making sure that whatever I was supposed to do I was doing.

Meyer: After that then, do you go into Metz?

Hirsch: This is before Metz.

Meyer: I know. But what's next after?

Hirsch: Well, of course, we relieved along the whole line. As I recall, for a few days we were occupying the line, and then the Germans were directly across from us. Like two football teams in today's world.

Meyer: This is still before Metz.

Hirsch: This is before Metz. This is before we crossed the river and all that sort of stuff. This is where they had been pinned down and had been decimated. And the 95th Division was relieving them. Patton had come and talked to the officers, the noncommissioned officers. You know. Patton had told—it was related to me. I wasn't at the meeting, but it was that Paton and Twaddle and Metcalf and all these were left over from World War I, and they were all in the regular army during that period of time. And so, as it was related to me by one of the people who was there, that Patton presumably said, "If you old farts play ball with me I'll have you in Berlin by Christmas."

Time 40:13

And that presumably were the words. And he had a lot of them in his vocabulary. But this was military vocabulary. We understood what fuck was, and what snafu is, and Kilroy, and all these

other things that grew up. You understand that. You don't talk about it. You don't think about, how can you be nasty? [laughs] You're just using the common vernacular, whatever it is, and describing the situation.

So then what happened is, we were doing what we were supposed to do, and among other things I had to also learned how to operate the radio. Because, this is in a company school. So in order to operate the radio, the Morse code, you had to be able to memorize the five clicks, and write them down as you're hearing the next five clicks. Which I was able to do. It's the radio operator's—and then, because he is the radio operator, he figure out how to get some radio. Uses very little battery voltage, or whatever it is. And so one of the company's assignments was to learn how to operate the radio, in case you need it to use Morse code.

Something else I learned—and these are all asides—something else I learned, I had an old, a 50-year-old, he worked in a machine shop. And he decided to send me, he took a piece of metal and shined it down so it could be a nice mirror. And it's like a 3 x 5 card mirror. And he put my initials in it, in Morse code, dot-dot-dot-dot-dot-dot. So I learned that your initials can be in Morse code as well as in alphabet.

Meyer: Oh, that's interesting.

Hirsch: So, every book today that I put my initials in, I put it in dot-dot-dot-dot-dot. I learned that from a guy named Bernard Barbie (PH), who sent me a mirror so I could see myself [laughs], but he put my initials in Morse Code on it.

Meyer: So you still use that.

Hirsch: Absolutely. That's the best thing. You don't just figure the book, but if you want to see books that you own, you put it down in Morse code. Nobody will even know you put the dots there.

Meyer: No. Nobody knows. You had said before, I don't know if you loop back, there was an amusing story you thought of, and then we went into—I don't know whether it was in basic or something. But something just before we went into combat. If that comes back to you, if you want to jump—I'm just sort of going chronologically—but if you want to jump anyplace, anytime.

Bernie Hirsch: You had a story you want to tell about the password and the counter password when you were on guard duty.

Hirsch: Pardon?

Bernie Hirsch: You said you were on guard duty and you had a story about the daily password.

Hirsch: Oh, yeah. I never smoked, even though they gave me cigarettes every day to smoke. I never smoked. Among other things it costs money to smoke. And I didn't have any money. Every money I had was, I'm talking before the army, and in the army. And so, but somewhere long the way, of course you go into all the places where people live, and I found a pipe. And I told the guys I found a pipe. Oh, that's great. And the pipe is caked with, you know, whoever had

owned that pipe had smoked it and it was thick, the residue in the pipe. And the guys tell me now, if you're really, they want me to learn, they were going to get me the pipe tobacco.

Meyer: Yes.

Time 44:58

Hirsch: They have the pipe tobacco. Now this is the whole group of my buddies from the 95th Infantry Division. Anti-tank Company. Who were teaching me all these things, to drive. They're going to teach me how to smoke a pipe. So, they knew the big thing I loved was the D-bars. Do you know what that is?

Meyer: No.

Hirsch: That's chocolate. Solid chocolate. For energy. They were called the D, like dog, D-bars. And my cigarettes I would always trade for some D-Bars. And you get these rations out. So they said, "Take one of your D-bars and enjoy it, and then we'll teach you how to smoke."

So I come, and they have me light, sew this to the top, and show me how to light the pipe. I'm puffing on the pipe. And I get so sick. And we're in a farmhouse or something. So I open the door, rush out, and the guard says, "Halt! Who's there?"

I said, "Go to hell." [laughs] And of course I heaved and heaved and so forth. And I learned that it's not a good idea to have concentrated chocolate and a pipe. And tobacco. But I wasn't going through the protocol of what's the password and all of that. And they were all laughing. I could hear them all laughing. They're training me.

Meyer: They are training you. So you're the youngest person in this.

Hirsch: Of the whole group here.

Meyer: So they're always getting you to do things.

Hirsch: Well, they're always helping me learn. Learn how to put the blindfold around me, to teach me how to put a rifle or carbine together without having—in the dark. So you make it dark, put a blindfold around you. But that's the story that I had referred to when they—that was--

Meyer: They were very affectionate toward you.

Hirsch: Yeah, I was sort of like a mascot in that sense.

Meyer: You were a mascot.

Hirsch: The captain had assigned me to straighten out all the army manuals that they had. The first sergeant had me help with the morning reports, and things that he didn't want to do.

Meyer: What was the captain's name?

Hirsch: Graves, G-r-a-v-e-s, I think.

Meyer: Captain Graves.

Hirsch: Right.

Meyer: Now the Germans are over there, and you're still west of the Moselle.

Hirsch: Then they decide, then they decide to—when I talk about “they,” I had nothing to do with the decision—to withdraw the whole regiment division to attack Metz. The 378th.

Bernie Hirsch: Before that, had you already relieved the 5th Division?

Hirsch: We first relieved the 5th Division, who got bogged down and who had been decimated by doing some of this stuff.

Bernie Hirsch: That's late October, or early December?

Hirsch: This was late in October; I don't know, I didn't keep the calendar or anything. But at any rate, it was cold.

Bernie Hirsch: On the west side of the Moselle?

Meyer: Yeah, west side of the Moselle.

Hirsch: Whatever it was on, was on what I call this side of the river, and Metz was on the other side. But in order to do that, they had to withdraw everybody. The troops. As I said, the Germans were, whether it was 1,000 yards or whether—there was nothing in there, there was no barrier, no nothing, it was just there. So every now and then they would send in patrol. And the patrol would go out there and they would go through this charade. We all knew that everybody was there. But now comes the time, and this is where—they're going to withdraw.

Time 50:18

Meyer: “They” meaning?

Hirsch: Meaning the 378th, the Anti-tank Company, ABC—everybody is going to go to attack. But they need 24 hours. So none of this is explained to me. I'm just told, we have to have a few people left, and here's all the foxholes. And the kitchen people are here, and the radio people I think went with them.

Meyer: So do they leave you?

Hirsch: Yeah, they left me and twenty other people, or whatever it was.

Meyer: To take care of what--

Hirsch: Not to take care of anything but to go between foxholes every now and then in order to show activity during the day. The withdrawal started at night.

Meyer: So that the Germans wouldn't know that they were withdrawing.

Hirsch: And they had loudspeakers simulating moving tractors, you know, moving tanks, and motors, so that they could hear activity. And then you were supposed to go between, one to another, and then to another...

Meyer: To foxholes.

Hirsch: Yeah. But you don't want to linger too long because if they have a sniper or somebody, you don't want that. Nor do you want them to think that you're playing games.

Meyer: No.

Bernie Hirsch: Seems to me in many respects you were a very lucky person.

Hirsch: Well, I didn't hear you.

Meyer: That you were a very lucky person.

Hirsch: Well, I was. I didn't think about any of that.

Bernie Hirsch: Being on the wrong side of the river at that time is the difference between staying alive.

Meyer: Yes. He was just saying being on the wrong side of the river at that time was the difference between staying alive and just being lucky or not lucky.

Hirsch: Well, remember that we already discussed that the mine platoon, any of the mine, some of them were booby-trapped, they had to be removed. The units that had to attack, had all be brought so they could move them across.

Meyer: So you move them across the Moselle?

Hirsch: And it takes time to move 3,000 men.

Meyer: Sure. Did they cross in boats? Or did they capture the bridge at this time?

Hirsch: I think that probably the engineers had put up a bridge. I don't really know.

Meyer: Okay. But you're still on the west side of the Moselle. You're keeping up this charade.

Hirsch: All I know is that everybody has left. I've got these loudspeakers. I've got the actors of yesteryear [laughs], pretending, they're telling on the stage. They may pretend that in Shakespeare's play that you have King Arthur or whoever it was. And just make it seem as real as possible. [laughs] And that's what whoever produces those were doing, with loudspeakers. If you've got speakers, use them. And hopefully the Germans listening aren't that curious, or knowledgeable of the stage. [laughs] They're lucky they didn't have you over there. You would say, "That doesn't sound right to me." [laughs]

Time: 54:07

Meyer: The sounds that are coming, is it like, they didn't have tape recorders.

Hirsch: These were loud, I don't know how they were making the sounds. All I had to do, I was with four or five different guys. I think they were cooks. And other people who were nonessential, moving. Not part of a team. So that's what we were supposed to do. That's how I earned the Combat Infantryman Badge, and the Bronze Star. Just moving from foxhole to foxhole.

Meyer: So you'd go from foxhole to foxhole. What would you do to make them think that there was activity? Just the act of movement?

Hirsch: You would carry a garbage pail from one place to another.

Meyer: (laughs) That's just great. Improvise.

Hirsch: You talk about improvising; this is improvising firsthand. First degree improvising. You don't want to make a mistake.

Meyer: No, you don't want to make a mistake.

Hirsch: And you were told don't overdo it [laughs].

Meyer: No, you had to do it just—

Bernie Hirsch: No mugging.

Meyer: No mugging. No, you don't want to go there.

Hirsch: You don't want an extra bow [laughs].

Meyer: No, you don't want to do anything where you stand still too long.

Hirsch: I wasn't thinking about all these after effects. I was thinking of the audience, that's for sure.

Meyer: You were thinking of the audience. How long were you doing this?

Hirsch: We did it for that whole day, while they were grouping in order to attack. Then they did the attack.

Bernie Hirsch: So dad was flanking during this time.

Meyer: Yes.

Hirsch: And then somewhere along the way they came back and collected me and the twenty or thirty others, and we then joined—I remember my first night in the Metz thing was in somebody's cellar.

Meyer: In Metz itself?

