Transcript:

Ralph Schulz

A44

53 min 27 sec

Interviewer: Talk to me about a little bit where you grew up.

Ralph Schulz: Okay. I was born in Illinois, just north of St. Louis, just a steamboat whistle north of St. Louis where Missouri intersects with Mississippi, a little town called Alton, A-L-T-O-N. Alton, Illinois. I was born there in '26. My parents had both been born there. Three of the four grandparents had been born there. So, we go back to 1829 that's as far back as our particular family goes.

Interviewer: How far from Carbondale is that?

Ralph Schulz: About a 120 miles.

Interviewer: OK. Trying to get an idea of where you live.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah. We were west right on the Mississippi. We grew up there in Alton. I grew up there until I was 14. Then, I went away to school until I was 19. I left the school at 19 and went into the army directly. I was in the army three weeks after I left school in October of '45. Of course, I was a latecomer and a foot-dragger and all that kind of thing but served in until '47, and I was discharged in 1947. So, that was my whole entire service period. In a small town like that, you knew everybody. The town is still in the same size it was then. I still have many relatives there including two brothers. They still live there and many others, cousins, nephews, even two of my dad's…well, one of my dad's brothers lives there. So it's the home place. And my daughter, [Tracy (sp) 1:45], found a picture that was

made 1908 of Alton. We planned to use it as a Christmas gift this year, but it was one of those--

Interviewer: Probably different than West Meade, isn't it?

Ralph Schulz: Yeah. It was panoramic that they had taken from the top of the river bridge on the middle of the Mississippi. They have the whole entire area. You look north, and you're looking up to the Chicago. You look south, and you're looking at New Orleans and you're right on that…right at the intersection of the Missouri, the Illinois, and the Mississippi.

Interviewer: It sounds like it's a great town.

Ralph Schulz: It was. It was. It really was. We grew up very close to the vest because of the depression. My father was a steelworker and then, he became one of the first welders and ended up as a…I can't think of the name, metallurgy, engineer…metallurgic engineer. After World War II, he did a lot of work training people in metallurgy. He was responsible for some rather prominent restorations for the World's Fair in 1960 and so forth. He restored the old civil war locomotive that they had no parts for. He made them out so that was his job. My mother was always as homemaker, but she also had a job taking care of insurance agency in the front room all during that time. But at that time, my parents paid $3,500 for a home that housed six children. My dad built bedrooms as fast as we added children. They both worked both jobs all that time. Everybody graduated from the same grade school. My older sister graduated from a high school there, but we moved in 1942 to Louisville. We lived in Louisville from 1942, and we just sold the family home last year, so we've been there 60 years. The family had been there 60 years. We sold it to one of my nephews, so it's still in the family.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Ralph Schulz: In any case, the Louisville was the next stage, and that happened while I was away at school. I'd come home for summer vacation during that

time. When I went into the army, I went from Louisville. I was in Louisville draft. But I wasn't drafted actually. I joined the regular army. We had an 18-month term. I served all 18 months, of course, during that period. We shipped to Camp Atterbury, spent three weeks there, and was transshipped over to Camp Roberts in California, trained as an infantryman, shipped from there to Camp Kilmer, shipped out for Germany in early 1946. We were shipped to Le Havre, Camp Lucky Strike, trained from there by train through mines into Frankfurt, then to D'erlanger which was our [unintelligible 0:04:58.2]. I was there for about three weeks. Then, I was assigned to the War Crimes Trials unit, 7708 War Crimes group. We were part of USAFE, had the same left shoulder patch as Eisenhower, and we have the right shoulder patch for Patten because their group maintained our work. We were part of the JAG and answered through lines to JAG for what we did. Of course, Robert Jackson was the guy who originally formed this up with President Roosevelt. They actually did it in 1944 and then, Jackson built it, and then they put Biddle on the judge's staff. Biddle was an old politician who thought he should be the chief judge. When they name an English man as the chief judge instead of him, he became very bitter and did everything he could to destroy Jackson and a lot of that work. All of that is documented very well. There are many books written about Biddle and that time. Probably, the most realistic and believable book that I've read about our unit was written by a doctor from Louisville. He just died last year. He lived in St. Matthew's area of Louisville and wrote a book late in life about what had happened. He debunked a lot of theories including the theory about Tex Richard, the guy who was put in jail for giving Goering his capsule. The doctor proved that Goering had hidden it in a jar of cold cream from the time he was captured until the time he used it. He used Tex to go upstairs to his trunk and get this jar of cold cream and Tex didn't know what he was doing. He was a captain in the unit who guarded the prisoners. That's just one incident that he wrote but it's by far the best presentation I've read. We went to the trials, of course. My job was to maintain all of the files that we had available to the attorneys at whatever trial was held. Now, unfortunately, everybody thinks about Nuremberg War Crimes trials as being centered in Nuremberg, and that's not true at all. That was a showplace. They did use it as a showplace. Probably, 50 times as many trials, or people, at least, were tried in other areas like the concentration camps - Buchenwald, Dachau, wherever. We had to provide the material and documentary evidence for those trials. My job was to be in charge of the unit that maintained those files in the vaults of the German bank starting in Wiesbaden. Then, in August of 1946, we moved all of those files to

