

John Fenzel Jr.

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COHEN: Hi, my name is Leah Cohen, and I'm here with John Fenzel at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Today is July 3, 2019, and I'm looking forward to hearing from Mr. Fenzel, who as a child or as a youngster had the unique experience of spending a lot of time with the German prisoners of war at the Hampshire prisoner camp near Rockford during WWII. He later served in the US Army, and I'm very interested to learn about that, too. So, welcome.

FENZEL: Thank you. Thank you.

COHEN: So, before we jump into the—jump into talking about the Hampshire prisoner camp, could you tell us a little bit about yourself, like where were you born and when?

FENZEL: All right, Leah, I'll be happy to. I hope I don't bore you. But I was born in Chicago on the south side. And I was the first of four children. We were born, like I say, on the south side. We lived there until 1939. My dad was a Buick dealer...and a veteran by the way [of the] First World War. Indiana farm boy. And the reason he got into the automobile business by the way was because of the fact he was sent to France. When he got to-- and he was trained at Purdue to be a pilot mechanic. Got to France, there were no airplanes, so they made a truck driver out of him. And he won the French Croix de Guerre. Very natural as far as repairing trucks. And he got the supplies through. Anyway, after the war he took care of his mother until she died in Indiana but came to Chicago. And he started as a mechanic, and he ended up on the south side working for Buick. And then they awarded him the franchise for the near-south side at 24th and Indiana. And he had Buick [sales] and service. And then the Depression came...The banks closed on Dad when he was getting ready to retire in 1932. Had nothing. So then they reopened up the store, and he had the [Buick] service contract, and he had a great clientele. The Comiskey's, Al Capone; he took care of his [Capone's] food service trucks, and he bulletproofed the cars, etcetera, etcetera. And things were going great until 1937 when he [acquired] lead poisoning from the paint [as he had to

sell his store]. He had nineteen mechanics working for him. So he was an invalid. And he got tired of just sitting around. So finally he told his doctors he was going to move to the country and try to make it. And that he did. And he moved to Burlington, Illinois in 1939. Had six months to live, but as a miracle of God, he got his health back when he got the fresh air. And he was doing great as a Ford dealer in this little town of 250 people, one of the biggest truck dealers in northern Illinois back at that time. And all of a sudden WWII came about. [If you were] a Ford dealer, if you were a mechanic...if you pass the physical, they made you a captain in ordnance. So Dad marches in, and Mom didn't care much for it, but she says, "My God, Man, you were in one world war, why another?" He says, "You gotta go." He was forty-seven years old at the time. And they wouldn't take Dad because of the fact that he had lead poisoning. So anyway she [Mom] told him, "Well, Dad--she was a Chicago girl. I'm not gonna stay in Burlington." There is no indoor plumbing, no indoor water, no nothing." So anyway after a long search, Dad found this store in Hampshire, the Chrysler store. So we moved over there, and in Hampshire we had running water, indoor plumbing, and train service to Chicago every day on the Milwaukee Railroad. Things were going great. So then the fourth child was born there, and so things are going well because dad loved to repair things. It was a farm community. Probably one of the finest farm communities in all the United States. I mean, we had everything there. So anyway I went to the Catholic school there and so forth. I was in third grade I started out there, and so fourth. Anyway, the town was a booming town, agriculturally speaking, agri-business wise. And this—I'm telling you this because I want you to know why we had a POW camp in little old Hampshire. And so anyway there was four gas stations, five grocery stores, four churches, four taverns, two barber shops, three beauty shops, two livestock truckers plus a freight line, a hardware store, one bank, two car dealers--a Ford and then Dad's Chrysler, even though you couldn't get new cars, but we still repaired them, and so forth--two doctors office, one restaurant, and one tavern--tavern restaurant combination. We had a big meat market, huge meat market. People came from all over Chicago, all the owners of the Cubs, Jack Taylor, Jack Brickhouse, Bill Wrigley, Jack Quinlan, Bob Elston, Vince Lloyd--they all came to Hampshire to buy their meat. And we had one newspaper, one clothing store, and one post office. So this town was really thriving. It was aggressive.

COHEN: Could you tell us a little bit more about the agriculture of the area or the production?

FENZEL: Well, that's what I'm getting at right now. That's right next on the docket here, Leah. It was like I say a farm. We grew--we had a big milk factory.

We took in 385,000 pounds of milk a day, and the milk was transported from Hampshire to Chicago. We grew corn and soybeans, and we were big in dairy farming as I told you. We were big in [live]stock. We had a big...[beef cattle distribution] We had a big dairy...cattle distributor... Anyway, all this was going on, but we had a big canning factory. We canned peas and sweet corn. And that's leading up to the POW camp... [which opened in] 1944—

COHEN: Sorry. Let's go back to that soon. But can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a kid in Hampshire?

FENZEL: Well, that's just it. I'm getting there. Okay, so what was I doing?? So, I had to do something. So I peddled papers. I peddled them twice a day. I peddled in the morning, the **Chicago Tribune**, the **Chicago Herald American**, and the **Chicago Daily News**--they had a morning edition, too. And then in the afternoon, the **Chicago Daily News** again--the afternoon edition--and the **Herald American**. But the morning edition is how I got into this POW whatever business. You see---and we mentioned we had four taverns. Now the big sporting event out there was playing horses. Now, when you're playing horses you need what they call a green sheet. And I delivered the green sheet. They had to be in the two taverns especially in the morning by six o'clock. The papers got there by the one train that dropped them off from Chicago. And the green sheet gave you all the odds, who's running at what park, etcetera. And anyway I took those into the two taverns in the morning. One of the taverns was a combination restaurant tavern. So I'm there one morning--this was in [early] January I think...So it was a [1944] cold January day. It was a cold day, anyway. So I'm there, and it was cold, and they always gave me free cocoa. I'd step up at the bar--it was a restaurant bar, combination bar--and they'd give me my hot cocoa. And they'd thank me for getting the green sheets there. Well, I'm sitting there one morning when three men from the big canning factory--the canning factory was named J.B. Inderrieden, and they packed sweet peas and sweet corn for Kroger, A&P, Royal Blue, you know, you name it. They packed it for everybody. So there was Johnny [Lang], Mr. McCreary, he was the mayor of the town. He was the president of the company, and then there was Johnny Lang, he was the manager of the company. A man by the name Ewald Koppen, he was the farm manager. And they're talking, and he says, "You know, boys, we don't have enough people to run this plant. What are we gonna do?" So I'm sitting two people down from this three, and one of the farmers in between says, "Hey guys, you know what you oughtta do if you need help? You say you need about 250 people?" You've got 250; it took about 500 people to run this thing from the field to the canning

operations itself. He says, "Get a hold of your farm service director down in Geneva, and they'll get you some German POWs. There's a lot of them around. In fact there's over 200,000 in the United States and they don't know what to do with them all. In a town like this you'll probably be able to get 250." Oh, okay. So the next thing I remember, it was in February--the end of February--these people had this ground adjacent to the canning. They were putting in a ten-foot fence from barbed wire, and it was inverted at the top, you know, up and then in. And they were building slabs. And there were temporary barracks for the American troops that were going in there, these buildings. There was a mess hall. Two mess halls--one for the Americans. There was about sixty American troops brought in. And then there's a mess hall for the German troops. And there was a PX for the Germans. And there was a PX for the--well, the Germans and the Americans used the same PX. And then there was barracks for the American troops. And these buildings--and I've got pictures of them here. These buildings were twenty by eighty. And they were cheap construction out of concrete slab. So things--boy, everybody's talking. What's gonna happen? What are we gonna have? Germans amongst us. It didn't matter because most of the town was German extract anyway. You go out to Hampshire, and you can see where the Irish settled the town. You go to the cemetery; you can see this. And then the Germans moved in. So anyway, one day I think it was in April, all of a sudden these trucks started coming into town, the deuce-and-halves, army deuce-and-halves. They came from Camp Ellis down by Peoria, even though we had prisoners in Rockford. But these were all Afrika Korps, the very best, sharp. So, anyway they pulled into town. Everybody's talking. There were 250 of them and roughly about sixty Americans as near as I can figure out. There was a ratio of about four prisoners to one guard. I remember this anyway. Okay, so anyway they're settling in and everybody's talking. So, one afternoon [chuckling] I'm putting the papers together and folding them, you know, so I can flip them--you know, when you deliver on a bike you know, at the garage on the desk and the counter at the shop. And all of a sudden here comes a command car, a big Dodge command car. Out comes the colonel, and out comes the druggist who was the paper distributor for Hampshire. And my dad says, "Now what in the devil--what trouble are you in? You're always into something. I have to watch you? Now what have you done? Look what's happening. They're not coming to see me." I said, "No I didn't, Dad. I tell ya I didn't do a thing." So anyway the druggist's name was George Wilcox, and this lieutenant colonel came in. He was probably retired [US] Army, but they activated him, so forth, to run these things. And he says--and he talked to my dad. He didn't talk to me. I'm standing right next to them. He said, "John" --his name was John. "Do you have any objection to your boy going in amongst the German prisoners?" He

says, "What we want to do, we want them and the Americans to be--to have available American newspapers."

COHEN: To be--?

FENZEL: To be available. Do you--would you mind if your boy went in there every day twice a day? Dad says, "Heck no." He says, that probably would be the best thing that kid ever did. He says, "They going to teach him orderliness...he's going to learn attention to detail, and when they start a job they finish it. He's gonna learn something..." "No that's all right. Let him go." So in about three or four days I started delivering papers in the morning before I went to school. I went to St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School right across the tracks, and then after school I delivered the evening papers, after of course, I got the green sheets into the taverns in the morning. So anyway what I had to do--that was one job [at the camp]. I had to see this man by the name of Hans Finkel. Now, these troops, these Germans, were all Afrika Korps. They're pretty sharp. They were all enlistees. As Hans told me, he says, John--this man talked perfect English. He was the equivalent to a sergeant first class in our Army. And he had a master's degree in English, and he talked perfect English with an English accent somewhat. And he says, "Now, John this is your job, ja?" I said, "Yeah." He said, you come in and you will censor the papers. Anything about murder or rape, out. I'll have scissors for ya, and before--the prisoners could buy these newspapers, the prisoners—they were all enlisted men, by the way and they were paid eighty cents a day plus ten cents for essentials. You know, like toothpaste, soap and so forth. Shaving stuff like that. And you will censor the paper, and then we'll sell them. Ja?" I said, "okay." So this went on. It was April, May, in June.¹

COHEN: How old were you at this point?