Hirsch: I guess it was in Metz itself; in somebody's cellar.

Time 56:22

Meyer: In Metz itself.

Hirsch: I guess it was in Metz itself, yeah. In the cellar. But I remember that for a different reason.

Meyer: Why?

Hirsch: Because the big thing is your mail call. And my friend Felcher (PH) was the mailman. And normally you don't get much mail. But it hadn't been delivered now for quite a while. So now we were in a place inside somewhere, and they decided to help our morale while they planned—to deliver the mail. So to my surprise I get—it's about the size of a Quaker Oats oatmeal box. It's a tin can though. And this comes for me, from my older friend Bernard Barbie, who had sent me the mirror. Now he sends me a can. It's all waxed in. Came from the United States, it was probably sent a month or two before, or however long it took to get there. And it's delivered to me in Metz. First thing in Metz. So I opened the wax, and the other guys are interested too, we don't get packages that much. Maybe it's something. So, in it is a fudge. He had poured the fudge in, and then sealed it all. So the fudge was still soft. So we had a great time. Our first night in Metz, those of us around us, with our Metz kit spoons and so forth, each indulged in some of that good fudge.

Meyer: Oh my gosh, how wonderful that was.

Hirsch: Absolutely.

Meyer: Oh my gosh.

Hirsch: You're not thinking about the world or the overall picture. And here there's fresh fudge.

Meyer: Fresh fudge. Holy cow. Holy cow. So when you finally got back and saw your friend, you thanked him for the--

Hirsch: I'll give you a better story. So when I come back on my 30-day leave, when we returned to the States on the Mariposa and I'm home. Now I have a military driver's license, but I don't have an Illinois driver's license. And the cars are mostly stick shifts; these are old cars from the '30s. So they want to lend me the car, but they've got to get me a driver's license. So he takes me down to City Hall, or downtown near City Hall, wherever it was. Remember just now I'm in my mid-nineteens, never had a driver's license. We go into wherever they issue driver's licenses in downtown Chicago. And he said, "This young man," or however he called me, "I'm bringing him here to get his first driver's license, but he's been driving all over Europe." They said, "How many miles did you drive?" I said, "Maybe 10,000." He said, oh no, it had to be closer to 100,000. "He's been all over Europe." So the examiner says, "Well, we'll put down 150,000." And he issues the license. I never had to take a test or anything. This is the war effort. [laughs] So I have never taken a driver's test. Except the first one.

Time 1:00:04

Meyer: Driving backwards.

Hirsch: Driving backwards, and I got my military driver's license. I did have a military driver's license.

Meyer: That's a great story. So now you're in Metz and the fudge.

Hirsch: Right. Pardon?

Bernie Hirsch: Was your friend with the fudge, was he in North America?

Hirsch: Yeah, he was in Chicago. He'd been working in machine shops, that type of thing. He was in tools; he loved tools. He knew how to do all this stuff. He had been an engineer for I think Western Electric. I remember going with him. He'd been a friend of the family for years. And he had a couple sons. His mother lived across the street from us; Barbie was his name, on Oakwood Boulevard. I remember he took me with him one time. In the early 1930s they were converting silent pictures to theaters to sound. And he was working for Western Electric, or whatever it was, and I went up to the control in one of the theaters, and he showed me how he would convert it so you could hear the sound, and so forth.

Meyer: He's a good friend.

Hirsch: A great friend, he always was.

Meyer: You said he was a few years older than you?

Hirsch: Yeah, he had sons my age.

Meyer: Oh, he had sons your age.

Hirsch: He was in his fifties or sixties.

Meyer: Oh, that's right.

Hirsch: He was not a young man or anything. He was helping the war the best he could do.

Meyer: So you're there in Metz. Had they captured General Kittel (?) Or is Metz still being--

Hirsch: They didn't consult me; I don't know who they captured.

Meyer: But was Metz freed by the time you got there?

Hirsch: No, I was rejoining the company. This was the first couple of days that we attacked Metz. This was at the beginning of the attacks. They were just returning everybody to where they were supposed to be.

Meyer: Let me just ask you now, because I know. So you're having your nineteenth birthday, or your twentieth birthday?

Hirsch: My nineteenth birthday was in November of 1944.

Meyer: So do people know? Or do they give a damn? Does anyone say, "Happy Birthday, Gus?"

Hirsch: Well we weren't celebrating [laughs] a birthday. We were celebrating the arrival from nowhere of a can of fudge.

Meyer: Of fudge. So that's almost like a birthday present.

Hirsch: It had nothing to do with the birthday. He didn't send it for the birthday. Different people did—some people would knit little scarves or something for you. And they'd think you'd get extra cold so they'd go from the floor to the floor around you. You couldn't use them very easily. But people were doing things, whatever they could, for the war effort. And this was happening back in the civilian. They were all rationed, as you know, that whole story.

Meyer: Speaking of mail call, did you write them back? Did you have time?

Hirsch: Well they had what they called V-mail. Everything was censored. But he didn't have any pretty daughters; I probably didn't write him too often. His deal for the war. I would write my mother more than anybody else. And different people would write. You'd write on what they called V-mail. You'd write and then they'd reduce it and send it over. But each one had to be censored by a company officer.

Time 1:05:33

Meyer: Did you try to give any clues as to where you were?

Hirsch: I didn't. But people would deduce, wrongly usually. People would deduce, they'd say, well, I had a hot bath or something like that [laughs]—and I want to talk about the shower, too—the answer is no, I didn't give them any clues.

Meyer: You didn't do it, but other people did.

Hirsch: And most of the clues, and the officers who were deputized by the captain to censor the mail didn't have any clues either. All we knew is that you had to do it and they'd X it out and let it go, and don't worry about it.

Meyer: So this is the early days of the battle. What's your job now?

Hirsch: Well, at this point, I'm back with the, I'm driving around, I'm with the company group that administrates the company.

Meyer: Yes. Like headquarters?

Hirsch: They call it Headquarters but it moves every night. And you're either on guard duty at this company or you're helping report the sick calls. Or, because I'm the only one who could type, you're typing an answer.

Meyer: Oh. You can type. Sure.

Hirsch: Yeah, I learned that in high school.

Meyer: In high school, you knew how to type. So you're valuable. You're very valuable.

Hirsch: On a company level, I knew what to do with all these books. I knew how to put them into some kind of order. Nobody read them, including me. But we knew how to—

Meyer: Put them in order.

Hirsch: In case we were inspected they didn't have to worry about those. If you had reports to do, they'd take roll call. Remember that the company would be spread out depending on what the assignments are. But you had to bring all that stuff--the stuff would all be reported in. But you had to put it together. And that was more or less my job, like a company clerk, clerk/typist.

Meyer: So you're a clerk typist. You're in the basement but now—

Hirsch: Well, that was in the basement. But as we start moving, now I told you about the airplane flying over the fort.

Meyer: No, you didn't mention that.

Hirsch: We were in the—and I don't know all of the dates and so forth—but for some reason we were gathered. There's a huge fort. It's maybe three or four stories high. And some German is looking over there, and we're down here. And why we're here I don't know, but we had a couple trucks there. And I know why, because they had dug a latrine along the base of the fort. And it directly down they weren't very much worried. Nobody is going to watch or worry about it. So we were doing whatever it is, putting up barricades, maybe. And I was with a team doing whatever I was doing. And suddenly, and this is a huge fort, suddenly a block-and-a-half away or something, a single engine airplane comes around the corner with German insignia on it.

Time 1:10:00

Meyer: An airplane?

Hirsch: Yeah. It wasn't an American. So we see it and we see the insignia, and then we all—whatever work team I was working with, I'm working with wherever I'm assigned on any particular day or you fill in—so we all jump for cover. I went under one of the trucks that were parked there. There were some jeeps and trucks, but I actually physically went under it. I could see the pilot's face as he came through. But he didn't strafe anybody. But the amusing thing, which made everybody happy, was to see the first sergeant, Stevens (PH). They called him the zebra because he had the six stripes, three up, three down. And we see him hopping along like a kangaroo with his pants down, pulling them up.

Meyer: He's at the latrine. (laughs)

Hirsch: Yeah. With this plane flying around [laughter]. This is for real. This is actually what happened. And the guy, he was down so close that you could see—I think he had the old-fashioned helmet on, and he was just looking around. Nobody shot at him, he didn't shoot at us. We were happy.

Meyer: That's a great story. That's wonderful. You've got such appreciation for these fine details that a lot of times are lost in the relating of the history.

Hirsch: Well, we were very thankful that he wasn't some guy coming around to see if he could strafe us. He was minding his business, we were minding our business. And we all came out from under the trucks, laughed, and said goodbye to the sergeant.

Meyer: So you stay back in Metz, and the fighting is ahead of you? And you're back sort of--

Hirsch: Well, I'm just riding along wherever I get a lift.

Meyer: Do you see any of the inhabitants of Metz, or are they hiding? Any of the French? What's it like? Are the streets empty or what?

Hirsch: As you go in combat, I've been through a lot of different things. You stop and you seek shelter wherever you can seek it, and you try to keep out of the limelight if you can. I'll give you a couple different stories that I remember. First of all, when I'm driving in the truck or on the

jeep or so forth, and we go from one country to another, you look at the farmhouses and the windmills and so forth, and there's a big difference from going to France, to Belgium, to Germany. And to the Netherlands, and so forth. And you can see that in the farms as you're going. Secondly, you smell what is human fertilizer in a lot of these places. Third, if you yourself are using their outhouses or their open latrines that they use in the house. I remember that some of them you're crouching over. Some of them had a footrest, they were more elaborate.

Meyer: I've seen those, yes.

Hirsch: But you're still out in the open, and so forth. Be out in a trench where the feces and so forth—Some of them got more covered or so forth as you got into different countries. And from farm to city. One of the things I, when I first went through Paris, we'd stopped. We stopped no matter where you were, every two hours for a piss break.

1:15:20

Meyer: Yeah, for a piss break. Yes.

Hirsch: And so, you, me, and everybody else, you'd do it back against the trucks. Everybody could watch. We didn't worry about the niceties of the thing. You get used to it. I remember when I went through Paris and I see like a wall going around a square with feet underneath it. Well of course people are using the latrines, the urinals, whatever you want to call them.

Meyer: Speaking of this, did you have toilet paper at that time?