Oxburgh and put them in a casern which I've visited twice in 1991 and 1998, still there. They've built a roller rink in the same area were we used to sleep, but it's still there, still like it was. After we moved there, I was made special service officer reporting to a full-bird colonel. We had very few officers in our unit, only 85 enlisted men at peak, but we had WACs about 60 WACs with our unit. We had an English contingent, a French contingent, a Russian contingent. I won't even say who caused me the biggest problems but you probably know. One of my jobs was to hand out all of the quotas for the tours of ATO from that point on. Each week, I had to find out how much space we had available for those tours and then, assigned who was going on the tours. I did that until I left that area. Of course, I had to lead a lot of these tours because I could speak just enough German to get by having been brought up in a home where German is spoken as a second language. My grandparents spoke both English and German very fluently. My great grandmother never learned English, so you know.

Interviewer: Was your family living in Germany at the time of the war?

Ralph Schulz: No.

Interviewer: Grandparents?

Ralph Schulz: No.

Interviewer: Anybody?

Ralph Schulz: My great grandmother's sister and some other relatives were apparently still alive in Marburg. That's where they had come from. Ancestors of my grandmother had been born in Kassel, and they still lived there apparently at that time, but we had no contacts, none whatsoever. We've all tried. My brother lived in Austria for six years in the 60's, and he tried every way he could to get genealogical information. He got nothing. The theory of it is that my grandfather who was too young to know what was going on was a son of a German officer in the war of

1870. Apparently, his unit was not well thought of. The family suffered when that happened. His aunt brought him to this country to start fresh. He came as a glassblower. He was an apprentice, became a master glassblower just months before they put in new machinery to do all the glass blowing for him [unintelligible 10:43] glass. Then, he went to driving a beer truck for awhile, and then, he did about three…well, he had a grocery store. The Mississippi flooded an amount of that and he went to work in his last years in his 70s as a janitor in a high school where all of his children went to school. I worked with him from the time I was 8 years old until I left at 14. I helped him every Saturday. We became very close. I learned a lot of German, but there are many words I don't want to repeat.

Interviewer: I know danke and bitte, and that's about it. Going back to when you were drafted, correct?

Ralph Schulz: Right.

Interviewer: You were 18? 17?

Ralph Schulz: Nineteen. I was 19.

Interviewer: What did you know was happening overseas at this time?

Ralph Schulz: Not much.

Interviewer: You knew there was a war.

Ralph Schulz: Yes.

Interviewer: You knew maybe there was some POWs? Did you even know that?

Ralph Schulz: We knew it indirectly.

Interviewer: Right.

Ralph Schulz: I've should have explained that. I was in a Catholic preparatory seminary to become a priest. I entered there straight from eighth grade. When war broke out in 1941, I had been there two years. What we got in the way of news was what our superiors cut out of the paper and put on the board. We didn't have newspapers there. We lived there every day but one on the Sunday after Christmas when we got to go home for one day.

Interviewer: Did you know that there was an attack or there was a war on the Jews?

Ralph Schulz: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh yes.

Interviewer: You knew that the Jews were being persecuted and killed?

Ralph Schulz: Yes. We got a lot of information from the Catholic periodicals. There were many, many, many articles about that.

Interviewer: What was your understanding…now, you're aware of the Catholic position back then as opposed to how they are now? Did you feel that there was any separation at the time? Did you feel that the information that was coming to you was from the Vatican?

Ralph Schulz: Hierarchy?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ralph Schulz: No. To give you an example, the Trapp family visited us and performed on our stage in the seminary. They had their chaplain with them. They also had a couple of DPs with them traveling. They've explained to us exactly what the situation was causing to leave Austria - Maria von Trapp, von Trapp, and her daughters and son. Well, not her oldest daughter. They didn't bring their oldest daughter to the seminary. They left her at home that day. I wonder why. Anyway, to make the long story short, we learned from that kind of sources as well as from periodicals of what was going on. I think we had a pretty fair spread of information. Some of it was sparse. Some of it was simple propaganda and other of it was I think pretty sound.