FENZEL: I was twelve. I have a picture here I can show you. I was pretty big for my age, so I'd walk right in the camp. The prisoners were saying, "Hey Johnny, how you doing? I'm saying, "I'm just fine, how are you?" The troops that we had, the American troops in many of these POW camps throughout the country, they were older guys and stuff like that. But [in Hampshire] these guys were young guys. It's interesting to note that this was in 1944 now. Keep this in mind. They ended up in the Battle of the Bulge, most of them. And I have proof of it. I've got a souvenir from it.

¹ Mr. Fenzel later added that this continued July and August thru October.

COHEN: Sorry, so you're saying—I'm a little mixed up. Earlier you said that most of the prisoners were from the fighting in Africa--

FENZEL: --Africa. They were Rommel's men.

COHEN: And but you're saying you later met people who had been--who had fought in the Battle of the Bulge?

FENZEL: These were the American guards.

COHEN: Oh, from the American guards. Gotcha.

FENZEL: The American guards, yes. Mhmm. Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself somewhat here. But anyway, okay. So I'm delivering the papers. Okay. And in the meantime they were--they were working, and the first thing that they had to do after they got themselves settled and so forth, they started harvesting peas. Now, I don't know if you know how peas are harvested. Peas grow on bushes, say about yea high. And first they're mowed with a mower like you're mowing hay or windrowed into rows about so wide. And then they're brought onto a hay wagon with a hay loader, which is towed behind a hay wagon and they fill up this hay wagon like hay. And then from the hay wagon they're taken to a viner, what they called a viner. And that's where peas are shelled. And they're put into boxes. The boxes were about two-and-a-half by two-and-a-half, wooden boxes. And these were out in the country. And as soon as these boxes were filled they were taken into Hampshire, to the canning factory, where they're washed, sorted, canned, stacked, labeled, and so forth. Okay? And that's the way it went. So anyway. We're going along one day. This was probably in May. I know school wasn't out yet. No, school wasn't out. I'll tell you the reason why I know that. He says, "Johnny Boy" --that's what Hans would call me, Johnny boy. He says, "I have a problem, and you're the one that can help." I says, "How's that?" He says, "My men are bored." And he says, "I need things for them to do." Now keep in mind many of them are from southern Germany, they know woodcarving. They were very skilled, because we had men in there that, besides infantrymen, we had aircraft mechanics and so forth. These are very technical—they were all mostly volunteers because if they didn't volunteer, they were drafted, and if they were drafted they were sent to the Russian front, so these guys were not dumb. You know. So anyway he says, "And you're just the man that's gonna help." I said, "Oh yeah?" "Oh yes. Sit." I said, "Yes Sir." And now, what we're gonna do, John, you are going to bring in watercolors, you know--he knew exactly what he wanted. You know those trays we used to have in school with the different colors and the brushes? You bring in that. I need them. I need

varnish, I need sandpaper. He says, "I need brushes. He says, I need carving knives." I said, "Whoa, no." I says, "You know--I listen to Jack Armstrong and Smiling' Jack and so forth." I said, "No, no knives." He says, "Johan, just a minute here, Boy." He says, "Look up on my counter. What do you see?" I said, "Oh my God, I see straight razors." He says, "If they didn't want us to have knives, why do we have straight razors?" I says, "You've got a point." I said, "Okay". I said, "All right, I'll bring it in, but," I said, "I'll tell you what, I don't have any money." And he says, "John I'll take care of you in kind". And he says, "You go get what I want and I'll show you what I'm going to do for you." I says, "Okay". So as I mentioned I came and went in that camp. Hi John, morning John, evening John, bye John, hi John. So, I came in, you what the paper bags are, used to be hanging over your side. He says--I come in there with all of these goodies. I mean, I was loaded. One guy, the guard, did say, "John, boy it must be a big edition of the paper this week." I said, "Yeah it's big this weekend." And so I get to the PX, I start unloading. I says, "You know, Hans, this cost me I forget exactly how much money". He said, "I'll double your money." I says, "How's that?" He says, "I know what's going on in your country." He says, "You don't have Hershey bars, the men don't have pipe tobacco like they want, they don't have chewing tobacco like they want, they don't have snuff like they want, they don't have cigarettes like they want." And let's see what's the other candy bar, O'Henry or something. I think that's what it was. He says, "I'm gonna load you up, and you take that down to your dad's shop, and he will sell it for you." So in Hampshire Illinois all during the summer of '44 up until October when they left, if you wanted candy—I'm talking about big Hershey bars, not the little ones, the big ones--you wanted cigarettes, pipe tobacco, Prince Albert chewing tobacco, if you wanted all that, all you had to do was go to Fenzel Motor Sales [chuckles] and that's how I had this business going on the side.

COHEN: How did Hans procure all this stuff?

FENZEL: Well, they [prisoners] could get it. That's the funny thing. They could get it. See, he was supplying most of the GIs, and they got the stuff. That's what I asked, I said, "How are you getting this stuff? This stuff is hard to come by." He says, "John we have our ways. I'm taking care of it. Are you complaining?" I said, "No, Sir, I'm not." He says, "Then be quiet." We take care of it. I told you we'd take of you. So I doubled my money. So anyway that was part of it. That wasn't all of it. So I'm there, we're unloading stuff one night, and school wasn't out yet. It was in May, early May. And I had my homework in there, too, you know. I had pads and textbooks. He said, "I'm gonna tell you something Johnny Boy, your English composition is horrible. You should be ashamed. Your punctuation is bad. Your

phraseology is bad." He says, "Your spelling is good, I'll give you credit. But you don't know how to write a complete sentence, you don't know how to initiate a sentence, you don't know how to punctuate a sentence. Now sit." I said, "Okay".

[Laughter]

FENZEL: Okay, so I found myself not getting home--and this was early May, and school didn't let out until about--it was about early June, first week in June somewhere in there, and I wouldn't get home for supper until 6, 6:30. And Mom and Dad wondered what the hell--excuse my French--what are you doing up there anyway?" I says, "Dad, he's helping me with my English composition." And Mom said, "Yeah, you needed it. I can't do everything for you. And you gotta do it yourself." So anyway, boy, my grades started to go up. Sister [Jeannette, my teacher] said, "John, who's doing your homework?" I said, "Sister, I am. It's my writing. I did it all." "Well, who's teaching you?" And I told her the same story. She said, "I don't believe it." I said, "Sister, it's true." I said, "I'm doing it." And then she gave me some special tests, and I did well. So I really owed this guy. He really took me under his wing. So that's what I had going. So then things are going good, business is good on the side with that woodcarving business and painting business. [laughter]

COHEN: You want to talk more about the business side of the woodcarving and painting business?

FENZEL: Well, that was interesting. The man that was in charge of the woodcarving actually--I found this later. I've got his name written out here. Ludwig Kafka. He was an Austrian. And I didn't think anything about it. I liked the guy. He was older than the rest of them. And he liked me; we got along very fine. And he says, he told me what he needed and put his arm around me, and he says, "This is what I need, my boy." He says, "If ever I can help you in any way, remember I'm here." I said, "Okay that's very nice of you." He was like an uncle to me. So anyway, later found out--and I didn't find this out until 190--or 2006. You see when I was in the Army--I couldn't get into Austria, and I couldn't get into Berlin when I was over there because I had a security clearance and so forth. And Hans ended up in the Russian zone. And I couldn't get to Berlin. So anyway this is going forward now to 2006, about this man that organized the woodcarving business. So I got into Austria, and I got to Vienna. I talked to the deputy mayor. He was in charge of war reparations and so forth, meeting people who were tied up with people during WWII, blah blah. So I finally got a hold of Ludwig Kafka's daughter. He had passed away six months previous to my getting there. So anyway she

started--she says, "How do you know--" to an interpreter, and I'll show you the--I've got pictures of them all. She says, "How do you know my father?" to the interpreter. I could understand her partly. And I says, "Well, he had a woodcarving business." "Nein, nein, nein, Papa luftmechanik." I says, "Nein, nein, nein, here's his name on the woodcarving." To the interpreter she says, it means nothing. I said, "Well it does. I'm telling you the truth." So she was foxy. Her husband was chief of detectives for the city of Vienna, so she tried to outfox me. So she says, "We eat dinner tomorrow night." I said, "Okay". So my wife and I, we met--where did we meet, at city hall. And she was foxy, she says, "Nein. Ein moment." She pulls out a picture about like this, it was her mother and father's, I think, sixtieth wedding anniversary. Mein Papa. And there was four guys and they all looked alike. She says, "Show me my papa." I said, "There's your papa." God, she hugged and kissed me. She said, "You tell the truth." I said, "Yes, I tell the truth." You know, oh she hugged me and kissed me. She said, "You know my papa? Tell me about my papa." And it was the interesting thing. She went through hell, because when he was repatriated, these German prisoners didn't get repatriated until 1946, so he went back to Vienna. And guess what? His home was in the Russian sector. And they kept him for over a year. And he went from about 175 pounds, when he was released he weighed 110. He went through holy hell. So anyway, that's why she didn't believe me. She thought somebody was trying to take advantage of him. But he came out of it all right. And he looked just like he did during the war. Because we fed these guys real well and so forth. And that was interesting talking about repatriation--maybe I'm jumping around too much but talking about repatriation. It depended on--we had over 370,000 German prisoners in the United States in 1945 when WWII ended for them. And they started to be--they were all repatriated by 1946, by June of '46. And the ones that were docked in France, Le Havre, and there was one other port. Guess what? They were sent as slave labor--they weren't paid or anything, and they were put in coal mines, put on farms. They were treated as prisoners. They weren't paid like they were paid in the United States. When they left the United States, they had all the uniforms just like American soldiers, new shoes, they had a savings account, money. They were paid it was about 640 deutschmarks, and they had three days of rations coupons. And they were well off. When they got to France, it was all taken away from them. But those who were docked in Germany, they went back to their homes. Now the only problem was, those in the Russian zone, they were kept under captivity again. Poor guys. I know that these guys were the enemy, but you know, we're all God's people. And you get to like these guys. They're the same as we are when you're working with them. And we felt sorry for them. But anyway. Now, if you don't mind, Leah, I'm gonna jump back to 1944 again.