Hirsch: We did have toilet paper. We used our helmets for everything. I did carry toilet paper in my helmets. You had a helmet liner, then the helmet. You would use your helmet for everything. I would shave out of the helmet, I would clean my clothes. They didn't have field showers and so forth. I remember going six or eight weeks without a shower or anything. Then we were brought to a place where they had set up a field shower. And they gave you a half-minute or a minute under this cold shower. And you'd get under it, and it's like Gasoline Alley, or something. You'd pull the chain, and the water would come down, and that's it. This is a military shower, and they were doing their duty getting you the shower.

Meyer: So just back in the gasoline shower. So would you pull the chain, you'd get wet, and you'd soap up? Did you pull the chain again and then rinse off?

Hirsch: You didn't pull any chain. You sat there and you got under the shower and they turned on. It was probably with motors. [unclear] pull the shower. You don't do any of this. It's a field shower.

Meyer: It's a field shower. So you sit there—

Hirsch: And you didn't get it except when you could be relieved. So I went for weeks and weeks without a shower. But if you cleaned yourself, you cleaned yourself out of your helmet. You poured out your water, if you wanted to clean, you did everything, you cleaned your clothes.

Meyer: Everything out of your helmet.

Hirsch: Out of your helmet. That was the other use of the helmet. If you were lucky to get a field kitchen set up, and you went through the field kitchen with your mess kit. Everybody's issued a mess kit. And then they would dump whatever it was into it. Scrambled eggs or whatever it was. When I talk about scrambled I'm not talking about—.

Meyer: You're talking about powdered eggs?

Hirsch: Sure, sure. Whatever it was, it was done in bulk. You're trying to feed fifty, sixty, eighty, and these are under combat conditions. You're not trying to serve them—

Meyer: You're not trying to serve them foie gras.

Hirsch: So you get there and my point I'm going to make is you eat the thing, and then at the end they have these thirty or fifty-gallon, whatever it is, garbage cans filled with hot water. And you dump the stuff. But then you rinse your field kit in there, and that's how you clean the kit. You didn't go to the board of health or anything [laughs]. You keep alive the best you can.

If you had stuff, you shared it with other people. I remember the first time I ever had pickled pig's feet. One of the guys got the pickled feet and shared it with me and others. And I shared my fudge with them. Whatever it is.

Meyer: So everyone shared.

Time 1:20:05

Hirsch: Whatever you got. Sometimes I got dried fruit, which would be very nice to get. Prunes and all this stuff that people would send you from the States. But you shared it.

Meyer: So there was a camaraderie from the sharing, too.

Hirsch: You're all in the same boat. It's like going to camp, probably. You know, Camp Granada?

Meyer: Yes. Like in the song.

Hirsch: Like in the song.

Meyer: "Hello Mudder, hello Fadder, Here I am at Camp Granada." When do you move out of Metz?

Hirsch: Well, from my memory, you know, I was always lucky to be motorized. To move our equipment, we always asked if we could ride along. That doesn't mean we were happy, happy. But we were more happy.

Myer: More happy.

Hirsch: So we would move from place to place, and almost every night we moved to a different place. It was an active thing. Now we get through Metz however we get it. Bypass it, whatever they're doing back there. We're moving ahead. And we move to, I guess, the Siegfried Line. At any rate, the idea is to cross this narrow river, and go up a thousand yards and take these pillboxes and wipe them out. But the Germans have other ideas. So everybody gets wind, we all get bogged down. Now when I'm on this side of the river, I'm lucky enough to be in somebody's old house. Now the 88s come over. Usually you have somebody who, particularly when you're eighteen like I was, nineteen, and they're training you, so I had a guy named McKenzie (PH). He was a great guy. He's half Irish, half Italian. And he was really a great guy. And he could break your arm, twist it off. He'd been in the paratroopers. Because he kept getting into fights, they bounced him out of the paratroopers and finally they bounced him to our company. He was always broken from sergeant to private and back to sergeant. Routinely. But he became my mentor. My idol, if you want to put it that way. So, I'm talking specifically about after Metz and we're trying to cross this small river and go up, I can't say it.

Meyer: Is that the Saar?

Woman [Kay Grosinske?]: That's the river, that's like six feet wide. Today we can't understand how—

Meyer: Oh, this is a river that's six feet wide.

Woman: It was on the way to—

Hirsch: This particular river, they even tried what they called ducks to go across it.

Woman: Duck boats.

Hirsch: So it's a little bit wider. Near Ensdorf, or somewhere in that territory.

Meyer: Okay. Oh, sure, I've heard them talk about [Ensdorf?]

Hirsch: Remember, they didn't furnish me with maps. They just invited me to go along for the ride. But the point I'm making is that there had been a village on this side of the river. That they were attacking. And the artillery of the Germans were firing routinely over our places. And wherever they came in, we were in this, and this is now in bitter cold in November some time. So we'd like to be in the luxury of the homes, but they're firing there. So whenever you start hearing these come in, most of the guys went down to the cellar.

1:25:00

But my idol, and I don't remember his first name at the moment at the moment, McKenzie, it's like Mike McKenzie? Whatever it was, he said, well he's not going to go down anywhere. Go down to any cellar. No German's going to--So he's back up to be sergeant, and he's teaching me. So he and I sit there while everybody else goes into the cellar. And sure enough, the shells go

over us, and they all come out of the cellar, which is a horrible place to be. And we're sitting in luxury up in the kitchen [laughter].

Now, I'll give you another McKenzie story. This time we're catching British Second Army. We're jumping way ahead. And we're waiting for Montgomery, or whoever the commander is, to take Bremen and Bremerhaven. And first of all, the whole British Army stops at four o'clock. The whole British Army. To have tea and whatever, the hot tea. And we're waiting for them to bomb the hell out of it so we can get going. So we're attached to the Anti-tank Company's battalion on a special combat team up in the British Second Army. So, among other things it comes nighttime and you go on patrol. Well, my teacher, my mentor, my idol, is McKenzie. So he says, "Come on patrol with me." And another guy who usually goes. So we get in a jeep. Now, this is at midnight now. We're on night patrol. Making sure there's no Germans running around. And we want some fresh eggs. And he says, "Here's a farm." There's no men left there; it would be women if there's any farms. So we drive up to the farm and a lady comes out and he says, whatever he says, "The Ruski, the Russians are coming and we're here to protect you from the Russians."

She says, "Oh, thank you." He says, We want some fresh eggs—whatever the German word is for eggs. And she brings them out, half a dozen eggs, fresh eggs, in the shell, she doesn't cook them or anything. So we're traveling around, but we're doing it Chicago style. Meaning—you know, Chicago style would be the cops. [laughs]

Hirsch: You shake down.

Meyer: You shake down.

Hirsch: Yeah, something like that. But at any rate, that was my— Now, McKenzie always wanted an SS officer's ring, and he was willing to kill. He was great at jiu jitsu. You would want to fight him, I'll tell you. He was teaching me jiu jitsu. And he was really a killer. [laughs] And all I know is one day he shows up with the ring that he was looking for, the SS officer's ring. So he got it off of some dead bastard.

Meyer: As part of anti-tank, do you remember any action where you did have to stop a tank?

Hirsch: I was not a participant as a crew in any of those. Remember, as I explained to you, that an anti-tank squad would be spread throughout the regiment. And I was attached to the headquarters, wherever that would be, or a group. Not to any particular squad unless I was assigned to be part of that squad.

Meyer: Okay.

Hirsch: And I remember, however, that we did evidently take one at Remagen Bridgehead, I believe. I think that is what it was called. And that we captured a bridge that we were all able to go over. And one of the anti-tank company, one of our units was instrumental in capturing that. I don't know what the details are. Capturing the bridgehead before the Germans blew it up.

Time 1:30:18

Meyer: Yes, the bridge in Saarlautern.

Woman: Well, it's called Saarlautern now. But it wasn't.

Hirsch: Yes.

Bernie Hirsch: Dad, did any of this happen in the Netherlands?

Hirsch: No, this is before the Netherlands. This is all in Germany. We're moving back in time again.

Meyer: We know that after they leave Metz they go toward Saarlautern, and there's a bridge there that they were lucky enough to circle around and they were able to capture so that--

Hirsch: All I know is one of our teams was instrumental in it. I remember going over the bridge in the jeep, and—these are all spot memories that don't mean much to me at that time, that's for sure—but it was going from one point to the next point to the next point. We were advancing. I remember when I first saw Aachen, the town of Aachen. When I talk about the structure I talked about London, but this was completely total—not even a framework of churches. Just rubble everywhere you went. I never saw such rubble. When you asked about rubble, that was really the first bigger town that I saw that was completely turned to rubble. And that memory will never—it's probably been rebuilt, but it never could be rebuilt. These were 1,000-year-old churches. That this war, with the dynamite and the bombing, and the advanced military weaponry, completely wiped out. I'm sure it was bombed.

Meyer: We've been talking for a long time. Are you tired? You're fine. How about you? Are you fine? Anything you want your dad to talk about [said to Bernie Hirsch]? Because all your prompts have been great.

Bernie Hirsch: My dad doesn't need my prompting.

Meyer: I know, but you'll remember things.

Hirsch: Well, he might be learning some things. I don't know if I should teach my little boy anything about this or not.

Male company: I could just ask you a question. My grandfather was with I Company with the 378th. I was wondering if you ever had any instances where you were either attached or if you can recall with the I Company.

Hirsch: No, I really don't remember any particular direct. I was never really attached to, one of my squads might have been, that they were attached to a particular company. I have a lot of friends from my company who could tell you about being in a house, and being attacked, and going back and forth. None of that. I could tell you that I had a sleeping bag. I love to be inside. I've been inside burning buildings, which is better than being outside in the snow. But I always

got in dressed, never undressed. Because you never know when you have to get out, and you don't want to take time.

Meyer: You don't want to take time to dress. Did you keep your shoes on?

Hirsch: Yeah, I kept my shoes on. I ended up with a little trench foot. Of course that was one of the problems that we all had. When I was discharged I was discharged with 10% disability because of trench foot, which is moisture against your feet. And you really don't get a chance to change. You don't carry, you're not carrying—

Meyer: Did you have two pair of socks?

Hirsch: Well you had different socks. You probably had more than two pair. But if you're in a combat situation you're more interested in—if you want to go to sleep, you go to sleep; if you're going on guard duty, you're four hours on, or two hours off, whatever it was.

Time 1:35:28

Meyer: So did you always have an army blanket that you put on the ground?

Hirsch: No, eventually they gave you, like a, a sleeping bag. Today the kids would call it a sleeping bag. Everybody had a shelter half. So presumably you'd put your half together and then you could sleep in it. I remember some of that but not very much. Mostly, in my case you tried to find a place that you could just lie down. Whether it was on the ground or wherever. Putting up a tent is not one of the—particularly when you're in a moving situation. You're not putting up tents.