Interviewer: This was about what year? Do you remember?

Ralph Schulz: It had to be after 1942 but before 1944.

Interviewer: So the camps were well underway. The death camps not yet.

Ralph Schulz: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Now, the Trapps did not address that issue at all neither did the chaplain. However, several of the DPs who were there with them did talk about some of the problems that were facing the people. They didn't differentiate by group, but they said that good Germans are being put to death in gas chambers.

Interviewer: They were referring to the Jews?

Ralph Schulz: Yeah.

Interviewer: What year were you drafted?

Ralph Schulz: I was never drafted. I joined up when I left school.

Interviewer: Oh, you did join.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ralph Schulz: I left voluntarily because I hit the 6th year which is the deciding year. I decided that that wasn't for me with the help of many good people. Within two weeks after I left, I was in the army. I just went to the nearest sign-up station and joined the regular army. I signed up at that time for 18 months that could be extended if they needed you. But as it turned out, I served just 18 months.

Interviewer: And this was what year?

Ralph Schulz: In 1945, in October of 1945, I joined, and I was out in March of 1947.

Interviewer: In 1945, by then, the camps have been liberated.

Ralph Schulz: Oh yes. Yes.

Interviewer: Have you heard about what was going on?

Ralph Schulz: Oh yes. It was an explosion.

Interviewer: So when you went over there, were you aware of what your duties were going to be?

Ralph Schulz: No.

Interviewer: You went over there--

Ralph Schulz: I went over there as a replacement.

Interviewer: --to war trial.

Ralph Schulz: No. They didn't assign me to the War Crimes Trials until I got to [Ehrlanger (sp) 0:15:50.4]. They were forming up the unit and fulfilling all the slots.

Interviewer: You were at Goering trials?

Ralph Schulz: Oh, yes. Yes. We attended the trials relatively frequently.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Ralph Schulz: Well, you had to get on to travel list. That wasn't too hard for somebody who was in charge of the quotas, but we carried the film in for the engineers who were stationed with us. We're admitted because of our jobs. We tried to stay up in the balcony, but some of our people were used as runners or couriers or some other duties. I would say that in my judgment, we did not understand much of what was going on. They had the IBM phones and you could get the interpretations, the translations but so much of it was so arcane that it didn't mean much to us. Now, certain trials were more spectacular than others. We were very limited in what we could do. We were not allowed just to go and come. When we got to the trials, we were stripped of cameras and any other – of course, our weapons were all taken. We were admitted like any other visitors were. Just because we had the uniform on, it didn't much to the MPs. We got to know some of them. One of the fellows who was in MP unit married a German girl who was Walter Cronkite's secretary. She had been born in New York. Her family moved back to Germany. One of the

fellows came back home and then left from Murfreesboro. He lived in Murfreesboro. He went back and married her overseas and brought her here. My son married her daughter.

Interviewer: Oh my.

Ralph Schulz: How about that for a coincidence? So, he lives here in Brentwood, still. Carl Puckett is his name. He was one of the MPs in the unit. He could tell you all about all of the correspondents because his job was to drive the correspondents to and from their billet to the trials every day. His wife worked for Walter Cronkite so he picked her up on the way.

Interviewer: That's funny.

Ralph Schulz: And this is 52 years later.

Interviewer: What did you know? How did you feel at the time? I mean, I know you weren't Jewish.

Ralph Schulz: No.

Interviewer: How did you feel at the time being among Goering who's considered one of the great masterminds of all time? He was evil. How do you feel?

Ralph Schulz: It's a very difficult thing to talk about because most of the people that I knew who attended those trials felt that Goering was about the only articulate man in the dock. They had no respect at all for his or for most of the rest of the defendants, but they felt that Goering was at least organized and articulate.

Interviewer: Organized, how would you say?

Ralph Schulz: In the sense that he followed a line of defense or a line of opposition perhaps. When he spoke, people listened. When the others spoke, people laughed, made fun of them, called them names. There were certain people who thought that people like von Papen should have been acquitted and was. There were people who defended certain other people in the docks, Jodl, for instance. Keitel was one of the favorites of them. I say favorites in the sense that they were open to them, but they had little respect for the large group, but you could almost feel certain tenseness when Goering was speaking or called. You could feel as certain kind of respect for what he said because it was meaningful. It was not what we wanted to hear and we didn't accept it, but we did listen. I would say that our response at that point depended on who was talking. We had little respect in our unit, for Judge Biddle, because of all the complications which had filtered down to us from the upper groups.