COHEN: Yeah, back to the--yeah.

FENZEL: So anyway, that's what we had going on the side, the business. Delivering the newspaper. I did that every day. But in addition, when school was out we had--now keep in mind there were no boys around anymore, there were no men around. For example in 1944 Hampshire had a population, supposedly by the 40s census, 500 people. But do you know how many people were in the [US] Armed Forces in 1944? And I've got proof of it, a sign that registered all the armed forces people in Hampshire. It was 102 of them.

COHEN: One-hundred and two. I was gonna guess between seventy-five and a hundred. Wow.

FENZEL: So anyway, there were [only us] three boys in Hampshire. All the other boys worked on the farm, their own farms and all that. So they needed boys for the crop dusting that was going on early in the morning. See you crop dusted early while there was dew on the corn and on the peas. So we would go out there at 4:30 in the morning, and then we'd finish by 8, and then I'd peddle the papers. But who did I have--I had somebody getting the green sheets to the taverns and so forth. I had that taken care of. Anyway, a couple of times I had to take a horse in from the place and deliver it myself. But anyway, we'd be out there helping load the crop-duster, the planes.

COHEN: Who's--how many--who's the "we"?

FENZEL: There was three of us, three boys. And the rest were German POWs. And so we'd meet out there, they'd load the crop-dusters with this compound, so forth, and then they'd spread it with these crop-dusters. You've seen a crop duster. [Whooshing sound] So anyway, we'd be out there, and I'd be driving a tractor, I'd be driving--we drove teams of horses and all that. You know. So then we'd get them loaded, and they're ready to take off, and we're sitting around. And then, so we'd have cocoa. They'd make us three boys cocoa, with milk and all that, and they'd drink their coffee. And then we'd talk. And they taught us how to play pinochle and euchre. And then we'd talk. Many of them talked English. It was surprising. I'll bet half of them talked English. They were a very educated bunch. And the things I saw beside learning how to play pinochle, which carried forward pretty well because all the farmers and everybody played pinochle in Hampshire. But one thing I saw that really surprised me, that a lot of them fought the English to begin with in North Africa. And they showed pictures--we're talking about playing cards--they

showed pictures of American troops, British troops, and them playing cards in the middle of the night around bonfires, arms stacked behind each of the respective parties. You had to see it to believe it. In the morning, they'd start shooting one another, but during the night they'd play cards with one another. I'm not exaggerating. I should have taken a couple of those pictures, but you had to see it to believe it. I was old enough to know what I was seeing. So that's one of the things that came about. That was quite an education in itself. And we'd talk about that... just like we'd talk about--and I was really too young to know what they. I was told to watch out for communism, that someday down the line we're gonna be fighting the communists. Little did I realize how true they were, that I was told about the era of communism, because the guy that restarted communism was a German and so forth. So anyway, that was one of the things that came to life.

COHEN: Did you ever meet any hardcore Nazis there that were doing Heil Hitler's salutes?

FENZEL: Yes. Not many. Some camps, yes. This camp, they were pretty down to earth. Yes, I had one. Hans--I used to follow him around like a puppy dog. He says, "Come with me John." One time we were going down to the woodcarving tent, you know. It was just like a good ol' boys club they had down there. You had to see it to believe it. This wood--where did they get the wood? It was from orange crates, fruit crates, and stuff like that. You know, and lumber that they'd pick up at the farms and so forth. They had their own court. And he says, "John, look the other way, I'm going by this one tent." And they had the guys strung up in there. He was getting some whips. I said, "Hans, what did he do?" "He stole." He said, "We take care of them. We do it yourself. You Americans don't do anything. We have our own discipline." I said, "Okay." Hardcore Nazis. We had one. And this guy, he was like a master sergeant. He didn't have to work. He strutted around there; he had a white uniform on. Very--he'd say hi to me. And good morgen, and I'd say good morning. He said, "John, you stay away from that guy. He's Gestapo. I don't want you talking to him, you don't tell him what you and I do. You just stay away. You understand?" I said, "Yes, Sir." And he'd come around, and he'd look at us--what are you guys doing? I'd say, censoring the paper, stuff like that. That was the only one I ran into. Now, a lot of things did happen, and maybe I should go into them if you have time here, Leah.

COHEN: Sounds good.

FENZEL: I'll tell you some of the things that came about, here. I told you they were all paid and so forth. And they worked in the fields harvesting peas. You

know, whatever. And then when the pea harvest was over, I'll mention this, you could hire the individual to work in your own private farm or you could have them help you building. For example, one of the men--we had a large influx of Germans in our town. They started coming in in '37. I went to school with a lot of their kids. I'm the only one left, by the way, too. Anyway, they had a big blacksmith shop there in town. And this guy was German. John Geringer was his name. His boys went to school with me. And they needed blacksmith help. Guess what? They had one in the camp. He was a blacksmith. Guess what? He would walk down unguarded, every morning, just like he was going to work. I was there one morning getting something welded for my dad. Something. He'd say, "Guten Morgen." I'd say, "Guten Morgen." You know, and that's the way it was. Okay.

COHEN: So the guarding wasn't too heavy?

FENZEL: It wasn't too heavy, and I'll tell you something that happened. This by the way is a Hampshire honor roll in 1944. So you can see that--I think there's 102 names there, but it got up to about 160 by '45. They were taking guys at the end of the war there that were forty, forty-five years old. Things were getting tight at the end. But anyway, but this is what our honor roll was in 1940, right here. Okay, so anyway, okay. Now, there's some--let's see here if I missed anything. Okay, a human element that we had going on there--let me cover some of that. One day I'm out at the camp, and this prisoner comes running up to me. I was right along the fence line. And Hans was with me. Like I said, I followed him everywhere. I heard this name Juns. I says, "Hans, what's that all about? You mentioned this name Juns. I said I go to school with a boy by the name of Juns." He says, "Yes, that's right John. He found out that his first cousin is here. So, what he wants to know if he can have or meet with his uncle and so forth." And so I went back to school, and I said, "Johnny, your first cousin's over there, your dad's brother's son is there." He says, "Yeah, he's over there." You had to know these Juns. They were big farmers. And he went up to the camp commander, and the first day he was there he had a big plate of fried chicken and stuff like that. I can still see the colonel, blah blah blah, how did these guys find out about it. He turned to me, he says, "Fenzel is that you?" I says, "Sir, it's not me." It was me. I says, "They're working with these gals in the factory, these men in the factory. They talked to one another." And he grumbled, "I guess you're right." So every Sunday for the first year these Juns people would bring in fried chicken, cake pie, anything to their nephew, Johnny's cousin. That was one thing. You had to see it to believe it. Anyway, I guess there was a lot of that going on throughout the country. Now, I told you I was lectured on Karl Marx and the evils of communism.

COHEN: Was this by Hans?

FENZEL: By Hans, oh yeah. He says, "I'm gonna educate you." And I'll tell ya, I got pretty good--it was a long time ago, but I got pretty good at writing, and I went to Johns Hopkins. And I wasn't very good at math. I was in business. But I had all these medical students that weren't able to write. They'd help me in math, and I'd do their writing for them. So it paid off in the end. But anyway, so that was one side effect I got. One afternoon--it was in, I think it was in August--a gal from town by the name of Jackie Gerber and Floyd Felise who [eventually] was a big restaurant owner in Dundee got married in our Catholic church there, and I happened to be the altar boy. And the church was just about a hundred yards from the camp across the railroad tracks. Well...Felise['s people] in Dundee...had this big...munitions factory, and they made fireworks too. And Felise was, they were all Italians, and they were in the business. So this wedding comes about, and it was a big wedding. I don't know why the guy never went in the army. Could never figure that out. Plus he owned a big restaurant in Dundee afterwards. Plus he founded Sleepy Hollow also where I live. So there were a lot of things we couldn't figure out. Anyway, the big wedding, and I mean it was big. In fact as an altar boy I got a five-dollar tip, and that was a lot of money back in '44, see. So anyway, we came out of church, oh, roman candles, those big fire--what do they call those big firecrackers, those great big ones? They were all exploding, and then the prisoners all rushed the fence. They even knocked the fence down. They had a hell of a time. Excuse my French. But that was one of the things that was very interesting that happened. And they didn't know what the heck--the police had a heck of a time, they had to help, and the prisoners were scared. They thought they were being attacked. So the police had to explain to them. I was even up there telling the sergeant, the guard what had happened and so forth, and I was an altar boy, who was what and where. So that's one interesting that happened. Okay, now one of the big things that was interesting, Leah, was on Sunday going to church. I can say we had 250 prisoners there. But they went to church on Sunday.

COHEN: Was this voluntary, or were they required to go?