Meyer: Did you ever just go to sleep in the nighttime and it snowed and you woke up in the snow?

Hirsch: No. I didn't, I don't—

Meyer: Okay, because somebody told me that happened to him.

Hirsch: A lot of different things happened. I'm giving you general things. But if you're going night by night, I don't know.

Bernie Hirsch: You had a story about Patton.

Meyer: Did you see Patton?

Hirsch: I did not. But the bunkhouse from the mine platoon did. And they were blocking, this was early, between Metz and the Siegfried Line. And they were blocking the traffic because they were trying to clear a mine in the road. Wolfe (PH) was part of the mine platoon and his job was to stop traffic. And he stopped the traffic, but this time he stopped the traffic that had three stars on the front. So they just didn't stop, they called him over. "Soldier!" Is what he told me about it.

“Come here.” He and I were brilliant learners. We didn’t learn very much, in other words. Anyway, he went over and he says, “Yes sir.”

And Patton says to him, “What’s the hold up?” And he tells him that there’s a blockage and we’ve got to clear it. And so Patton says to him, “How long will it take?”

And he says, “Don’t know, sir.”

Patton says, “Who’s in charge?” He tells him the lieutenant’s name that’s in charge, [inaudible], I think it was. He says—now in those days we didn’t have telephones to talk to each other like you see in the movies today, but you had the walkie talkies—he says, “Have Lieutenant [Name] report to me immediately.”

“Yes, sir.”

So then, for some reason, Patton has a little compassion so he softens his tone as was told to me. He says, “Did you get your hot meal?” Meaning at Thanksgiving, or whatever it was. Because Patton loved to have that happen.

And he said, “Yes, sir.”

And he says, “Well, how did you like it?”

Now Wolfe being as bright as me, he didn’t think he was talking about how we liked the turkey dinner. So Wolfe says to him, “Well, there’s places I’d rather be, sir.”

And Patton sort of laughs and just sits back. And then Wolfe goes back to his position in the road stopping traffic. Then he calls, however, and says, “Have the lieutenant come up here, it’s important.” And the lieutenant is one that doesn’t, he’s not so highly regarded because he’s always shining his second or first lieutenant, whatever it is. So he’s taking his time to get up. So this is as Wolfe tells it to me, I wasn’t there. This is the way the Wolfe tells me. So the lieutenant gets enough to see that there’s this staff car or jeep or whatever it is with the three stars, so he starts running as if he’d been running. And according to Wolfe he then starts to salute, which is a no-no on the battlefield. And he remembers to pull his hand down.

So evidently Patton says to him in a very Patton-type of terms, “What the hell is happening?” And all this type of stuff. How long it will take, and so forth. And he tells the lieutenant, “Get your goddamn ass down and find out what’s happening and get back right away.” Because he wants traffic to be allowed.

So he says, “Yes, sir.” And according to Wolfe the lieutenant turns and runs away [laughs] faster than he was running up. Then a few minutes later he gets on the call and the lieutenant tells him, “Let the traffic go through, we have to reset something or other.” In other words, get rid of the bastard. Which Wolfe does. And that’s my Patton story.

Time 1:42:31

Meyer: That’s a good story.

Kay Grosinske: So do you remember your Thanksgiving meal?

Hirsch: I don’t remember specifically, but they’d set up the field kitchen. And normally you’d have K-rations, or C-rations, or whatever, you did your own stuff. But at this particular time, and particularly the holidays, whenever possible, they would set up and actually cook the stuff. And if you couldn’t go there they would send it out. And as I remember, it was sent out. You wouldn’t come back in a group and sit around eating. But they did do the kitchen. Patton also wanted you to have, he tried to get you fresh socks every day. But it didn’t succeed, I can tell you

that. But he knew what the problems would be with troops, particularly in snow. We were in snow, and rain, and wet.

Meyer: That's what I heard about socks. If he caught people with wet socks too much it was an infraction, he'd get angry. Because he didn't want you to get trench foot.

Hirsch: Well he knew. What I can tell you even to this day that your feet feel underneath and get sore. And if you're in the infantry and you're trying to walk, that's not so easy. Fortunately, I was seated in the conveyance.

Meyer: You had trench foot itself.

Hirsch: I did have trench foot.

Meyer: Does anything still bother you?

Hirsch: Well it's still powdery, all these years. It doesn't bother me like it did then. It would itch and get raw and so forth. I think they gave you oil of wintergreen. We went to the medical place, and that's what they gave you. The best thing is to change your shoes and socks.

Bernie Hirsch: What happens if you got sick, like if you got a fever?

Hirsch: Well, if you felt badly you would ask for sick call if you could. One of the statistics that we gathered was who's on sick call. But if you're in the middle of a battle you're not going anywhere. You'd do that, if they tried to bring you back to rest or so forth, you could do something [unclear] they would do it for you.

Meyer: Did you ever feel like you had any close calls? You don't have to talk about it. Just a question.

Hirsch: Well, I'm trying to remember.

Bernie Hirsch: How about that time you were praying?

Hirsch: Yeah, there was, this was again, wherever it was where we were trying to cross the small river, or whatever it was. And we were being pinned down. And I was called into the captain's foxhole. He'd asked me if I'd ever done a machine gun. I said, no, I hadn't taken that training because I was on leave at the time. But I could learn. He told me to go to my foxhole and wait, and he would let me know. When I went to the foxhole, I think that was the only really day when I was so scared, and that I literally said, "God, I don't know anything about any of this, where I'm at and so forth." And I said, "Help, help." And I'm talking to God in my mind. And I then said, my father taught me a children's prayer when I was about a year old. In German, not in English.

Meyer: What was it?

Hirsch: As I recall [recites prayer from memory in German]. I said that. I said that. Whatever it was, I said that. And then I sat and waited. And I'm waiting there for something to happen. And I get called, but this time I'm called because—about six or seven hours later, I'm still waiting—we're called now to come and move to the relief of—

Meyer: The Bulge.

Hirsch: You know, the Bulge. But that was probably the most, the most--

Meyer: Scared.

Hirsch: Not scared but—when one swears in a court, I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, you're swearing to God. And don't think about it. Most people don't. When you're taking the oath of office of President of the United States, you're swearing to God. Or doing confession, you're swearing to God. I never thought about any of that stuff. And to me that was my moment of—and I've never had, I've been sad, I've been a lot of things, but this was when I was truly scared, and I was turning to something that I couldn't comprehend, and saying, "Help me." That was my moment, at any rate. Normally, a lot of things have happened in my lifetime. But if you want to know when I was most scared, and really meant something when I said I was praying, that I was really talking to God in the best way that I ever knew. It wasn't something—it was just something that came out of me, that I remember to this day.

1:50:00

Meyer: That's something. My father had a prayer of faith that at times he would bring it out. On his deathbed, I said that to him, because he'd taught it to me. God is my help in every need. God is my every hunger feed. God walks beside me, guides my way through every moment, night and day. I now am wise; I now am true. Faithful, kind, loving, too. All things I am, in doing thee for Chris. The truth is in me. God is my health, I can't be sick. Got is my strength [and failing quick?]. God is my all, I know no fear, since God and love and truth are near. And he said he told his friend, his brother-in-law taught him, and he said, "Say that in combat."

Hirsch: Well, you said whatever like I thought. You know, going to a Sunday School, or religious school, or so forth, is not quite the same as being there and feeling it. And having that human reaction. You know that something happens when you're born, you're here for a period of time, something happens and you die. You don't know what happens after, or before. But you feel that you're here because there is something spiritual that happened to you. Either that, or you don't believe it. But we all know, we all go through this. Whether there's a reason for it or not, you can debate all that stuff. But when you get into a situation which is a hopeless situation, because the captain had explained to me the tremendous casualties that were happening, that were being killed and wounded, and decimated. Just sending anybody up there, but it basically was almost a hopeless task.

Meyer: It was suicide.

Hirsch: You're going across, the pillboxes are there. And we weren't knocking. Just saying, "Go away, I'm here," doesn't do it. So you were going to almost sure—.

Meyer: Death.

Hirsch: Well, you didn't know what you're going to. You don't sit around contemplating that part of it. But if you're scared, you're scared. But you know you have to do it. Some people think running away, doesn't help you any. You're scared. And that was a true, that was probably, you know, things happen all throughout your life that you get scared with, or that you pray for, or whatever. Or you contemplate, Well I'm 97 years old, now what's going to happen. But I'm accepting whatever is happening. I'm not going to change it by my, and so forth. Some people get comfort from certain poetry, or they write poetry. Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, you know all of that. The 23rd Psalm. But—that's comforting but it's like taking aspirin, it doesn't necessarily make your headache go away. It's just helping you get through the period of time. But that is to me the most meaningful thing that ever happened to me from a human point of view.

1:54:05

[End interview session- Day 1]

Part 2, Day 2 October 21, 2022

Emil Hirsch: I want to add one thing that I didn't tell you. When we finally got to Bastogne, after three nights in subzero weather, bitter weather, things were starting to thaw out. And the stench was terrific. Dead horses as well as people. Stench all around us as we worked. And this is now in the daylight. This is after the relief of the Bulge. We're still driving around and this is all left there. You have blown out tanks and this and that, but the stench—you didn't see anything, but you could smell it. And you knew what it was. And you knew that it—we don't realize that we had so many horses and the Germans had so many horses, still. But we did have. A lot of the artillery, particularly in the mountain areas, were moved by horses. Or mules, or so forth.

Male Voice: You said Americans?

Hirsch: Americans, yeah. We had whole units in there, because supplies and everything else were moved by horse. We could go into that, if you wanted to. Not that I'm involved, but there were units in Europe doing this, right now, what I'm talking about, in the French villages. All of these villages were still having the animals and the use of animals for power. We think we have everything by tractors—we didn't have any tractors there.

And I told you before that one of the things when you went to some countries that you could smell is the human feces that was used for fertilizer. You knew what it was and so forth as you're going through the countries. When you stopped and you relieved yourself one way or

another there was all different kinds of holes in the ground, some outhouses, some not, some filled up, some just there. And you did what you had to do.

David Meyer: You did what you had to do.

Hirsch: You lived like people mostly have lived, most of their lives. Just in the 20th century that we have electricity. We didn't have inside plumbing. If you had to go, you had to go. And we looked upon these functions in a different way than we do today. Today, everything is private and you're not supposed to talk about it and all these types of things.