Interviewer: What did Goering say? What do you remember him saying?

Ralph Schulz: What I remembered him saying…

Interviewer: Is he denying what happened?

Ralph Schulz: Oh no. No, no. I don't think he could have denied. He would have been meaningful if he had in my opinion, but what I remember him saying is that "I held high office. I was responsible for many people. I did what I thought was good for the German people just as your president would do for your people."

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

Ralph Schulz: We felt that he was making too good a case, I think. We didn't expect him to make a good case. We thought he was a fat, old, bloated vestige group. When he was arrested, he was given no respect. The people who did arrest him were close by, still there, serving. Our apprehension unit was involved in some of the transportation of those prisoners and really

gave them no respect. The people who guarded them had very little respect for them, but they were very closely controlled. We were all very closely controlled by our officers. As I said before, we had very few officers in our unit. Colonel Straight was our number one man. He was a full-bird. Colonel Eichmann was the man I responded to. His name is really Eichmann just like the accused. Both of them were old regular army colonels. They had been there for all of their lives. We paid a lot of attention to what they thought. What they said to us is "It's not your job to make these judgments. It's your job to provide the information, the support, and the help to these people." We would import a new lawyer, for instance, for a given case. The Malmedy case is a good example. They would ship in two or three lawyers, make them majors on the spot. They were civilian lawyers, make them majors. We have to billet them, put them up, get the information to them, provide the records for them and see that they were properly supported. As soon as the trials were over, they went back home. It was a very changeable unit. The presence of the English and the French was welcome to us. Some of the other presences were not welcome to us. I would say our work that we did in the offices was very mundane. One of our fellows, in fact, said his entire duties was to sit at a typewriter and type items which people brought to him on this side [unintelligible 23:20] and when he's finished, they put them on this side. So, there was that kind of duty. Then, there were other people who went out and arrested the suspects or the witnesses. I did not personally arrest anybody. I went with a couple of the groups. I was sergeant at guard several times and had to disarm a prisoner one night which was the most violent action I saw. I was shot at by the German police on my way to mass one day, believe it or not, quite accidentally.

Interviewer: Oh my God.

Ralph Schulz: They were chasing a blackmailer up the street, and I happened to be in the middle of the street. That's the closest I came to violent action.

Interviewer: Let me back up to Goering. You mentioned that he had commanded a level of respect because of his articulacy and his ability to make a case.

Ralph Schulz: That's right.

Interviewer: How do you feel about what he did?

Ralph Schulz: I feel it's criminal in every way. I feel that he lost it, well, at the beginning before we even got involved in the war. I feel that he was very selfish for grasping. I mean he was obviously…a what…a bandit. But, we didn't' know at that time what all he had done. It was only becoming obvious then.

Interviewer: Him coming out in the trial?

Ralph Schulz: That's right. Well, in the Stars and Stripes, we had these printouts of discoveries of these caches here and there in some of our own soldiers who took advantage of that and looted some of those castles. Those were in the Stars and Stripes when I was there. We were all cautioned. I was cautioned on one occasion for giving a used army blanket to a German civilian who had no army blankets. He worked in a dark room. He helped me every day and I gave him our used army blanket, and I was threatened with being sent home because I gave him a used army blanket. That was our attitude at that time. It was very--

Interviewer: Do your job and go home?

Ralph Schulz: Yeah. It was very realistic in that sense. Most of the fellows were ready to go home when their time came. I didn't know anybody who signed up for further duty.

Interviewer: What do you remember most about the trial?

Ralph Schulz: It's hard to say. I think the security impressed me, number one. I had never been in a situation where that much security was present. There was a sense of dignity, a sense of quiet. It was an extremely a quiet place. A sense that people were paying attention to what was going on,

but there were certain areas and certain times when that just disintegrated and people would get up and leave and come back.

Interviewer: Do you feel that he was represented properly and given a fair trial?

Ralph Schulz: Oh, no question. No question. You look at the verdicts and you can see right down the line that they followed the highest possible motivations.

Interviewer: Had you been to any of the camps or seen any of the survivors while you were there?

Ralph Schulz: Oh, yes. We had many DPs working for us in the unit. We learned a lot from them.