FENZEL: No it was voluntary, and there was about a hundred of them that would go. So they would march down. And it was about a four or five-block march. They'd come right to the center of town. I'll show you pictures. And they were all in their Afrika Korps uniforms. Now during the week there work uniform were American Army fatigues with a PW in orange. They were green. That's what they wore going to work. They looked just

like American, with the PW orange. But on Sunday, they were at their very best, all Afrika Korps khaki. And they'd come singing. They marched, I think it was about six or seven abreast, and they'd come from the camp down the main street, up Main Street, and right in the center of town they would separate. Half went to the Catholic church and the other half went to the Lutheran church. Now, both--Catholic priest, Father Herman Meininger, great guy. He spoke perfect German, and he would give them sermons, give them communion, and so forth. They went to Mass. But they had to sit in the choir loft. The rest of them went to the Lutheran church, Reverend Schmitke. Talked perfect German. Great guy. His daughter and my sister were great buddies. And so forth. So that was interesting to see. But they would come down in the morning, and they would sing their German marching song. [Singing] Hi, lee, halo... and they wore--we had a brick main street, you know. Cobblestone. And they had their hobnail boots. [Clap, clap, clap] You close your eyes and you'd swear you were in a newsreel over in Germany. It was very interesting. Well, then church would let out. One church would empty out or would let out early, so they'd meet right in the center of town, and they'd wait there. And that's when they started singing Lili Marleen and then Silent Night, you know, in German. Beautiful, their voices were beautiful. So that was one thing. And they'd sing other German songs, and everybody sat around clapping. So they got along really well up there. So people liked it, and they enjoyed it too. Okay, so that's another thing that happened. Now, [chuckles] one thing that happened, if you don't mind my telling these things. I was late for school one morning, just before school went out. He decided to give me all of the contraband early. I said, "I'll wait 'til night." He says, "No, I gotta get it out of here now." So I'm late for school. So I come running up the stairs, and the sister is waiting for me. She says, "This is the third time you've been late in a month, John. What are you doing?" I said "Just working over at the camp, Sister." She said, "I thought you delivered papers?" "Oh, I did, I did." "Why is your paper bag full?" [Laughs] I says, "Sister, we've got a little business going on." "Let me look at it." I told you, papers, Sister. Let me look at it. And then she saw the tobacco and the snuff and all this stuff. cigarettes, and then she also saw the candy bars. She says, "All right, Wise Guy. Put your hands out first." And my hands were red by the time I got done. I mean. "Now," she says, "We're not done. First of all, you're not coming back to school until this afternoon. You're gonna go home, and you're gonna tell your mom and dad what happened. But guess what." I said, "No, what sister?" "Your gonna be minus all the candy bars. You can't do that!" I think I had over a dozen of these great big and then some O'Henry's beside. I said, "You can't do that. That's how I get paid." She said, "You hear what I said?" So I lost all my candy bars. I'll never forget that. And I saw her ten years later. She said, "Ah, there's the thief for contraband." and so forth. She never

forgot it. She was good. I'll never forget that. And I told you about loading the crop dusters. And then on Sundays they would also play soccer and go swimming. We had a swimming hole that was a gravel pit not far away. They were trucked out there. So they went swimming and so forth in the summer in the gravel pit. You know. And then they played soccer. Of course, being in the Midwest you know, Leah, we never played soccer here. I didn't know what a soccer game was, even in the 50s. We didn't have soccer. It was either football, basketball, or baseball. That was it. So we used to watch them play those things. The guards that were with us, they were younger ones.

COHEN: So, John, who were the guards?

FENZEL: They were average soldiers. They were good soldiers. I'd say there were about twenty-two or three.

COHEN: These were American soldiers who were placed there?

FENZEL: They were sent there. And now who were they? One guy I remember I was very close to, a guy by the name of Bob Stanfield, and he was from Merchantville, New Jersey. And he was very close to me. Good-looking guy. And then there was this other boy from Binghamton, New York. They hung together. And they liked me. They were good to me. I used to go get things from uptown that they couldn't get in the PX. And then we used to bring these guards into our homes for Sunday dinner. And then also the village of Hampshire built a [USO Club] in the city hall, they turned it into a soldiers' club, you know. They had cake and they had cookies, and they would cook meals for these soldiers and so forth. That was right next door to our garage. See, I lived upstairs of our garage, Leah. Our apartment was right up over our garage. So we got pretty close to these guys. And yeah, we got very close. They were young. In some camps, your guards were older guys. Thirty-five, forty years old. But these guys were ready for combat. As a matter of fact, the whole bunch of them from the first contingent that were there ended up in the battle of the Bulge. And I've got a bayonet to prove it. He sent me. He thanked me for all our mom and dad did while they were in Hampshire, and stuff like that. So we were kind of close to them. You couldn't help but like these guys, these young guys. My dad used to talk to them. They used to talk to dad and wonder what it was like in combat and so forth. And Dad would tell them, "Oh, it was different in WWI then it is now, probably. Maybe not." So anyway we got acquainted with them. And I used to talk to them a lot delivering the papers, and they would be guarding the France. or they would go out to the farms. There would be maybe six men working at a farm picking sweet corn and stuff like that. And that's what they did

after the pea harvest was pick corn, sweet corn. You know, how you pick corn. And one thing that I'll never forget. This one farmer, Glen Melms. He and Dad were friends. He was in WWI in France the same time Dad was there, and I was working at the farm. Us kids did everything. And I was driving the tractor, and it was about six miles from his farm into the town, and I was out there taking wagons in loaded with sweet corn. Big wagons. You know, they pick--they were out in the fields picking, just like you pick field corn. And I'll never forget, it was a hot day. And they were out picking corn, and I was waiting, I was up there gassing the tractor up and so forth. The guard was sleeping under a shade tree. And the prisoners were out in the field. I think there was twelve of them. They were out picking corn, and this guy's under the shade tree. And Glen knew it. And he was fast asleep. So he says, "Johnny, watch this." So he goes over, tiptoes over to the soldier, he takes his M-1, that was the rifle, away from him. The guy didn't even feel it. He was laying there like this, and the rifle was cradled between his knees. He picks the rifle up. I said, "God, Glen, how'd you do it?" Shhh. He takes the rifle, puts it on the porch. So he's sleeping, and it was lunchtime. And see that's another thing, these guys, these prisoners like. When they were working for a farmer, they had the option of eating with the farmer, or they could bring the chow in from the mess hall. Well, the famers, they liked to feed them, themselves. They had roast beef; they liked to roast pork, by the way. Dumplings and sauerkraut, like that of course. And so anyway they came up for lunch. And so they saw the guard sleeping there. And they circled, the twelve guys circled all around--I'll never forget, I couldn't believe it. And then all of a sudden they said, "Wake Up!" Like that, and the guy said, "Oh my God, where's my rifle? Where's my rifle?" That's all he said. They're laughing like hell. And that guy never did live to see the end of it. The prisoners always used to kid him about it. You know. But those are some of the things that happened. On the other side of this thing, Leah, escapes. We had two of them.

COHEN: I was wondering about that.

FENZEL: Yes. Now, the first one that escaped. And you could escape if--it didn't take a--they didn't dig tunnels or anything like that, they just slipped away or something like that. The first one, he ended up in downtown Chicago, because these guys had all heard that Chicago was destroyed. So he had to see for himself. So he's walking around downtown Chicago, PW, you know, on his back, or on his back and on his pants. And they finally nabbed him. He starts to run, so with a shotgun, they got him right in the rear. So they caught him, and they brought him--and what they did. He was bleeding, not that bad, but he was bleeding, so they took bed sheets, made a diaper out of it, and brought him back. I was there when

that happened. And that was one--they took him away to Rockford. That's where one of the basecamps were. They had base camps, and they had separate camps, little ones like Hampshire.

COHEN: Was the base camp Camp Grant?

FENZEL: That was one of them. The base camps you had were Camp Ellis--that's where these guys came from, Camp Grant in Rockford was another, Fort Sheridan was another. Let's see, there was some--I've got a list of them.

COHEN: That's okay.

FENZEL: Fort Sheridan, Rockford, Hampshire--there weren't that many in Illinois. There were a lot of them in Wisconsin—

COHEN: So, I guess I was wondering, is the camp at Hampshire a branch of the camp-

FENZEL: It was an auxiliary camp—

COHEN: --of Ellis?

FENZEL: It was out of Camp Ellis. But I think it was actually administered out of Camp Grant, 'cause we were only thirty-five miles away. That's where the airport is now. You know, but these guys came from camp Ellis, and they went back to Camp Ellis after it was over. That's down by Peoria. So I can't figure that out. But they're all Afrika Korps. All Afrika Korps. We didn't have a mixture of any of the others. But anyway, number two escapees, just two. This guy escapes; he ends up in Streamwood. Do you know where Streamwood is? Well, Streamwood is just east of Allerton [i.e. Elgin, Illinois], on Route 20 between Route 19, Irving Park, and Route 20. He was walking around there for six days. Six days - mind you.

[Laughter]

FENZEL: Finally, one of the policemen noticed, that isn't right. So I guess the policeman, from what I understand, what does that mean? He thought it was a GI home on leave. And he went up to the guy and asked--this is what Hans told me--asked him, "What outfit you with?" And the guy couldn't speak English very well. But he was having the time--he was ordering food. I don't know where he got--I'm sure he could get the money from--I mean, these guys were intermingling with people in the factory and on the farm, so they could get hold of American money. It was easy. So anyway, he's buying hamburgers and stuff like that. That's

what he subsisted on in Streamwood. So those are the only two escapes that we had.

COHEN: So, was the second one caught as well?

FENZEL: Yes! ²He was caught as well. A policeman noticed the PW six days, mind you, after the time--from the time he escaped until they caught him. In... [Chicago]... That's only fifty-five miles away, roughly. So there you go. That's some of the things that happened. But we didn't have any work stoppages like they had in some places. Everybody got along--I shouldn't say that. Everybody got along pretty well. And they attributed that to the fact that they're all Afrika Korps and they had discipline. And if you do a job, you do a job and do it right. And that's the attitude that they had. But they were treated so well. They were treated so well. There wasn't any animosity or anything like that. Because a lot of the guys like the blacksmith in Hampshire, he fought them. He was a sniper in the Army. He fought with them. Like my dad, he didn't like the Battle of the Bulge or anything, the damn Huns and all that. But he lived with the Germans, you know, for a year after the war ended in WWI. He lived in Trier. And Trier is along the Rhine. It's up on one of the bluffs surrounding the Rhine. And he lived with this German family. So he got along good with them. And he remembers telling me that after WWI towards the end of his stay over there they were running around with wheelbarrows for money. Things were bad. And the thing I disliked about his whole doggone stay with the Germans, he loved Dobermans, and he used to go wild boar hunting. Dad was a country boy; he liked to hunt. And this family had a Doberman, and there were a lot of wild boar in this country. So he'd go wild boar hunting. So, just [chuckling] just before he died, he says, "You know, Johnny"--he called me Johnny. He says, "I don't think I'm gonna last long, but we need somebody here to watch Mom. You're living at home, and she's upstairs [of the shop]." And he says, "I hear there's a Doberman down at the vet's office that's up for adoption. You go down and get it." "But, Dad, I don't like Dobermans, I don't like the looks of them, I don't like them." He says, "Do as I tell ya, please." I said, "Okay." So I got this Doberman. I had more trouble--the Doberman loved me, but he loved me too much, and he loved my mom too much. And we had about--I darn near lost the dealership, because I had him chained up during the day, and if he didn't like you he'd snap you. But anyway.