That's an interesting thing about the use of the term, we said about the use of "fuck." Everything's fucked up. Everything's fucked. Fuck this, fuck that. SNAFU, situation normal. And so forth.

But I told you earlier that when I had pneumonia at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. And I'd had pneumonia as a kid, too. But anyway, I was a couple of weeks away in the field hospital at Indiantown Gap. And after Ferdinand Cranz, F. Edward Cranz he liked to be called, but at any rate his first name was Ferdinand. He'd been a professor. He had pneumonia too, same time I did. This was our first early military training world. And we talked about how words change over 100 years or so. That is one of the subjects I remember we talked about. And he was a professor, had his PhD., at Connecticut Women's College when he was drafted. And how use of terms change. And that was one of the things I remember talking about with him a great deal.

Meyer: About the word fuck?

Hirsch: No, probably about the word ain't. Ain't ain't in the dictionary. A-i-n-t. No, we didn't get into fucking.

Meyer: Because I know we're going to stop right now, but in the military I know, as you said, there's a vernacular. When you came back to the United States, did you have any trouble dropping the military vernacular?

Hirsch: I didn't use that vernacular mostly. But it was used all around me. I can give you a lot more vernaculars, but I'm not going to do it.

Meyer: Maybe tomorrow.

Hirsch: Not even tomorrow. You'll just have to go to bed [without knowing it]. ...

Meyer: I'll have to dream about it. [side conversation] This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th, 95th Infantry. Today is Saturday, the 22nd of October. What time is it?

Hirsch: It's actually Friday.

Woman: It's 10:25.

Meyer: I'm still on Cyprus time. It's 10:25 on Friday, October 21st. And I've had the great pleasure of listening to and talking to—could you say your name again?

Hirsch: Emil Gustav Hirsch.

Meyer: And in the 95th they called you what?

Hirsch: Gus.

Meyer: And also with Mr. Hirsch's son—can you identify yourself?

Bernie Hirsch: I'm Bernie Hirsch.

Meyer: Bernie Hirsch. Who is also in the military.

Bernie Hirsch: I'm in the air force auxiliary. I'm a major. I'm a mission pilot. Search and rescue mission pilot.

Meyer: And we're now in Herndon, Virginia. And we've had a great time talking and learning a lot. And we'll continue this tomorrow if you can still stand me.

Hirsch: It's either that or we'll get around the piano and sing some of the old-time songs.

Meyer: That would be great, too. That would be great, too. All right. Thank you, Mr. Hirsch.

7:24

[End Session.]

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

Emil Hirsch: You can go onto the floor—where are people looking down on there. And then they have all these reference books from all over the world there. They have two or three other warehouses. So if you want something, you go to the center librarian and request it, and they'll get it. They'll deliver it to you. You can't take it out.

David Meyer: You can't take it out.

Hirsch: You keep it there for yourself for seven days. And that's how I learned also how they copy. You could have Xerox still, but you photographed each thing. It was free. You bring your little computer or your chip in, and if you wanted to take copies of the whole book or any part of it, you can sit there and do it yourself, no charge.

Meyer: Oh, that's wonderful.

Hirsch: That's the current way of doing it, as opposed to the way it was when you were a boy.

Meyer: Yes, yes, I'm slowly getting into the 21st century. I've found this week, the challenges, this is the first time I've been in a position where I've been here the whole time. And no phones have worked except for the hotel. And it hampers you now.

Hirsch: Right. But you have to arrange, it goes the other way. If you go to Europe or anywhere you can arrange—I have Verizon—that it will work. And they will charge you. But you've got to do that with Verizon before you go.

Meyer: What I did was I had a Verizon chip that was in my phone. When I went back to Cyprus, they said just put in the Cyprus chip. And I did and it worked. So I came back here, I put in this Verizon chip. Verizon says no.

Hirsch: No, it won't work unless you have made the arrangements.

Meyer: Yeah, but we still keep a live Verizon account.

Hirsch: No, it's not the account. It's the country. You go to Canada, you have to do the same thing.

Meyer: Well, I have a U.S. card. So I just put in the U.S. card. But I think next time I'll make the arrangements before and let them know this is what's going to happen. Well, I'll let you go over your speech, if you'd like.

Hirsch: No, I'm not going to have do anything now but do what I'm doing.

Meyer: Well, okay. Let me ask you a few questions, now. I don't think I ever asked you, when did you get out of the service?

Hirsch: January of 1946.

Meyer: January. Early January? Mid, do you remember?

Hirsch: Toward the end, I don't know exactly when.

Meyer: Okay. We got you through the Battle of the Bulge. And after the Bulge, after you leave the Bulge, where do you go next?

Hirsch: We went to Amsterdam, and the Germans had flooded the place. They flooded Amsterdam. So we were parked outside of wherever it was. And then—this was probably early January by this time of '45—and we went on a special combat team attached to the British Second Army. I actually went up toward Bremen and Bremerhaven, and that's why I got a unit citation there. Part of that, the battalion that was sent up in the Anti-Tank Company went up there, too. This was a presidential unit citation.

Meyer: Oh, that's what it looks like.

Hirsch: Yeah, you're supposed to wear it on your sleeve.

Bernie Hirsch: Dad you're right here. Oh, let's see. Right there.

Meyer: Which one? Here?

Bernie Hirsch: This man right there, with the glasses.

Hirsch: They made glasses into my gas mask, too. Pre-made the glasses so if I put the mask on the glasses were already there.

Bernie Hirsch: You can take this as a souvenir. Has everybody's last name lined up with who they are in the picture.

Meyer: That's great.

Hirsch: This picture was taken at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. Around June or whatever it is, 1944. The whole company. Anti-Tank Company. At Indiantown Gap, outside of the barracks.

Meyer: Oh, gosh.

Hirsch: That's what they did with the companies before.

Meyer: Is this a slide rule?

Hirsch: That was one, the German slide rule that I took from Germany.

Bernie Hirsch: And a German Nazi.

Hirsch: And a German, you know, helmet.

Meyer: Oh, of course, it is.

Bernie Hirsch: He separated that from a German Nazi.

Meyer: And you separated this from the Nazi himself.

Hirsch: Well, I—

Meyer: Oh, you liberated—

Hirsch: I found it, anyway.

Meyer: You found it.

Hirsch: I don't know how I got it.

Meyer: No, no. I don't know how you got it. So this is the Bronze Star medal.

Hirsch: And this is the case for the Bronze Star. This is the bronze down here.

Meyer: Yes. For meritorious achievement. I heard there were two Bronze Stars.

Hirsch: No, that one's the Congressional Medal of Honor. And they were talking about Bronze Star was easier to make.

Meyer: And what are the medals here? This Bronze Star. Is it the Combat Infantryman?

Hirsch: That's a Combat Infantryman Badge. And then there's the campaign in Europe with the battle stars. I can't see, I think that's the one.

Meyer: Oh yes, that's the one, four battle stars. So that's Central Europe, Alsace, oh, gosh, Northern France, I think; and then Rhineland.

Hirsch: Yes, and then we were also the United States one, and then there was the peace one, and the Good Conduct Medal.

Meyer: And over here, the two books?

Hirsch: Well, these are the Bible. This is when I went in, they gave you a copy of the Bible. And one is the New Testament and the other is the Old Testament. This is the New Testament. And this one is the Old Testament, Holy Scripture, they called it. This is the whole Bible. Any soldier would get it. From the chaplain, if you wanted it. This is what I happened to carry.

Meyer: So they called this The Old Testament and the Jewish Holy Scriptures. Interesting.

Hirsch: Whatever it is, it faded. It's just a regular Bible.

Meyer: Sure. Did you keep it with you all the time?

Hirsch: Sure. You had a knapsack with you, or not a knapsack, but a big bag. You know, a huge duffel bag. Anything you had, that's where you kept it in there. Underwear, anything else.

Meyer: Did you carry anything for good luck, or a talisman or anything?

Hirsch: No. No.

Meyer: Any letters from home you carried?

Hirsch: No. No. I didn't carry nothing except what I got there.

Meyer: So you were with the British for what, two weeks?

Hirsch: British Second Army. No, we were up there for a while. I don't know. Every four o'clock, everybody shut down and we had tea.

Meyer: (laughs) That's what I heard!

Hirsch: That is the truth. And then I went on night patrols with a guy named McKenzie and somebody else.

Meyer: Yeah, your friend McKenzie.

Hirsch: We did all that up there.

Meyer: What was your job up there in the night patrols? Were you scouting or?

Hirsch: Yeah. You're looking for an enemy, Germany or Russian. In this case Russians were coming in, too.

Meyer: Oh, so you were in Belgium?

Hirsch: No, we were in Germany.

Meyer: You're in Germany, you're with the British.

Hirsch: In Bremen.

Meyer: Oh, so you were in Bremen. That's right.

Hirsch: We were fighting to take Bremerhaven. And Montgomery was having the bombers go, and we were not happy about that because it was taking—we thought we should be moving faster than the British Army moved. But they liked all these bombers. You could hear, like locust, but they're all bombers going to bomb Bremen. They destroyed the place; it wouldn't be worthwhile taking. But at any rate, that was the part of the British Second Army.

Meyer: So you're there with the British Second Army. And then—

Hirsch: That's how I also got in touch with the Dutch underground.

Meyer: Tell me about that.

Hirsch: Well, I was in the Maas River, and it's got another French name. But anyway, the Maas River separates in this case, Holland, on the other side is Germany, right up to the river. And they're shooting into Holland. Shelling.

Time 10:01

And about a mile-and-a-half, outside of the, there's a small town called Tientsein, T-i-e-n-t-s-e-i-n, or something like that [Tientsin?]. And we set up the Anti-Tank Company captain headquarters there. And I was on guard duty during the day. Outside of the, you know, my M-1 rifle. A civilian young man rides up on a bicycle. And he says to me, "Are you Yudin?" Are you Jewish. I said yes. He said, "Could you come with me?" I said, why. He said, "I want you to meet," it turned out he wanted me to meet a 28-year-old Jewish nurse from Rotterdam that they had hidden out for three years. Now this is a whole Catholic center.

So I went in and asked Captain Graves, and he said, "Well, be careful. You can go but be careful. Take your rifle." [laughs]

And I walk with him, and about a mile-and-a half outside there's a little farm. And on the farm, it's just a regular farm, I met the owner of the farm, and his daughter. His daughter's about forty, named Johanna. And the owner, who is about seventy or so at that time. And then this young man. They pulled back—they had a secret compartment.