Interviewer: Was that difficult for them to be around with Goering? Do you recall?

Ralph Schulz: As far as I know, no DPs were ever allowed at the trials. We did not schedule any DPs for tours or for... Well, I take that back. They were able to go on Hitler's yacht on the Rhine when they requested it and there was room, but that's the only place they were ever allowed to go outside their jobs. We were scared of the Poles because the Polish people had suffered the most in everybody's opinion, and it was very difficult to live with. They were very violent people.

Interviewer: The Polish people.

Ralph Schulz: Yes.

Interviewer: Violent, how?

Ralph Schulz: When we used them as guards, we took away their weapons under any conditions and gave them one cartridge most of the time and told them to shoot it near to alert us. That was our instructions.

Interviewer: Did you understand their desires?

Ralph Schulz: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. No question about it. One of the people that I traveled with for whom I have great respect, [Fred Welchrieter (sp) 0:28:03.0]who is living in Savannah now. Fred said at one point, "I'd hate to be a German by myself with anyone of those Polish people." I remember vividly him saying that to me. I asked him why. He was a little older than the rest of us. He's still alive by the way, a good friend. He said, "They suffered so much that all they can remember is what they've suffered." Most of them had no families left. None whatsoever. That was one thing that kept coming forward every time we were with him or around him. We had a feeling of fear for violence.

Interviewer: In Dachau, there's a story that circulates. I can't think of the name of the book, but it's three liberators, 18, 19 years old, who had turned over their weapons to a couple inmates and allowed them to shoot at the Nazis.

Ralph Schulz: Yes.

Interviewer: They were interviewed. I don't remember the consequences of their actions but they were huge, but they all three had stood by saying that it was imperative that they gave these inmates an ability to get some dignity back in some form of retaliation primarily because they were too thin and sick to physically fight back. Some of them did physically take punches at the Nazis and I understood the liberators too have held them down. But at 60 or 70 pounds, they can't be very effective. Did you hear stories like that? Had you heard circulated stories of liberators assisting inmates in getting back at Nazis before the trials?

Ralph Schulz: Yes, we heard those stories. We didn't know anything about them. We couldn't document them. Now, I believe Jim Doris implicitly, and Jim was one of the ones who stopped people doing that.

Interviewer: He was. You're right.

Ralph Schulz: I would have supported Jim in that position.

Interviewer: Ironically, the difficult position is you can understand why they wanted to.

Ralph Schulz: Oh absolutely.

Interviewer: You can understand the liberators that wanted to let them get there but you can also understand the need to stop it.

Ralph Schulz: Absolutely.

Interviewer: That is very interesting.

Ralph Schulz: Yes. Yes. I have friends who were survivors at several camps. I have heard some things from them that I trust implicitly because they're high type people, wonderful people, the Gross brothers, I mentioned. Carl and Ben, both, I would trust implicitly when they said something to me. They told me some few very sparse reminiscences. My feeling about that is…because they were younger than we were. They were in their teens at that time. They had been in those camps for some time, for six or seven years. They were in Theresienstadt. I remember that. I think in Buchenwald and Dachau. They were actually as I believe Carl was in six and Ben was in five as I remember, but that's been a long time since I've been gone over that so that's not trustworthy. I have to talk to them about that.

Interviewer: That's okay. Where was I headed with that?

Ralph Schulz: We're talking about survivors.

Interviewer: Right. What do you say to people and they exist, I'm sure you've heard, that said it never happened?

Ralph Schulz: That's ridiculous.

Interviewer: What do you say? You didn't see it. You heard. You're at the trials. You saw some of the DPs. It's so outrageous. It's so completely outrageous to think that people can be responsible for the death of 10 million people, six million being Jews. What do you say?

Ralph Schulz: Well, one of the things that I have said is that I talked to the German people, not many but some. I used to buy pastry in Dachau when I went there because they had great pastry. I've got a picture somewhere of the pastry. Anyway, what I said on a couple of occasions was the Germans never denied it. The people who lived in it never denied it. Their excuses were I was only following orders. I was helpless. I couldn't do anything about it. Nobody ever said they didn't…

Interviewer: These were the Nazis or the people, the residence?