[Laughter]

FENZEL: But those are some of the things I remember the most from that.

² As clarified by Fenzel in his revision of the transcript.

COHEN: John, I was wondering whether you heard reactions from the German prisoners. For example, did they complain about the work or being in a camp? Did some of them want to stay in the United States? Like if you heard a little bit of feedback?

FENZEL: Well, yes, I did. I used to get some of that. And there was one that ended up in Hampshire. And he worked for the electrician that took care of the electricity during the war. And he had a big feed company. And he came back. And yeah, we had no problem with—they loved it—I'm telling you, Leah, they were eating well. It was great. They had everything except their relatives. They didn't have family, but they were made to feel at home. It wasn't like—I guess the Germans treated our people pretty good, but there was a shortage of food and stuff like that. I talked to a lot of my friends—a couple of my friends who were taken captive. One man I worked with, Jim [Sensor]—he was from Dundee, he was a B-24 pilot...he was...based in Italy, and his plane was shot down. They were going against the oil fields in Ploesti, and the copilot was killed, and he told the rest of the men to bail out. And they all bailed out. And he took the copilot, wrapped him up, and put him in a parachute. And after it was all done he bailed out of his B-24. And he ended up right in the middle of the German anti-aircraft battery, whereas the rest of the crew they were taken by the partisans, and they went to Switzerland. But no, they didn't mind it. They were treated, the guys that were—there was two of them that were taken prisoner. Another one was Chester. He worked for the State of Illinois. Chester Millikin³. He was treated fine by the Germans, but he got what they had. They didn't have much to feed these guys with. And he was liberated by the Russians. But, guess what? He had to walk all the way back from near Hamburg where camp was all the way back into Russia to get a boat back to the United States. So he used to come and talk to me about the German POWs a lot. And he in turn would tell me what happened to them. And he says, "You know, John, they treated us fair. I didn't have any problems. I don't know if that's true everywhere." But he says, "I was an infantryman, and they respected me." So that was, of the most part, pretty well. But these guys like I say in Hampshire were treated well. But there's some irony to all this. I don't know if I'm going on too long here, Leah, or not.

COHEN: No, it's interesting, and thank you for such a vivid description.

FENZEL: I like I say was in Germany '54, '5, and '6. I could never get to go to Berlin because I had a security clearance.

³ Name verified by Mr. Fenzel in his review of the transcript.

COHEN: Can you back up a little bit and talk about when you were enlisted in the Army and how it came about--

FENZEL: Well, it's funny that you should ask that question, because it's kind of a hot topic right at this very moment. I wanted to go to West Point. And I went to Marmion Military Academy, and I was kind of gung-ho growing up. So I come running down the corridor one day, and we had Sam Browne belts on, uniforms. You know what a Sam Browne belt is? It's a leather belt with a leather belt over one shoulder. Leather, you know, like the policemen wear and so forth. And I was the commander of the corps cadets at Marmion. And so I'm running down--something happened, and I'm running down the corridor. And the principal, Father Alquin grabbed me. He says, "Hey." I said, whoa, I pulled him over I was running so hard. He says, "John, where are you going to college?" I says, "Father, I'm going to West Point." He looked at me and said, "No you're not." I said, "I'm not?" "No you're not. You just got turned down." He says, "You've got a bad heart. You've got an enlarged heart." I says, "You're kidding." "So, now what are you gonna do?" I said, I don't know what's gonna happen. I don't know. I don't know. Just like that, I was stumped by it, stumped by it. And he says, "Well, I'll tell you what you're going to do. You're going to Johns Hopkins University." I say, "You gotta be kidding". I said, "Father I don't want to be a doctor." "You don't have to be a doctor. What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I don't know I guess I don't want to be an engineer either. Maybe study business." "Well, they got a business school. You're going there." I said, "I am?" He said, "Yeah, you're going there." I said, "Okay, I'm going there." He said, "I got a full scholarship for you." I got a full scholarship to Johns Hopkins, tuition that is." And he said, "They've got an ROTC unit. You want to go in the Army? They've got the oldest ROTC unit in the United States, founded in 1916, one of the first two." So I didn't have to take--first two years of college at Johns Hopkins I didn't have to take ROTC because my high school ROTC was the same as college ROTC.

COHEN: Could you repeat please the name of the high school?

FENZEL: Marmion Military Academy in Aurora, Illinois. It's now Marmion Academy. They took the—[chuckles]--they took the "military" out back when we were having trouble in the United States where anything military didn't [go over] during the Vietnam War. They took the military out because the enrollment [declined]. But back then, it's a cool 500 boys. And the enrollment sunk to 400 because mothers didn't want their boys going to military school. So anyway, so they named it Marmion Academy. But when I was there, and my boys were there it was Marmion

Military Academy. Maybe they took the military out in the 80s. I don't know. But anyway, so I went to Johns Hopkins, played football, and in my junior year I entered ROTC, and went to ROTC summer camp, and again we proved to have the best ROTC unit in [the nation]. I mean, maybe I'm--I don't want you to think I'm bragging too much, but we were pretty sharp. And the Korean War was going on. And they came up to me--I was one of the leaders--and we're looking for volunteers to go to Korea. Well, I just lost my sergeant from Marmion. He was wounded in Korea. The guy I played football next to--we used to lock feet. He was captured, Felix McGuigan. Tommy Thompson, a guy I ate breakfast with. He was killed. He was only there two days, and he was killed. It was terrible, so I volunteered some of us. So instead of at the end of ROTC summer camp going home July 30, they held some of us over until August 15. Now, the armistice came about July 23. But they still held us in case the armistice didn't hold, we were gonna go to Korea. So I can still remember--oh God, I remember. I'll never forget this. It was down at Fort Meade. Maryland. And it was a Saturday, and I was dirty. I took a shower, and the wind was blowing. It was sandy. And here comes Colonel Hurley. He was in charge of ROTC at Johns Hopkins. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. He says, "Fenzel." I said, "Yes, Sir." You know what you're a blank-blank fool.

COHEN: Why?

FENZEL: I says, "What did I do, Sir?" "What'd you do? You damn fool. You ever been in combat?" I says, "Sir, you know that." He says, "It's not fun, I'm telling you that." And I respected him. He was in the Battle of the Bulge, you know, and I loved the guy. He says, "You just don't know what you're doing, Boy." Well I told him the same thing I told you about Thompson or Tommy being killed and Sergeant Krueger from Marmion being captured and riddled with machine gun. He lived by the way, too. And Felix McGuigan being captured and so forth. He says, "You can't help them, John. Why did you do that?" "Well I did it, Sir." "You damn fool." Well it worked out anyway because the armistice held, so we went home August 15. So we finished ROTC. And so right after we finished we were sent down to Fort Benning to what they call the Basic Infantry Officers Course. And in that course there was about out of 150, there was about--eight, nine--about ten of us from Johns Hopkins. So it was like going to school again. We were having a great time down there in Georgia, you know, learning how to eat grits and all that. So anyway it came to graduation, and out of the [one-hundred and fifty] I think six people went to Germany, and the rest went to Korea. And I happened to be one of them going to Germany. And as I told you, we, on our way over, we went over on a DC-6 out of Massachusetts, and we were--the icing was so bad that we thought we were gonna crash land. And I was told by the pilot. He

says, "John, you're in charge." There was six men on this flight, all the rest were WACs [Women's Army Corps]. Forty-two WACs I think it was. I'll never forget. He says, "Get ready for a crash landing. He says you tell your buddies to get the life rafts ready." I think it was twelve or fifteen minutes before the plane sinks. "If you get in the water you've got about fifteen minutes before you freeze to death. Each girl tells them to take their shoes off. You take your shoes off. Everybody gets two shots of whiskey. There's a cabinet up there. There's scotch and there's bourbon. You take your choice. Two shots." So here are us guys with our arms around these girls, making them drink, and they didn't want to drink whiskey, particularly the scotch. So, and we finally made it. I'm up in the cockpit watching. And he said, "Maybe we can make it." The pilot, "Johnny," he says, "maybe we can make it." He says, "Pray." I says, "Yeah I'm praying." And we did. We knocked off the nose wheel coming in. We came into Keflavik. The wheel hit the edge of the airport, it was right up against the water, and we nosed in. so we got it repaired and were on our way. So, I got to Germany the next day, and one of the funniest things--not funny, one of the grandest things I saw, the pilot he was up there always showing me things. He says, "Now John we're going over England now. Notice how dark and dank it is. Stay here just about ten minutes." He says, "You're gonna see one of the prettiest sights you've ever seen." He says, "Look it. Look at up ahead, look, it's emerald green. That's Ireland. John, that's why they call it the Emerald Isle." This was in February, and it was just as green as--beautiful. So anyway, we landed in Germany, and boy we landed at Rhine Maus and it looked like it had just been bombed. Rubble everywhere. So there was a jeep to pick up--two jeeps to pick up six guys, and the corporal says, "Where are you going Fenzel?" And I said, "Kirchgons." He says, "You poor SOB." I said, "What's the matter?" He says, "You'll see when you get here." And it was out in the middle of nowhere on top of a hill. It was built for the French, but we kicked the French out of it. And they went to Wetzlar instead. And so, I got there the next morning, and after I shaved and cleaned up and everything, and there, Colonel Schneider was the regimental commander, 22nd Infantry. And he says, "All right Fenzel, you know what?" I said, "No, what, Sir?" "You're my football coach. You're the assistant A&R [Athletics & Recreation] officer and our varsity football coach." And I says, "Sir, by rights, I know these guys you got here, they went to major college, played major college football, UCLA, California, Oregon, Washington, Virginia, Purdue." And I said, "I just went to Johns Hopkins, a small school." He says, "You know Johnny Bridgers?" I said, "Yeah that's my football coach." "Well, I know him too. We soldiered together in WWII," and he says, "He told me you can play football. You know football." I said, "Well I don't know, Sir." "Well, I do know. That's

it." Okay. So I went to the--I hope this is--what I'm gonna tell you is not pretty.