Meyer: In the floor?

Hirsch: Under the kitchen floor. They then opened it. And downstairs was a couple cots. There was a little table with a mimeograph machine on it, there was a clandestine radio. And among other things they had hidden out two American airmen who had crashed but they got away. And they hid them for three months until they could take them to the Belgian underground. Who then returned them eventually to the United States Army command.

?: Why don't we continue this—

Meyer: Yeah, we're going to continue this over here. [moving to different location] Okay, so when they opened up--

Hirsch: At any rate, to sum up the whole thing, this is where this woman who owned the farm was a midwife, and she knew where all the families around were. She'd been there for years. So she had taken, it turned out, a total of 250 different Jewish children, their babies, and placed them in 250 different Catholic families.

Meyer: In that community.

Hirsch: In this whole community that I'm talking about, which is a whole Catholic community.

Meyer: So the whole Catholic community had all these Jewish children.

Hirsch: And then they had their, whatever, certificates, the priests and so forth had to be. But they did that. I'm talking about the human side of the Shoah.

Meyer: Yeah, you are talking about it. A whole village can cooperate.

Hirsch: Yeah, a whole farm. They were all farms around there. A farm area.

Meyer: When they brought you to the house, and they showed you the floor, was there someone hiding underneath then?

Hirsch: No. There was this nurse from Rotterdam.

Meyer: She's down there?

Hirsch: No, well, she was up above when I saw her. Because we're now American in control of that town.

Meyer: Yeah, of course. So she's finally out.

Hirsch: That's why they were revealing this to me. At that point, this woman, the owner—Johanna Von Borden, I think her name was—she had been picked up by the German commander who controlled the place. And they suspected her. They caught her with six children. So they took her to the German headquarters, wherever that was, near town. And this was before the Americans got there, of course. And they took the six kids and sent them to be gassed. They're gone. And they started torturing her. And you can read all about this in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, which is a memorial in Jerusalem to the righteous non-Jewish people who helped. So they wanted me to bear witness. And I'm bearing witness to you.

Time 15:39

Meyer: And you're bearing witness to me. Thank you very much for the honor.

Hirsch: So that was how I got involved. And then after the war, he wrote to me in '46. And I sent some books to him, and other stories like that.

Meyer: So, after you leave the British Army where do you go? Do you go back to the 95th? What happens?

Hirsch: Well, eventually the combat team is returned to the 95th. Which by that time is, I don't know, the Ninth Army, or where--

Meyer: Yes. They're in the Ruhr Pocket now, aren't they?

Hirsch: Somewhere, I don't know.

Meyer: Were you part of—they captured Dortmund, or Krefeld?

Hirsch: This is all after that Siegfried Line stuff. This is all in Holland, in Belgium and Holland.

Meyer: Were you around when they liberated that camp in Whirl (PH)?

Hirsch: I was in the lead jeep. I don't know where. If you're asking me where, I don't know. But I was in a lead jeep and I opened up a Russian, a prisoner of war camp of Russians. And these

skeletons came out. Literally—looked like Halloween skeletons. Of course, they were human. One of them, because I was in the front lead jeep on the right side, gave me the flag. Huge, German Nazi flag. Sort of as a welcome. I was the first one that he had seen. There was all these skeletons running around the street and these are Russian prisoners of war that we were liberating. So I was there, and I also, there was a, in a town I guess it was, we liberated, they had hidden out some kids and so forth. I had nothing that I did, other than happen to be there when it happened.

Meyer: And now you're bearing witness.

Hirsch: Well, this is actually what happened. These are some of the things that happened.

Meyer: Some of the things. Do you remember where you were when you heard about Roosevelt dying? Did that affect you?

Hirsch: Oh yeah, we felt bad about it. We actually had our own private service—the company did. And the next morning, I don't know if we had a chaplain come or not, but that wasn't the point. The point is that we were saying goodbye to our commander in chief.

Meyer: Did you know anything about Truman?

Hirsch: I knew nothing about Truman until later on. I knew nothing about any of that. I wasn't worried about the election.

Meyer: So you liberate camps during this part of it, how many more weeks do you have until V-E Day?

Hirsch: Well, when did Roosevelt die, in March or April?

Meyer: Yeah, I think April. Early April.

Hirsch: And then V-E Day came in May.

Meyer: Were there rumors before V-E Day?

Hirsch: No rumors, none that came to me. No, no rumors.

Meyer: I meant, how did you hear that Germany surrendered?

Hirsch: I suppose the first sergeant, the captain, got the bulletin from the headquarters, you know. It came through channels.

Meyer: And then what did people do? Did they cheer? Do you remember anything special?

Hirsch: I think we again gathered as a company. Remember, as an Anti-Tank Company you're spread around all the battalions.

Meyer: You're not in one place. So you gather.

Hirsch: You gather around. And as I recall, and we were all happy. We were all ready to go home right that day.

Time 20:14

Meyer: Oh, sure. (laughs) And when you do go home, where do you go home out of? Le Havre?

Hirsch: I think it was Le Havre. It turned out to be the Mariposa.

Meyer: Oh, it's the Mariposa. Yeah.

Hirsch: The same luxury ship we came over on, we went back on. And I think we landed in Boston, but I don't recall.

Meyer: Yeah, I heard that you landed in Boston.

Hirsch: Then I was given a 30-day leave.

Meyer: You went back to Chicago?

Hirsch: To Chicago. I'll give you another human interest story if you want it.

Meyer: Yes, please.

Hirsch: It had nothing to do with the war.

Meyer: That's okay.

Hirsch: I went back to my parents, where I lived, my parents' home, my brother and I. I'm now nineteen years old. And so we have a little cocker spaniel dog called Duchess. And it got to be about 11 o'clock at night and my mother tells me, "Duchess needs a walk."

So I took her downstairs. We live in an apartment building. It has, you know, it's a court building, and we have six apartments—three floors, two apartments each floor. There's a twin building next door. This is on a regular Chicago street.

So I'm walking the dog. Next door, suddenly a woman comes out, a young woman, and says, "Take my baby."

I said, "What do you want me?"

"Take my baby." She says, "I'm burned." She was in a bathrobe up in her room and she was completely burned. She had evidently set, or the fire happened, she was on the third floor of the next building.

So I took her baby and I went to the first floor of my apartment and knocked on the door and asked them to take the baby, which they did. And we called the fire department. So the fire department comes, and I'm saying, "That woman's here."

They weren't interested in the woman. "Where's the fire?"

At any rate, they take her, as I recall, in an ambulance and so forth. And I ride with them. And she dies the next day. And they have an inquest and all that, which I attend.

So some of the newspapers picked that up. So I started getting marriage proposals from all over the country from people wanting to help me to take care of the baby. But the baby had his father who was I think overseas or something.

Meyer: Who took care of him until the father came back?

Hirsch: I haven't the slightest idea. It wasn't me.

Meyer: Well, I'm going to stop right now because they're going to start any minute. Then I'll have a few questions after..

23:31

[End Session.]

Part 4, Metz Hour Speech

Male Voice: The guest speaker for the Metz Hour has traditionally been one of our Iron Men. I'm pleased we were able to continue this tradition. Emil showed up on our radar this spring, when we heard he was trying to arrange a trip to Fort Sill to visit the memorial. He was kind enough in discussions to volunteer to come join us and address us today.

He served in the 378th Regiment Anti-Tank Company. He fought in Metz in the Battle of the Bulge, and other areas throughout the European Campaign. Today he calls the Chicago area home, and is kind enough to join us this morning. So at this time I'd like to pass the mic to the honorable Mr. Hirsch.

Emil Hirsch: Thank you. [Applause]. Thank you, Cliff. My buddies, life is a book that we study. Some of its leaves bring a sigh. There it was written by a buddy, that we must part, you and I. A little more than 100 years ago, during World War I, a soldier thought of his friends in the back barracks and on the battlefield, and in the trenches, and referred to them as "my buddies." This morning, I, too, am thinking of my buddies. From World War II, and the two years I shared with them. At the top of my list is staff sergeant Louis Cadwick (PH), who at age 29, shortly after Pearl Harbor, in 1942, joined the 95th Infantry Division. He was killed in action on October 21st, 1944, when a German artillery shell exploded in his foxhole, killing him outright and permanently wounding two others, who spent the rest of their lives in military hospitals.

As I sit here in reflection and recollection, I'm looking at a picture of all my buddies in the Anti-Tank Company of the 378th Infantry Regiment, taken in 1944 in the United States, outside of our barracks in Indiantown Gap Pennsylvania, shortly before we embarked for England to begin our direct participation in the battles for Metz and the Bulge. My buddy Paul Klemmer (PH), who has written extensively about our company, thoughtfully labeled the last names of all who are pictured. I've made copies of the pictures, and you all are welcome to take a copy for yourselves. I am in the top row, second from the right, on the bottom picture. The

third picture to the right, in the small center of the picture group, the printing process inadvertently cut out. So there is now a third set, which is that center section.

All military, even from different countries, are your buddies. No matter what their rank, when together with you they face the enemy. At a 95th reunion long ago, my buddy Wolfe (PH) told me how friendly General Patton was when Private Wolfe had to halt him while the mine platoon was clearing a minefield in the roadway. General Patton called him “son,” and asked him if he had been given a hot Thanksgiving meal. Soldiers I did not know then, but had served at the same time as me, are my buddies in arms. I became good friends with Sam Booker (PH), of Naples, Florida, in the late 1990s, after we compared notes and found that he had served as a Ranger in the 378th Infantry Regiment, where I had served as a private in the Anti-Tank Company of the same regiment. He had been wounded by machine gun fire in November of 1944, when the Ranger group attacked a school which was training German SS officers. He had spent several years in Walter Reed Military Hospital, and became sufficiently healed to return to civilian life.

In the late 1980s, I attended an International Rotary convention in Munich, Germany. On a Tuesday night, one of the German rotary clubs hosted 50 or 60 of us in a brewery. Picnic benches were spread out in a long row, and Rotarians from different clubs from all over the world sat next to each other. The Rotarian sitting to my right, next to me, said he was from Cleveland, Ohio, and hadn’t intended to come to the convention until he found out from the Red Cross that he could enter France on a special visa to visit the grave of his father, whom he had never seen, and who had never seen him.

I asked him what outfit his father served with, and he replied he was in a Line Company of the 378th Infantry Regiment of the 95th Infantry Division. When he found out I was in the same infantry and regiment, he kept asking me question after question about my experiences, so that he could imagine what his father had also experienced.