Ralph Schulz: We couldn't tell one Nazi from someone who wasn't a Nazi, so we didn't know. But the people that I dealt with including the young man that I worked with in the dark room who lived through that era, was about a year younger than I, said that as far as they were concerned it was given, that it was a fact and the fact that Dachau had been opened as early as it had in the '30s and that they had had people there imprisoned without cause for many, many, many, many years simply verified the fact that they were there because of their race, because of their religion, because

of their practices. I'm talking about what the Germans said, not what the Americans were saying. I didn't have many contacts but I had some. Of course, back then you didn't tell who you had either. That was another whole side of it. I would say that we trusted the German people. Whether they were Nazis or not, we didn't know. But, I'd say we trusted what they told us and they never denied it and to my way of thinking that's pretty much a given.

Interviewer: Now, you are a German.

Ralph Schulz: Yes. Well, I'm a third generation.

Interviewer: Right. You got German in your blood.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah. With a name like mine.

Interviewer: That's what I've said I'm Weiss. I'm not German but it is a German name.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that? These are your people that did these?

Ralph Schulz: They were close to us in appearance and in habits, a lot of them. I could identify some of my great grandmother's habits with people that I met overseas. I tried to differentiate language for instance. I tried to learn high German and low German. I tried to become part of that community so that I could learn more about them but it wasn't easy. I don't consider them benefiting from what we have as American citizens.

Interviewer: Have you been back to Germany?

Ralph Schulz: Several times.

Interviewer: Is it difficult for you? I know, I'll be honest with you, when I was in Germany, it was very difficult for me to look at elderly people, older people, 50s and older because they were there. How do you feel about that? Do you have any sense of—

Ralph Schulz: When I went back in '91, I had only sparse contact with them. I really can't say I had any reaction at that point because I was so intent on finding the places where we had served. It really didn't develop much but on the train, I took the overnight train from Munich to Brussels and stopped at Weisbaden on the way. I spent a night at Weisbaden. I came into Mons and took the flier up. And on the train between Mons when I re-boarded the next morning in Brussels, I had been traveling in a private compartment and I moved out into the other compartment so that I could talk with the other people. There was a quite a different group there, a disparate group. There were a couple of American people. There were several people who were upset about the fact that so many of the East Germans were dragged on the West German economy and blamed the fact of the division of Germany on the war and the people who had caused that. I would say that what I learned from that was that these people were thinking about the same kinds of things we thought here in this country. As we looked at the illegal immigrants, for instance, they looked at the East Germans who were coming in and using their funds. My feeling about it is that they were not far from us but they had been so misled that they had no concept of reality. I've learned this too from other people since who have come from the same genre. I think a lot of the good people who wanted to do something to stop the terrible atrocities were so scared and so intimidated that there can be some understanding of their feelings, of course, for people who've lost their whole families. Carl Gross has an office with pictures of his families on every wall. Completely covered with family. For a man like that to live in that circumstance everyday must be a torture. I've never had that kind of experience.

Interviewer: There are survivors who say they felt more betrayed by the Germans, the non-Nazis, the neighbors, the shopkeepers, the doctors, the teachers than the Nazis.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah, I've heard that.

Interviewer: Nazis being Nazi by definition a monster.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah.

Interviewer: These were your former countrymen in a lot of ways.

Ralph Schulz: That's right.

Interviewer: How does that feel?

Ralph Schulz: Well, it doesn't feel good. You wonder whether we could be guilty of the same lack of strength, lack of resistance.

Interviewer: Do you think they didn't help them because they were afraid or do you think that there was really something else?

Ralph Schulz: I would say for the greatest feeling was the one of intimidation. They're being afraid of, for instance, I knew that the practice of the Germans was to not just punish the person who did something but to punish his entire family. I learned that before I ever got in the army. I learned that that was a characteristic of the Germans. I always felt that that was a terrible, terrible problem. Whether or not they were intimidated to the point of complete helplessness is something else. We keep hearing about these plots to assassinate Hitler that didn't work. We wonder how much of that was really supported by the populous. I doubt very much of it was, frankly.

Interviewer: What do you want people to know about what happened as a liberator.

Ralph Schulz: I think they should know how unnatural, inhuman it was. I think they should study it well enough to realize that anybody is capable of that if they're pushed to that point. I don't mean to say that being pushed to that point is an outside influence. I mean if you're pushed to that point by their insides as much as by the outside environment. We're all capable of the worst kinds of problems, I believe, and if we ever get in that situation, I pray to God that we will have people who will stand up and resist it. But, the old saying is I didn't fight it because it didn't affect me and it affected my neighbor, and it didn't affect me and pretty soon there was nobody left to defend me. I think we need to learn that as a people, as a group as well as individuals. I'm not at all sure that we're learning it, not at all sure we are. I see too much selfishness, too much self-serving in that kind of thing to be happy with that kind of understanding, and I don't mean to be devout or pious about that. I just feel like that that's a terrible danger for our children.