COHEN: It's okay.

FENZEL: Okay. So I'm the boxing officer. And the first couple nights I was there went on this boxing trip. And the A&R officer was ahead of me with his wife and somebody else, some other couple. And we were coming back from this boxing match around midnight, and we were stopped by a train. And we were there a half hour anyway. And so all of a sudden the door opens in front of us. He pulls his wife out like that. And I says--I was kind of half asleep. What the devil am I seeing here? And he pulls his wife out and starts slapping her. And these soldiers behind me, they're cheering him on. I said, "What the hell is going on?" So I said to the driver, "Open that door." I went out there. I says, "Sir, what the hell are you doing, man?" He told me, he says, "Fenzel. I'm a captain and you're a lousy second lieutenant. Get your so-and-so back in there. Don't worry about it." I said, "I am. I see you do it one more time I'll coldcock you." Are you sure we should be putting this stuff down?

COHEN: I think we should, because this can be an issue, as well.

FENZEL: Well, nowadays it probably wouldn't be an issue. Yeah, probably. Anyway it happened. So the next morning I said, "I can't take this. I'm not gonna be associated with this." What we had, Leah, in this outfit were a lot of captains who during the Korean War were field commissioned, they're heroes on the battlefield. And this guy was one of them. And some of them were pretty crude. I mean, pretty crude. Some of them had an eighth-grade education, period, and that was it. Now this wasn't one of them, but what I'm gonna tell you in advance for coming up here, I'll tell you a story. So, I go to the office next morning, and he says, "Fenzel, you are nuts. I gave you a cushy job, Man, you got it made, you're gonna travel all around Europe, you're gonna play football. Man, it doesn't get any better than that. It's gonna be like being in college again." I said, "Sir, put me in a line company." He says, "You're nuts." He says, "You're gonna freeze your you-know-what off." I says, "That's right. Please. Put me in there, please." Why?

COHEN: Do you want to just explain to the viewers that you stopped the man from beating up on his wife?

FENZEL: I did stop him. I says, "Put my fist up to him, and says one more time and I'll coldcock you. I says, "Stop it." He never did it again. And I checked up on him because the sergeant, the A&R sergeant, every time he'd see me,

he'd smile. He says, "Everything's okay, John." This was in the two years I was there. So anyway I was transferred to Company C. And I was weapons platoon leader.

COHEN: So is this still in the 22nd?

FENZEL: This is all the 22nd Infantry.

COHEN: But you moved from one company to—

FENZEL: No, I went from the A&R office--that's the athletic and recreation office--to C Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry. Okay. So I get--he says, "We're sending you to Charlie Company. And Captain Tingle's your commanding officer, and you're gonna be weapons platoon leader." I said, "Okay." Now I like this guy. This again this was a boy from Mississippi. He had won the Silver Star. He was as handsome as--he would look good on a poster. You know. Handsome, looked like Smilin' Jack. And he and I got along great. But he didn't finish high school. But he was heroic--he could lead men. The men liked him, and I liked him. Now, so we're on the company test. And I'm leading my platoon back in, and we're walking through the fields in Germany, and there were tactical problems that came up. And I'm walking back there and looking at the farmers. They're plowing with oxen. I found out in one case that the oxen came from Hampshire. We had the Holstein project, which originated in Hampshire. I'm talking to the farmer, and the platoon sergeant says, "John, get up here. Get with us!" Okay, so all of a sudden we stop and somebody--I get this thing on the radio, "Fenzel, come on up here". It was Captain Tingle. So, I go running up there, and he says, "John" he says, "I'm lost." Well, I says, "Sir," I says, "I'm just a lousy platoon leader." I says, "You've got a smart executive officer right there." I says, "Ask him. Don't ask me." He says, I'm gonna tell you something. Now, don't take offense to this. He says, "No Jew's gonna tell me what to do." I says, "Sir, he's a great guy. I love him. He lives next door to me." He says, John, are you gonna tell me what to do here or not. I says, "Okay". Luckily enough I knew what was going on. And we ambushed the ambushers. And we won. We were the best company in the 4th Division. And afterwards, after it was all over he and I were very close. And I said, "You know Sir, you shouldn't have said what you did. You know, you kind of spoiled it between you and I there." I said, "I love ya, but don't do that. Please don't--this guy, he's a great guy. I love the guy. And you gotta love--You know what the Ten Commandments are? I know you do, because you're a damn good Baptist. I said, I know you know what the Ten Commandments are. Love thy neighbor as thyself." I shouldn't have got that involved. I don't know--maybe I'm opening up here, but it's all

coming through here. So anyway, first thing you know, I'm transferred to the heavy weapons company, and I didn't like the company commander because he was one of the judges in this desk company deal, you know. And he told me, he says--and he was another one of these guys that was commissioned in Korea. Captain Kenlles. I'll never forget this. And he was a short guy. He says, [gruff voice] "You know what, Fenzel? You've got these mortars misplaced." I said, "No, Sir, I beg to differ." I said, "I know I'm a greenhorn, but I read the book, and I've been to school. I'm right." He says, "You're wrong." I said, "I'm right." So the battalion Commander comes up, Major Mann, and he pulls Kenlles over and says, "You know Fenzel's right." First thing, I know I'm under Knelles' command. And [laughs] he said to me, you know Fenzel, I don't like you. I said, "I know you don't, but you're stuck with me I guess." I said, I guess. He said, "What do you mean by that?" I just said I guess. And first thing you know, right after that the call for football comes out, and Colonel Schneider says, "Fenzel" --I shouldn't talk so loud-- "You're gonna play football." So I went up to him and said, "Sir, I hate to tell you this, but I'm leaving. I'm gonna play football." He says, "We'll see if you do or not." And he went to the battalion commander Major Mann and he says, "Fenzel, I don't like people who play sports. We're soldiers." I said, "I was a soldier here, too. I was." "What do you mean was?" I said, "Well, I'll be a soldier after I finish." He says, "We'll see if you come back here. Go ahead and play football." So I did play football. We ended up with a five and five record. But it was interesting playing against these guys, from a little college guy playing against these big boys and I did all right. And I got in trouble once. I was the line coach, and we were going down to a place to play football at Schwabisch Gmund. And we were going down the autobahn. It was a beautiful day. They had a big bus and a truck with the equipment behind it... And I had my car, and I had three other guys in my car beside myself. And they were enlisted men, halfbacks--they came from the medical company. So we're going down the autobahn, driving along real nice. And you know the Germans back then had just gotten cars. All of a sudden these three Ford Taunuses, I think they were Taunuses--Taunus, not Taurus. Taunus is the mountains in Germany. Taunus, that's what they're named. So, they [whoosh, whoosh, whoosh.] I said, Holy God. They all had sunroofs on them too. All of a sudden all three of them came together. And kids' bodies came jumping out and everything. So we stopped. Now, that was wrong. We had just gotten a communiqué from General McAuliffe. Do you know who General McAuliffe was? General McAuliffe was the soldier at Bastogne that said, "Nuts" to the Germans. Well, he was in command of USAREUR. He says under no circumstances are any American personnel to stop at a German civilian car accident. Well, I did. What are you gonna do? It was terrible. Leah, it was terrible. Honest, you had to see it. Little kids' heads coming...I mean, so we

stopped. And I put my first aid guys to work, you know. We had first aid kits in the bus, in the truck for football. And so they're--and I had I think about six guys from the medical company that were playing football. So they're working. All of a sudden, I'm holding this one kid in my arms and holding his head together. We had khaki uniforms, and they looked like your skirt there. They were polka dot, I mean khaki and red. All of a sudden this car comes, I think it was a big Mercedes, siren blaring, and he stops in the middle, and guess who it was. General McAuliffe. He says, he looked down at me, and I'm holding this kid. He says, "Well, Lieutenant, what have you got to say for yourself?" And I says, "Sir, I know I'm wrong. What in the hell would you do in this case?" He looked at me. He says, "Carry on." So, I heard about that when I get back, what we did...So then, we played football, and we had a five and five record. And I came back to the company, and we were getting a lot of snow. It was November. It started snowing early. It was the worst winter since the Battle of the Bulge. And there was a call put out to send troops to learn to teach winter warfare, 'cause most of us guys were trained in the south. All our camps [in US] were in the south practically. So I reported into the Dog Company where I was. He says, "Fenzel, you report to battalion headquarters. They want to talk to you." And, "Fenzel, you're going to Bad Tolz. You're gonna learn how to ski and teach skiing in winter warfare." I says, "Captain" -- I forget what his name was -- "You can't send me there." He was ES3. "The biggest hill I've seen was a hill of corn. I'm a flatlander, I don't know how to ski." He says, "You're going. You're a big athlete, Big Shot. You think you're something." I said, "Sir I didn't think I was something. I was told to do that." I said, I always thought that a colonel had more rank than a major, a battalion commander. He says, "You're going. He made the decisions since you like to be athletic and all." It wasn't my asking. So I learned how to ski. I went to Bad Tolz. And I tell you I was never so scared in all my life. I was scared, I was really scared. And we were taught by ex-German soldiers from Norway and from the Russian front, all Germans. And I'll never forget one told, he says, "Johan, I can see you're scared." I says, "Yes, Sir, I am." I don't know, he was in what they call the German Federal Border Patrol. They didn't have an army then. "Yeah, I am, I'm really scared," I said. And we had these big clunky skis. And I says, "Yeah, I'm scared." He said, "I'll tell you something. Just do what we tell you, but always remember John, when you're up high, if you fall you slide. You don't break any bones that way." See. And I never thought of it that way. And it was true. And believe me, we fell. So anyway, I learned how to ski, and then I went from there to Wildflecken.