My buddy PFC Simms (PH) and I decided to walk through the town of Winchester, England, on Sunday afternoon. As we were walking uphill, an old English couple called to us from their window and invited us to visit with them, which we did. After her father died, probably in the 1990s, Simms’ daughter called Paul Klemmer to see if she could come talk to someone who knew her father. He told her to call me, since Simms and I had been special buddies. She said she had never talked to her dad about his military service, and asked me to tell her anything about him I could remember.

I told her about our Sunday afternoon visit to the Staffords (PH). After we had been with them an hour, they invited us to have lunch with them. We thanked them, but told them we had plenty to eat, and knew they were severely rationed. They insisted we have some delicious pastries, or pasties, which turned out to be ground meat with a little pastry shell around them. And also some small round tomatoes. They said their son was a pilot in the RAF in India, and they hoped someone would be kind to him like they were to us. They said they had a second son who was somewhere serving in England. And they said, with tears in their eyes, that their daughter had been killed in an air raid in London. On the first of every month they collected about 20 British magazines from their neighbors, and sent them to me to be shared with my buddies.

[Singing] Nights are long since you went away. I think about you all through the day, my buddy, my buddy, nobody quite so true. Miss your voice, the touch of your hand, just want to know that you understand, my buddy, my buddy, your buddy misses you.

[Ovation]

Part 5, Following Metz Hour Speech

Hirsch: You know, that's the introduction. They never sing that.

Meyer: Life is a book that we study, some of its leaves bring a sigh. There it was written by a buddy, that we must part, you and I.

Hirsch: That's the song. They get the lyric part but they never sing.

Meyer: The person on the recording was the daughter of a veteran who died in 2004, my first reunion. She showed up with her husband, who played a harmonica. I recorded her on a cassette tape, and every reunion, it has a nice sort of feeling for the people.

Hirsch: I hope I wasn't inappropriate, but I had no knowledge. My knowledge was from World War I. My father and everybody in World War I. The song itself was written in 1922.

Meyer: Yeah. So a hundred years ago.

Male voice: [You?] didn't figure it needed anymore.

Meyer: No, I could see.

Male voice: Ninety-seven

Meyer: A few more questions. Would you recommend service or military service now?

Hirsch: Specialized service depends upon the (?). To be exact, I have a grandson who lives in Missouri, grew up on a farm in Missouri, in El Dorado Springs Missouri. And at the end of high school he had a special talent for, and I said that it would be good—he didn't know what to do, he didn't have money to go to a major college—that so long as the air force wanted him, which they did. So they enrolled him in his third year, let him finish his senior year—which counted to retirement if he ever wanted to retire—and then he enlisted for three years, but as a specialty, cryptoanalysis, and so forth. And then he was at Edwards Air Force Base and other places, and he became a very, whatever the—

Meyer: That's a fascinating—

Hirsch: And so if you have certain talent, I do recommend that you go into the service and have them—which they did. Not only that, but even while he was there, they paid for—today you can take the courses by the computers—and they paid for it, so he earned a bachelor's degree with their money, the air force money and time. And when he decided to come out because he was offered a job where he is in Kansas City, with a company that has the contract to computerize all the hospitals in the Veterans Administration. And his starting salary at 22 or something like that

is in the hundreds of thousands, in the six figures. So, I recommend anybody, particularly if they have a talent. Like a mechanic.

I know another person who had been a Philippine, I recommended it years ago. And he stayed in the navy, but they trained him to prepare the radios or something on the aircraft. And he's finally bought a house, got a wife. He's been in the navy since, he lives in the navy now.

Meyer: So if you have a talent that is needed by the military and you know that they would help develop it, that's good. How about service in general? Would you like to see a universal, not a draft, but something that says everybody has to serve one year in like a CCC or something? Even though it would be unworkable. Do you feel like there's something missing from the modern component? From when you were growing up, you didn't have a choice.

Hirsch: Well, remember, I grew up in the Depression. We didn't have money to do anything. We were lucky if we had food. You talk about the CCC. I remember somebody knocking on our back door. He'd been in CCC camp. He looked at our place because he wanted to go to chiropractic school (?). My grandmother, we lived with my grandmother, we had a little house, and took him in, and for a couple years he lived with us. People didn't have money in the 1930s and so forth. So you helped everybody, no matter what. The CCC was a way of taking young people and giving them something to do, rather than having them sitting around.

So from that point of view, now you have a whole change in the educational system because of television and computers. You have a universal language today, which is the picture book, the television. So a refrigerator for an Eskimo and a refrigerator for somebody in the middle of Africa, or up in Siberia, or here in the United States, they all know what it looks like. They all understand how it works. You don't have to be able to read German or French or Scotch or Dutch or Eskimo or whatever. So you have to look at the educational whole system and the economic system.

Time 6:10

Another thing that happened to me is I graduated University of Chicago on the government's money. Got a bachelor's degree in mathematics. Then I went on for a year in the department of economics, working on a PhD in economics. But for one reason or another I went to Mexico City and so forth. But the point I want to make is I took courses from Milton Friedman. That was his first year at the university, before he won the Nobel Prize or anything. And Paul Douglas, who was a senator, was president of the econometrics society, and all these professors at the University of Chicago.

The whole field, everything is changing. But you've got to look at it from an economic point of view is what I'm telling you, without going into it.

Meyer: Without moralizing. This is a general thing, and you've already explained a little. But just in a broad way, how did the war change you?

Hirsch: How did it change me?

Meyer: Yes.

Hirsch: Well, I was an 18-year-old when I went in and I'd never been away from home. It reminds me of the World War I song. How you going to keep them home on the farm after

they've seen Gay Paris? And so it changed in the fact that I was able to do a lot of things a lot of people didn't do, and wasn't afraid to do them. I'd been challenged to a duel at one point in Mexico City. I don't have time to go into it.

Meyer: Did you have the duel?

Hirsch: No, the person didn't show up. But being a soldier made me—I was not going to be challenged by anybody over a senorita or anything else. And I'm also one of the only people you will ever know that was invited and did go with the empresario to the bullfights, in 1948. Alonso De Ona (PH), Thursday to the ranch to pick out the six bulls for the Sunday toreador, or whatever they call it. Sunday afternoon bullfight. So bulls are not allowed to be touched by humans for this purpose. So he looked and they paraded the bulls. He said, "So what do you think of this one?" So I said, "I think that's okay." So I really improved his choices [laughs]. I'm sure you're not going to meet anybody else that picked out the bulls for the bullfight in Mexico City.

Meyer: Never! No, never. When you got back on the 30-day leave and you went back home, did you call your mom? Did they know you were coming? Or were they surprised?

Hirsch: I think they probably knew I was coming. I don't really know. We didn't have long distance telephones back then.

Meyer: What was it like that first moment she saw you again?

Hirsch: Well, they met me getting off the train and I had the big knapsack, you know

Meyer: Yeah, a duffel bag?

Hirsch: Duffel bag. It probably weighed 60 or 70 pounds. Everything in it, including the stuff you see. The helmet, and everything else. And anything I owned. My mother was there, my uncle was there. My father, and brother. The train station. And my uncle went to pick up the bag and he couldn't get it off the ground [laughs]. So, it toughens you up physically. And it helped you grow up.

Time 10:12

Meyer: How was your readjustment to civilian life? Was there anything you had to change? Was it hard to have people accept you?

Hirsch: No, it wasn't hard at all. Personally, even before that I worked at, I think I told you, the Chicago Streetcar Company. And that in itself was an experience that most people never have. It toughens you up before you went to the army. Also, in the army my hobby was boxing. I boxed.

Meyer: Did you box after the army?

Hirsch: No.

Meyer: What weight were you?

Hirsch: Very heavy.

Meyer: Were you?

Hirsch: Yeah, but I don't know. I always had probably 175-180 pounds on me at that time. I don't know where the rest of it has come from.

Meyer: Where were you when you heard about the bomb dropping?

Hirsch: I was on a troop train. I think I told you. I was on a troop train going back to Camp Shelby, Mississippi from Chicago. And they showed the news headlines through the window. You couldn't get off the train and they couldn't get on, but they showed the atomic bomb dropped. We didn't know what it was, but that's where we first heard about it, on the troop train.

Meyer: On the troop train. Did you know that meant the end of the war?

Hirsch: I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know what dropping an atomic bomb meant. Did you know?

Meyer: Oh, no.

Hirsch: They didn't come consult you? They didn't come and tell you, Private Hirsch, you know what--

Meyer: Do you approve?

Hirsch: Yeah, do you approve? They didn't ask me what my opinion. They asked Einstein, but not me.

Meyer: Well, that might be good. And when you heard that the war was over, were you at Shelby?

Hirsch: Yeah.

Meyer: Are there parties, or what happens?

Hirsch: I really don't—

Meyer: So, nothing special.

Hirsch: Probably, the USO probably had parties in New Orleans. That's where the closest USO was.

Meyer: Okay.

Hirsch: And I'm sure that we were all happy about it.

Meyer: You were all happy. When you said you came back on the Mariposa, the same, so going to Europe your mood is one way. On the Mariposa going back, are just drinking? Or what are they doing? Is there any change?

Hirsch: No. They were either playing poker or throwing craps or just looking around. In either direction, it was the same. It didn't change the behavior of that nature.

Meyer: What did you do, now that you mentioned poker and things, what did you do for relaxation in the service when you had time?

Hirsch: Well, I didn't play any of the games, one of the guys taught me cribbage and that type of thing. But I just went along with whatever I had to do. And I also was assigned to clerk/typist for a while in the company headquarters. So I had to help get everybody discharged.

Meyer: Oh, gosh, that's a big--So you don't have much free time at all.

Hirsch: I didn't have any time for what you were talking about.

Meyer: Do you remember your serial number?

Hirsch: Not offhand, no.

Meyer: And what is this one here, the presidential citation?

Bernie Hirsch: Dad would be the one to answer these questions.

Male Voice: Were you with the 95th in the States?

Hirsch: No, I was not. I joined them at the last minute at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, and took basic training in the Anti-Tank Company.

Male Voice: Well, I knew they, on their way from Texas, to get to the ships or wherever, they stayed over for more training.

Hirsch: Well, they came to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, in February of '44. February. But they didn't ship out until, I think, July or August of '44. We were there at Indiantown Gap for about six months.

Time 15:20

Male Voice: We didn't, because they didn't assign us, we were nothing but replacements. We had a liberty ship full of—

Hirsch: Yeah, you were a replacement in Europe.

Male voice: Replacements.