Interviewer: And that people don't learn history or doomed to repeat it, do you believe that?

Ralph Schulz: Exactly. Exactly. Absolutely. I worry about our grandkids and theirs. It's cyclical in a sense but you would hope that we will learn to moderate those cycles to a point where reason could take over under any circumstance, and that didn't happen in their case. If you read the time from 1919 to 1934, all of those functions were involved - selfishness, grasping and terrible hate and deprivation, and all of those things were part of that pattern. It created a kind of thing which we don't even want to look at today, we deny sometimes or some people deny. I don't have any patience. You ask how I feel about the people who deny. I can't even respect anybody who would deny that. That makes no sense. It seems to me that the admission of German civilians that it did happen is final proof. To my way of thinking that's been the case since they were made to walk through the concentration camps by Eisenhower and people like that. They were actually made to handle the results of those atrocities. I applaud that kind of reaction that happened.

Interviewer: It's been said that several times, you'll see it everywhere, FDR called himself a friend of the Jews.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are you aware, maybe you're not aware that several Jews, primarily survivors, do not find him more of a foe with the Jews.

Ralph Schulz: I'm quite aware of it. I feel the same way about Pope Pius XII.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Ralph Schulz: The same thing.

Interviewer: The military did not step in sooner. The military did not bomb the railroad to Auschwitz which is what the Jewish Defense League was begging Roosevelt to do.

Ralph Schulz: Right.

Interviewer: As a military person, how do you feel about that?

Ralph Schulz: I think it was a mistake. I think it should have been done. We had the forces in...

Interviewer: Hold on. Somebody is knocking.

[0:42:51.6 to 0:42:56.5]

Interviewer: I always find it fascinating what veterans feel about it because as a civilian, Roosevelt said, it could have been too much collateral damage.

Civilians could have been killed in the attempt. How do you feel about that?

Ralph Schulz: I don't buy it. I wouldn't buy it today. If I were in the staff and talking about it, I would say collateral damage is to be expected and this is not collateral damage that we can't support. We're doing something far more worthy of the job. I think it would have been only partially effective because the Germans were killing people everywhere. They weren't just killing in the camps. We had many, many files were a flier shot down were immediately lynched by the local peasantry without even a soldier present or even a mayor sometimes. We documented cases like that. I guess, I saw at least a dozen or more of those cases. They were prosecuted, too. We prosecuted all numbers of people who were... We had pictures of them participating in some lynches. Those were part of our evidence.

Interviewer: Do you feel good about your service there? Do you feel good about your time spent?

Ralph Schulz: Yes, I felt that I was very fortunate to be in that position. I was never shot at and I feel a little bit of regret that I couldn't do more but that was my job. I did my job and did it well. My feeling about it is that we're all subject to service and that was my service. I would have been happy to serve in any way they'd told me to do, but my feeling about it now is that it was the best part of my life in the sense of personal purpose. You have one ambition when you get up in the morning and that is to do your duty and you do it and that's the end of the day. You don't stop and wonder, did I do it right. It's part of what's being done. I regret the fact that I didn't learn more over there. I had some opportunities more than most did. I had had two years of junior college, I mean, first two years, a year and a half of college, so I had some background and that served me well. I was able to participate in a lot of things that I would not have that opportunity for before.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of understanding that you served and were a, however, indirect participant of the trial of what's considered the greatest in a sense of the most horrific acts of murder in the history of mankind?

Ralph Schulz: Yeah. But you know, what bugs me about that? Even then there was talk about, are we trying these people because we were the victors rather than because they did something wrong? I'm talking about back then. Most of this was enlisted men's club talk, our discussion after a round of golf. We played golf over there a couple times or several times, a number of times they tell me. We had occasions where we sat down and talked seriously about this with people whom I just saw a month ago, and their feeling about it then was about what it is now. Yes, it was justified. Yes, it was necessary. If we went through the same thing again, it would be necessary to do it again.

Interviewer: What was justified and necessary?

Ralph Schulz: The creation of the War Crimes trial system and the punishment that ensued. There was a feeling that it's so difficult to prove it or to get down to the facts that almost nobody has the resources or will appropriate the resources to do anything about it.

Interviewer: That was the feeling among the soldiers?

Ralph Schulz: There were some feelings that way then there were other feelings that were more black and white I'd say.