COHEN: Sir, what is the purpose of the battalion in Germany? Aside from just recreational aspect, what was the larger purpose, and were you aware of it at the time?

FENZEL: Well, Leah, in the Army your combat units are divisions. And each division at the time was made up by a regiment. There are three regiments. Everything's triangular, you see, and then there's the basic to this triangle are supporting you. It's like a tank battalion, artillery battalion and so forth. So anyway in each regiment there's three battalions consisting of three rifle companies, one heavy weapons company, and that was it. So each battalion is made up of three rifle companies and a weapons company. And then each battalion and then there's three battalions, such as that into a regiment. And that's the way it is. That's the infantry, combat arms, and that's the way it's made up.

COHEN: So, what was the particular mission or assignment? What was the objective?

FENZEL: Our object--at the time when we first got over there, we belonged to the Army of Occupation. Well, all of a sudden the war was ended and everything, and we're not--at that time after that not in the army of occupation but we were involved in the Cold War, the Russians. And that's--and the blockade of Berlin had just, was on and so forth. We were over there just after that. They were our bad guys. So we were defending--- Germany was made up of zones, occupational zones-- Russian zone, French zones, English zone, American zone. And the American zone was more central. The English zone was north and central, Hamburg, Cologne, that was all English. And then the French zone was down further along the Rhine. And the American zone was the biggest, but the other big zone was the Russian zone. And that's what we were guarding, all interest from the American zone. When we would go on alerts and so forth, we would go up to an area where we would meet the Russians in initial combat. And our idea or our general deal was to slow them down and then evidently, they figured as though we didn't have the troops to stop them, but we would then retreat all the way to the Rhine, we'd get to the Rhine, and we would have river--we practiced river crossing to get to the other side of the Rhine, which was the British zone, and by that time we would have reinforcements brought in from the United States and we could resurrect an offensive. And that was the way it was planned. Thank God we didn't have to do it. You know? So that was the general idea of our being there.

COHEN: To prevent encroachment of the Russian communists within that part of Germany?

FENZEL: That's right. That's right. That's right, all of a sudden--and all I could think of when this was going on was Hans, what he told me. And that was our idea of being there.

COHEN: But that's interesting, too. So what insights did you get from Hans once you were serving in Germany?

FENZEL: Well, that's—you know, I wanted to get to see him to talk that over. I could never--they wouldn't let me go to Berlin, because where he lived was in the Russian zone, poor guy. I got over there finally--I won a trip with Chrysler. I was very fortunate. I won a lot of trips with Chrysler, Very fortunate. Yeah, I did. Anyway, I won a trip to Berlin right after the wall came down. So we were in Berlin, and I said Muriel--that's my wife--I said, I gotta find out, try and meet Hans. I'll go to the police station. I had his address and everything before the war, at the beginning of the war and so forth. So I went to the police station. So I told them the same story basically, that I told you, and I had this woodcarving with me. I was there for half a day, and these guys couldn't believe it, what went on and how we treated--I said, "You guys doubt me? My God, the war's been over for a while. You've never heard this before?" "No. Are you telling the truth?" I said, "Certainly, I'm telling you the truth. You'll see from the woodcarving. It's got my name on it. Bete und Arbeit eit. Pray and work. POW Camp 1944. Here's my picture. I said this is the man who conducted all the business with me. I want to see him." "Well, we'll look him up." And they found him. "Come with us." There was three of them, packed--plus me--packed in this little Volkswagen, you know a bug.

COHEN: [Laughs] Yeah.

FENZEL: And so, "Come with us." And I'll tell you--and this was in 19--what was it, '91, something like that? When did the wall come down?

COHEN: I was also trying to remember if it was 1990.

FENZEL: '90 or--wasn't it in there. The wall had just come down six months previous, and wow. They took me over to the Russian zone. Wow. What an education that was! It looked like I was in the slums. Their buildings and everything were not up to snuff. They hadn't cleaned up the rubble and everything. So we pulled up. "Here we are, Johan." I said, "Well maybe you'd better lead the way." So I saw as we were getting out of the car, "You know there's somebody seeing us. I saw the curtains part."

COHEN: Oh.

FENZEL: And so we went up there. And they knocked on the door, and the lady opened the door partway, it was this woman, and they looking--Hans Finkel. And I heard this, and I knew what it meant. "Hans ist gefallen. Hans ist gefallen." That means Hans had died. He had died six months previous. And I tried to--and boy, she slammed the door and she wouldn't open it again. I tried to tell her who and what I was and so forth. I never got the opportunity. So that's how it ended with Hans. But it didn't end at--I had a better ending with Ludwig Kafka's people in Vienna.

COHEN: Had you studied German, or had you picked it up from the time you were working with the Hampshire?

FENZEL: I picked up a little. Not as much as I should have. And I didn't study German in college. I probably should have. I wished I had if I'd known what I know. You know. But when I was in Germany I could understand what they were talking about. And I could order off the Speisekarte, you know. That's the menu. Things like that, but you know, I could make out some of it. But of course there's a lot of German spoken in my hometown. Even up until maybe twenty years ago, the farmers would talk German. We had a lot of Germans. There was an influx; it was in '37 when most of them came over here from Germany, 'cause they saw what was happening.

COHEN: So were the ones who immigrated in '37, were they the ones who objected to Nazism?

FENZEL: They saw what was going on. They were mostly Catholics. And some Lutherans, Lutherans and Catholics, that's the ones who came over. That's where we are now. But that doesn't mean that--there were a lot of them in Pennsylvania, of course and Indiana. So they loved the Midwest. You know.

COHEN: Were there Jews who had escaped Germany in '37 as well that came to Hampshire?

FENZEL: The who?

COHEN: Were there Jews among the Germans who settled in Hampshire?

FENZEL: Well, that's a good question. The man that ran the cattle yard in Hampshire, Harry Wertheimer, great guy [He was Jewish]. [Chuckles] He liked me. He ran in the Chicago Stockyards. Remember the Chicago Stockyards? Are you from Chicago?

COHEN: I'm not, but I know of the Chicago Stockyards.

FENZEL: Well, you know, this was the butchering place of the United States. The Chicago Stockyards, they were great. Halsted St. 25th, 35th, somewhere in there. Well, he had a commission house. Do you know what a commission house was?

COHEN: I don't.

FENZEL: Well, as a farmer, you would send your cattle there, and then he would sell it to the packinghouses. So that was a big thing during the war. Us kids used to ride the trucks into Chicago on Sunday nights. And we'd always go to a restaurant and get a hamburger with the truck driver. But we always--it seemed like everybody from Hampshire sent their hogs and cattle to Harry Wertheimer, because Harry Wertheimer had a big wholesale cattle yard in Hampshire. In other words, he would import cattle from out west and from down south. They raised cattle, both places. So everybody loved him. In fact I lived with this one farmer when I was in high school two years. Glen Melms. He was like a second father -- he would let me do things my dad wouldn't. I loved this guy. And him and Harry Wertheimer were buddy-buddies. And I'll never forget, so I go out and Glen came into Dad's shop one day. He says, "Where's Johnny at?" "He's over there polishing cars." He says, "Go get him, tell him to pack up. He's coming out and living with me for the summer." So I did for two summers. So then the first I get out to Glen's home, and I'm getting ready to help him with chores. And all of a sudden, he's gone. So, I said to Sylvia his wife, I said, "Where's Glen at?" "Oh, he's doing some negotiating." I said, Oh, okay. She said, "Johnny, just go feed the cattle and stuff like that." I said, okay. So the next--so Glen came, he says, "Everything done?" I said, "Yeah, everything's done." The next day Harry Wertheimer comes with a truck, and he's got a horse, his own personal horse, that he rode in these commission houses. The cattle would be in this pen from this farmer, that pen from another farmer, that pen--and there was a lot of pens, and he would--that he owned, oversaw, that farmers would ship cattle to him, and then he would in turn sell them to Swift and Armor and so forth. So he had his own personal horse. So Glen went and talked him out of his horse. And it was the biggest horse I've ever seen. It was not a stocking [i.e. work] horse. It was--it must have been a racehorse or a steeplechaser, something. Beautiful thing. He said, "Now Johnny, Harry said this is your horse." I said, "Oh, Harry said, or you said?" "Both of us." I said, "Oh, okay." So--and they made me drive--ride it. Not drive it. Well, I actually had to drive it because he wouldn't give me a saddle, he

wouldn't let me put a bridle on it. He said you've got to learn to neck rein it, John. You know what neck reining is, Leah?

COHEN: Well, without any reins or anything.

FENZEL: You have a halter on a horse. No bridle. You know, a bridle's got a bit.

COHEN: Bit, yeah.

FENZEL: Yeah, well this is just a halter, and there's a rope coming on each side, and you steer it just like a car, and the horse goes that way. And it was tricky--he was smarter than I was. And I says, "Well, I need a saddle." "No, you learn to ride bareback. That's what our Indians--that's what our forefathers did. They didn't have saddles all the time." I said, "Yes, they did. The movies said they did." "John, do as I tell ya." So, here I was-- Harry's people came over in the 30s. And he was a real gem. I think he loved in Highland Park if I'm not mistaken. So that was the only Jewish person I had met, and he was wonderful. And then I went to high school with one, Carl Neubauer. Great basketball player from Aurora. He was Jewish, got along great with him. But I really didn't get to know Jewish people, Leah, 'til I got to Johns Hopkins. And there were a lot of Jewish people in Baltimore and stuff like that. They were my buddies. We got along good with them. They were smarter than I was when it came to math, but I could help them in writing.

[Laughter]

FENZEL: Again writing came to--but we were pretty close. And yeah, that was-- those were good days. But that's how I got to learn about the Jewish people. But Harry Wertheimer came over, his family came over in the early 30s. He saw it happen, and he was a prince of a guy. Everybody loved him. Great to do business with, and so forth. But Dad did a lot of business with the Jewish people in Chicago. He always got along good with Jewish people. And so forth. So, that's the way we grew up.