Hirsch: Yeah, I understand. I had friends who joined us. I remember I had a three-day pass in Paris after the armistice. And my roommate, in the luxury hotel which I didn't stay in [laughs], was a guy named O'Brian (PH), and he had been a replacement just like you say. And he and I went on different—we just slept at the same, you know, military hotel.

Male voice: Jim was in the I Company in 377th.

Hirsch: Yeah, well it doesn't matter, it's all the same.

Male Voice [Jim?]: One time I got a pass back to somewhere, I truthfully couldn't tell you—Paris or somewhere like that there—and we no more than got off the bus and I had the urge to move. BM. So I went to the corner, pulled my pants down, and let go.

Hirsch: That's the way the prophets did it.

Jim: Some officer and a bunch of other officers, "Get that man's name and send him to the front lines!" [laughs] I said, "That's all right. I said, I've just come back off the front line."

Hirsch: That's the way most of the--I happen to have a cousin that was married to my cousin, who was a lieutenant on Eisenhower's staff. So when I was in Paris, outside of everything else, I got in touch with him. Sam Ringle (PH) was his name. And he was an interpreter, I think, or so forth. He could speak many languages. And he and I went to places which you normally would not go, and do things which you normally would not do, on a three-day leave. In Paris. In May of 1945.

Meyer: Like the Louvre? You're not talking about going to the Louvre.

Hirsch: Yeah, I went to the Louvre, and I looked at Napoleon in his tomb, and I did all those things. Eiffel Tower. I climbed up to the top and bought a little souvenir for my mother.

Meyer: Oh, you did.

Hirsch: Well, after climbing all the way up, I got to do something. I also paid my way because I didn't smoke but I had cartons of cigarettes. And that paid for everything I wanted to do. I had the cartons with me.

Meyer: That's smart.

Hirsch: That was currency. That was more than smart. We all knew what the currency was.

Meyer: So wherever you went you had the 60-70 pound duffel bag. So did that accompany you on your three-day leave?

Hirsch: No, no, no. When you were in combat, they checked it. You didn't have it in your foxhole with you. You wouldn't say that. It was all in storage somewhere. All you had was what was on your body or on your helmet. Toilet paper in your helmet.

Meyer: You had toilet paper on your helmet.

Hirsch: In my case.

Meyer: Did you have things for bugs or anything?

Hirsch: No. No.

Meyer: Toilet paper. One question, this is near the end, is thinking of, say, picturing, say, a great-great-great-granddaughter 100 years from now. What would you say to her that is important to know, or important in your life? What sort of words of--

Hirsch: To learn how to be human. And learn that to be human means that you know that you were born, that you will die, that you have a certain history in between. And that if we have a reason there's a deity. But it's a deity of humanity. Not just a deity for-- You've got to remember that there's seven billion or more people on our planet, and only a billion are Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. So most of the planet is not. And if they have any religion it's pre-Biblical religion. And any way you want to look at that. My point is that a religion of humanity, which Samuel Hirsch was involved with, he gave a series of lectures, of eight lectures to the Masonic Lodge in Luxembourg in 1854, and those original lectures are in the Vatican Library. I visited the Vatican Library, and the librarian took me through to show me where they were and all that, the original lectures. But he was looking for a religion of humanity. That's why he was a Mason. A Freemason.

Time 21:12

Meyer: A Freemason. Well, I tell you what. I have never had any desire to read *Mein Kampf*. But now, I'm going to the Gutenberg.

Hirsch: I'm not suggesting that it's happy reading, or even easy. But if you're asking questions looking for motivation, you'll find out that the motivation, and his explanation of the motivation, is in the early part of his reading. His viewpoint—of course, remember this is socialist as opposed to—they were ranting and raving against the communists. I'm talking about in the early '20s.

Meyer: Yeah. Weimar Germany.

Hirsch: And he was stacking—he started his stormtroopers, he had young people, nothing, but he figured out the [inaudible]—

Meyer: And the Brown Shirts.

Hirsch: And he and four other guys were building the union. And he'll tell you all about it.

Meyer: That would be interesting to read. Just to see how he sowed the seeds, how he was able—

Hirsch: Not only he, but how it all was done.

Meyer: How it all was done.

Hirsch: You know, it didn't just happen. Here I am.

Meyer: No. I mean, the ground was ripe for that to grow.

Hirsch: Well, you had the Versailles Treaty, which took away. They weren't allowed to manufacture, to do anything. And so they formed the unions of socialists. And they said the communists were coming in, and he had no respect for the French. He surely didn't have respect for-- He did respect the Englishmen more. And he will tell you about it. I don't want to give away the story.

Meyer: Well, I know the end to the story. It's the beginning of the story and how it goes.

Hirsch: Yeah. So you understand what it was. Remember, he was a soldier coming out of World War I.

Meyer: Yes. The Iron Cross.

Hirsch: When I went through the—they have lockers for all of the people now. In 2016 when they took me through where all the members of the what's it called, the Reichstag, and his is particularly blocked off, but they showed me. He and everybody else had their agenda. Their political agenda. And their passionate agenda, too.

Meyer: You say—

Hirsch: Their passionate—

Meyer: Their passionate agenda.

Hirsch: Right.

Meyer: I was not, I remember I had an acting teacher talked about, I carry pictures—He said, “See if there's a picture that straightens your spine.” So I carry the picture with me of, I don't know where it is, whether it's Warsaw Ghetto, of the little boy or little girl who's just so scared with their hands up. And the Nazis are smoking, the soldiers are smoking cigarettes. This child is

just scared to death. And I think, I see, I look at things and I go, Nope, nope. What is worth standing up against?

Hirsch: I met a man in Florida. There's a book about him. Cesar, I forget his last name, but his father was a famous orchestra leader from Italy, from Rome. His mother was a ballet dancer from Hungary. And his father was an orchestra leader in Rome in the 1930s. And they had this child. It came along the war and his mother decided to take him back to Budapest. And she'll tell you, as a seven-year-old boy, she put some food in his pocket. She was Jewish, her husband was Italian, he'd been baptized. Put the baptize, said he was Italian. And as a seven-year-old was put out onto the street, to never see her again, maybe. And so there's a book about him that you can get from Amazon. First name is Cesar, I don't remember his last name. So that's the story. And his father was a famous composer and orchestra leader in Rome.

Time 26:24

Meyer: You were talking about giving speeches or a lecture, or you're about to do, about humanity and the Holocaust.

Hirsch: I did that at the request of the high school in [inaudible] in Germany to talk with the class. The whole class, plus some teachers and the principal and all that. Because it's mandated that every year they have to do something about the Holocaust. But I choose to talk about what I told you about. And looking at the human side of what people did at the risk of their lives to help, regardless of anything else. And then I was asked some questions.... Evidently one or two of the students were refugees from Africa or somewhere in the school. This is now near Trier, which is on the border of Belgium and Germany. And it's about 15 miles north of Trier, where I was.

Meyer: Do you have any of your talks or anything online, where people can listen or read them? Or I can search for your name.

Hirsch: The most recent one, I told you about that. Sinai Temple. Most of the talks, no, they wouldn't be online. I didn't give them online.

Meyer: The New 95th asking a few questions. One of which is, what advice would you give today's soldier? That's their question.

Hirsch: Just take advantage of all the modern, learn how to use all the modern instruments of war, and instruments of communication. Today, every soldier has his own cellphone.

Meyer: You're right. You're right. Now everything is—

Hirsch: What would you give to the Ukraine or the Russian soldier that's been conscripted off the street?

Meyer: What would you give them?

Hirsch: What advice would you give them?

Meyer: What advice would I give them? Oh my God. The Ukrainians?

Hirsch: Or the Russians. They're just conscripted. You know, like how we used to take people, sailors.

Meyer: Yeah, like the British took them from the ships, for the war of 1812. But I understand—

Hirsch: It was the crew. They just picked them up, put them on, and don't worry about their family or anything. Maybe they'll come back in a year or so.

Meyer: Well, the personal advice my grandfather gave to my father was never volunteer.

Hirsch: Well, that's a cliché.

Meyer: That is a cliché. Even though he did. What advice would I do? If you're pulled into an unjust war, what you think is an unjust, and you're just a cog—

Hirsch: I would not. Then and now, I am not a philosopher about wars or anything else.

Meyer: What would you say?

Hirsch: I'm just telling you, I'm not. If your country calls you, you should serve. Period. I'm not getting into the ecclesiastic part of the problem. You know, who do you take the pledge to, when you pledge allegiance? You take it to God. When you say, "I'll tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth," who are you swearing to, in a court? To God.

Meyer: But if they conscript you, and they pull you in, and you think it's a fight you think God would not want you to do--

Hirsch: You do what I did. You accept your situation and you do whatever you can to help out. It's not a question of volunteering at all.

Meyer: No, it's not.

Hirsch: It's a question of you have a certain ability and they can use it, and it helps everybody. And I could go into that much more, which I'm not. I'm talking about in relation to the 95th. But you just take whatever talent you have. If you're a farmer and you know how, you know, you're there as a team. It's not you. 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. And so when you ask a question like that you're saying, well, me, standing alone. And that's not the case. You're part of that 150 or how many guys we had there.

Meyer: That was the question they passed on to me. And your answer was very elucidating. Is there anything else you wanted to say?

Hirsch: No. I have to get on my plane.

Meyer: You've been very generous with your time. Thank you for bearing witness. Thank you for allowing me to bear witness to your words. I didn't expect anyone to come today, I mean, come to this reunion. Last reunion, there was no one new to talk to. So between the two of you, I've been able to--

Hirsch: May the gift of whatever you have be shared with other people. And may you be allowed to do that. I give that as a prayer for you.

Meyer: Thank you for the prayer. And health to you and thank you for broadening my world. There you go. And also, helping me to look more for humanity.

Hirsch: And if you ever find a need for somebody to pick out some bulls, I'm always available. As a volunteer.

Meyer: I'm living in Cyprus, you never know.

Hirsch: Well, that's okay. If they pay my way back and forth.

Meyer: I'll pay your way back and forth. If they need something, you might get a call anyway. Mr. Hirsch, what a pleasure, thank you so much.

Emil Hirsch: Bye.

Meyer: This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th, of the 95th Infantry division reunion. We are in Dulles Airport Crowne Plaza. And it is now what time?

Hirsch: 12:38

Meyer: Just ended up talking to Emil Gustav Hirsch, Gus Hirsch, who was with the 95th Infantry. He is in 378th Antitank Regiment. [Repeats closing, makes sure he has details straight.]

35:11

End Interview