Interviewer: Because you had talked to DPs.

Ralph Schulz: Oh yes.

Interviewer: So you have heard?

Ralph Schulz: Oh yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: First hand accounts of what was happening.

Ralph Schulz: We worked with DPs. I had one, just 10 feet from my desk. He had been through the entire war as a DP. His family had been destroyed in Krakow. He had been all over Europe and in labor gangs, and that kind of thing. He was never in a camp, but he was homeless for the entire time, five years.

Interviewer: Is there anything you like to add?

Ralph Schulz: I have to say and I know it sounds crazy, but I honestly have to say 50 years later that I enjoyed my service and the opportunities that it gave me to get some feeling for other people, in other people's lives in other places. You didn't ask me but I have to say I believe in universal service for that purpose. I believe it's the best education in the world. I believe it's the best kind of association because you meet all different kinds of people, and some become fast friends. Some you never hear of again. Some you learn to detest. My feeling is that's growing up. I had the opportunity to grow up when I was very young and to my way of thinking it's a great advantage. If anybody asked me today, I probably I want to put in universal service.

Interviewer: Duly noted.

Ralph Schulz: For that reason now, not for the war reasons. T hey could build roads or help people who need help but I really do feel that it was educational experience which I could not have bought for a million dollars a day. It's lasted me all my life and I still have good friends. Ones I was with last month right here in Nashville. We still celebrate together and I talked to them on the phone. When the fires happened out there, we were on the phone finding out what happened to the guys who lived out there on the forest. That's 60 years ago now. Those things last. You get to know these people pretty well.

Interviewer: This has been an honor to share it with you.

Ralph Schulz: Well, thank you. Thank you. I'm delighted to have the opportunity.

Interviewer: We are delighted that you came out.

Ralph Schulz: Good. I'm sorry I don't meet your qualifications for survivor or a liberator.

Interviewer: No, you do meet our qualifications for liberator. Absolutely, you were part of the trials.

Ralph Schulz: Oh okay.

Interviewer: That's a key. What we have found in doing this project is that we have so many different people from survivors to liberators. Some were combat troopers coming in on the first day, and some were flying in 30 days later. For the sake of just projects in general, there's always boundaries that we set.

Ralph Schulz: Sure.

Interviewer: But the War Crime trials were key. Pivotal in the war.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah.

Interviewer 2: In a way, you have a perspective that is different from any liberator because a lot of liberators, they had a perspective of it that it's just work. It was one day they were in. They almost didn't. It was so quick. It was so sudden.

Interviewer: They were there like hours.

Interviewer 2: Whereas you have a perspective of sort of a holistic view of experience, but then getting real interaction with people on all different sides.

Ralph Schulz: You know, the most emotional time I had was when I had to spend an overnight in the guard shack at Dachau. I have a picture of that building here. I think you saw it. It's right above the entrance where they say, work makes you free. Right above that was a little room. We bunked out down there. In the middle of the night, I can remember thinking what if I was an inmate here? I remember it to this day. Of course, I never was an inmate. I didn't suffer that way but it made an impression. It was pretty dire.

Interviewer 1: A lot of ghosts in that guard shack.

Interviewer 2: Not a lot of people get to have that impression.

Ralph Schulz: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer 2: It's a perspective.

Ralph Schulz: It's really unfortunate that they have papered that all over in my opinion. I think that was a disservice to history.

Interviewer: When you say papered, what do you mean?

Ralph Schulz: They've close it off. They have fences on the drainage ditch. You can't get there unless you know where you're going. Not many people know what's over there. It's so covered with trees and bushes that you have to part them to even get to what is left. When I went in '91, I was astonished, really astonished because if you talk to my friends, you'll hear that that was one of the first impressions I had. "My god, they've erased

it." They took the headquarters building and made a museum. Some of the statements on that museum wall are not statements I would make. I promise you. Some of them simply talk about political fights when they should be talking about human fights. I mean that... I don't mean to be cryptic.

Interviewer: No, I see what you're saying.

Ralph Schulz: It was different. I still have some pictures of those displays. I was so surprised to see them written up as they were and that map that has all of those concentration camps on it that I showed you in that book. I thought there were maybe from my experience, two dozen concentration camps. There were well over a hundred. They were everywhere. For anybody to say they didn't exist, it is pretty unavailable.

Interviewer: It's amazing, isn't it?

Ralph Schulz: Yeah. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you sir.

Ralph Schulz: Thank you, Dawn. I'm happy to... I appreciate it.