COHEN: So how long were you in the Army or--

FENZEL: A little over two years. I got out, I resigned because I had a letter from Chrysler. I loved cars, and I loved the Army. But I loved cars, and I was enamored by Walter P. Chrysler, and I wanted to go to work for Chrysler. I just loved that guy. He was a wonderful guy. And that's the only reason I got out of the Army. So I had this letter stating I had a job. I had it in my pocket. So after I was home a few days from Germany, I said, "Well, Dad I'm going to Detroit. I got a job." He said, "Good, you'll learn something.

Maybe you'll be back someday." I said, "Yeah, don't worry, I'm gonna." So I went to Detroit, reported in the office to this one guy, and I says, John Fenzel reporting for duty, Sir." He did like that. I said, "What's the matter? This letter." He said, "You know what, John? That letter isn't worth the paper it's written on."

COHEN: Aw.

FENZEL: I says, "You gotta be kidding. It says that I have a job." He says, "John this is the automobile business. Things are tough now. You don't have a job."

COHEN: So was it because there was a downsize--

FENZEL: There was a downside to it. They were firing people. Things were--and that's the way it was in the automobile business. Up and down, up and down, up and down. So I didn't want to stay in Hampshire because all the guys that I grew up with, they were all married, moved away, the girls were all gone. You know, and I felt alone out there. So I came to work in Chicago. I started with Commonwealth Edison. I loved them. I got along great with Commonwealth Edison. I was doing good. But I wanted some excitement. So then I went to work with Dewey and Almy Chemical Company. That was a chemical company that made sealing compounds for pails, drums, tin cans, and so forth. And there was a lot of traveling involved, and I thought that'd be fun. Well, I got accused of being---there was one account they couldn't get was Texaco. Finally, I came right out and asked the guy at Texaco, I said, "Sir we've been calling on you a lot of times. We did business with you years ago. How about an order?" I said, "My God, it pays to have a different source of supply. Why don't you give me an order?" So he gave me an order. I came back, and I got fired. He said, "You used too much pressure." You gotta be kidding. So I got fired. So by golly, lo and behold I picked up the **[Chicago] Tribune** on a Sunday--Managers wanted, Dodge. I went there, and I got the job.

COHEN: Manager of Dodge in Chicago.

FENZEL: I was made a district manager out in Iowa.

COHEN: In Iowa.

FENZEL: Uh huh. And I was so happy. But in between time when I was with these other companies, I got married. Did I tell you that?

COHEN: I think not during the recorded part of the interview, so tell it now.

FENZEL: Well, in the meantime, Dad told me I was messed up. I didn't know what to do. He says, "Why in the hell don't you go skiing?" And I says, "Okay." So I went to Sun Valley, Idaho, and one night I was talking with some guys who were stationed in Friedberg, close to where I was stationed, and Elvis had been stationed there. I said what kind of a soldier was he? And so forth. We had a long conversation. These were cowboys. They were boys from Idaho and Washington and so forth. We were talking a long time. So anyway after we were over with I came back to the barracks [i.e. dorms]. I was with another guy from Chicago. And in these dormitories, there would be four girls in a room, four boys in a room, and so forth. I came in. It was late, we had eaten supper, and it was probably around 7:30 or something like that. And, Oh, here comes John. I said, "How you doing?" And I looked up, and there's this one creature, took the cover off her head, and she said, "Hi." And I said, "Hi." And I said, "Oh my god, I'm gonna marry her." And this was in March of--March of '59. And I went to see her, I dated her--I took her out for two dates in Sun Valley and got to know who she was. She was a cowgirl from Walla Walla, Washington, and she was working in San Francisco working as a med tech. She went to University of Washington State. And it was just sixty years ago today that I went to meet her in San Francisco on a date. Sixty years ago today. And I dated her in San Francisco, and then I had her come back to Illinois in October—oh, wait a minute. Yeah, October. And then I had her come back to Illinois in November for Thanksgiving, and then I went out there Christmas, and we got engaged, and we got married Easter of 1960. April 17, 1960...that's how we did it. Kind of crazy, huh?

COHEN: Sounds romantic.

FENZEL: We got along great. We get along great. She's a good girl. She was a med tech. She comes from a family, four girls and one boy. And I came from a family I was the only boy with three sisters. So anyway, what happened, once we're married we get three boys right off the bat, bing bing bing, and she wanted six children, eventually. And I said--she found out that was gonna be something. But she said, "I want a girl." Well she got her girl on her birthday. So we got our girl. So like I say we had three boys. Things progress and stuff like that. I was with Chrysler, and I was assistant regional manager of Dodge in Denver. Something told me, John go home, John, go home, John, go home. And I did, and it's a good thing I did, because Dad got sick and so forth. And it's a good thing. Otherwise we would have lost the store. So I went home and started working. Dad gave me hell for quitting Chrysler. And I said "Dad, I'm gonna stay. I'll make it." So we did. So I went out and beat the bushes and stuff like that. And so we had the three boys and a girl. So things progress. And Dad died and Mom died. And I had inheritance taxes to pay. And I had to pay off the

three sisters for their share of the estate. It was all tied up in the business and so forth. And things were really tough. Anyway, we made it. But so then it came time for these boys to go to college. I said, "Listen you guys, I need help." I said, the first boy, he had trouble in high school. We all went to Marmion Military Academy, by the way. He was kind of a goof off. He ended up in Tulane. But he went in the Army, and he ended up just retiring two years ago as a colonel in Special Forces. If you want to hear stories, you should listen to him some time... It was Tim that we talked about. You asked me, did any of your boys have trouble in the Army with marriage. Yeah, Leah, why did you bring that up? I said, "Yeah the oldest one." I'll still never forget sitting when he got put in Special Forces down at Fort Bragg. The general got up and he says, "You know I'm gonna tell you something." He's sitting there on the stage talking to these guys just like that, with his finger. He says, "You know what, in five years half of you guys are gonna be divorced." And I says to Johnny, [my son] after it was over, "Did you hear that John?" 'Cause he had just married this gal that he met in the Army. She was in the Army. He said, "Dad, it won't happen to me." "By God, it better not." I said, "We don't need any divorce, okay." So he had two girls, two beautiful—they're really great. One day, she [his wife] decided, "I don't want to be married anymore." So they got a divorce. She came from an Army family too. And she's still never married yet. And then my little boy, I says, "Mark. He wanted to go to Johns Hopkins, and I couldn't get him into Johns Hopkins." So I got him a scholarship to the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point. "I don't want to be a sailor." I say, "You don't have to be. You can go into the Marine Corps if you want to. Once you're commissioned there you can go in the Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Corps. Whatever you want."

COHEN: A lot of options.

FENZEL: Options. I says, "Do that." Well, okay. So then the third boy comes along, Michael, and I said, "Michael you've got t get a scholarship. You've got to help me. I have all this money I've got to pay off, your aunts and so forth, and the taxes." I said, I need all the help I can get. And so he got an ROTC scholarship. He said, "I want to go to Johns Hopkins just like you Dad." I says, "Okay." So we tried at Johns Hopkins. They're full. 'Cause they can go to any college that will accept them with that ROTC scholarships. Ah, Mike says, "I don't want to go to any other school but yours" I said, "Michael. All right let's get on an airplane. So we'll go see Bobby Scott." He was the athletic director. He was a ranger, he played football, and he and I played football together. I said, "Bobby, you've got to help me. I said Michael wants to go to Johns Hopkins. He's got a ROTC scholarship. You don't have to worry about scholarship. You don't have scholarships

at Hopkins in football anyway. But can you get him in? He's a hell of a football player, Bobby I'll tell ya." He says, "Is he, John?" Yeah he is Bobby. And he's pretty smart too. He says, I'll see what I can do. He says, "You go home. I'll call you." This was on a Friday. I'll call you Monday. And he called me Monday. He says, "John, I got him in. He's going to Hopkins." So that was good.

COHEN: Yeah.

FENZEL: That was good. And Michael, he's gonna be a general as of August 2nd. He was captain of the football team. So, Bobby never forgot that.

COHEN: That's very impressive.

FENZEL: But then like our girl, and like her mother she liked horses. Muriel is a hell of a skier and a good athlete. A horsewoman. She grew up on a ranch. It was mainly a wheat ranch, but they raised cattle too. They kept them way up in the mountains close to Walla Walla. The blue mountains of Oregon there about thirty-five miles away. So forth. So we got our girl, and...she went to Colorado State. And it's too bad she's not at home, because actually, she had the best business head of all of them. But she's out in Baltimore. And I probably--if she was around here, I probably could have kept the store open. 'Cause she had a great business head [tongue clicking] up here. She kept her husband going back in the recession through '09 and stuff like that. He was an engineer from Johns Hopkins, and he was some type of computer engineer. But she kept the household going doing various things. Great salesperson. But she had it up here. She knew figures, and so forth. So that gives you a little background on our family then, Leah.

COHEN: Wow. That's really nice.

FENZEL: I don't know, maybe I talked, rambled on too long.

COHEN: No, no. I think it was good. I guess I'm just wondering, do you have any message that you would like future generations to learn either from your service or from your contact with German prisoners of war? Like is there—

FENZEL: Well, I guess the only thing I can say, number one, ours-- it's a great country, and you've got to realize how great it is. I teach confirmation class, and these kids--"Pay attention to your history, and at the same time love thy neighbor as thyself." And all this crap that's going on, everybody fighting everybody else, I get fed up with it, listening to it.

We've got to get along. And the big thing that I've learned from all of it, and particularly coming in contact particularly with the south side of Chicago, we've got to give these kids education. And once they get an education, they can make something of themselves. They can't be quitting high school in second year, first year. Nobody's gonna hire them. They've got to learn that they've got to educate. And that's why I actually honestly believe--I don't want you to think I'm gung-ho. I am in a way. It'd be great to start up the draft again and get some of these kids into service and teach them how to legislate their lives. And learn how to live and put a purpose to their life and an objective to their life. That's what I've learned. Maybe I'm getting carried away, but that's what I believe.

COHEN: No, I've heard this from others as well. Not necessarily combat but like you're saying, I think you put it well. How to legislate your lives, and what discipline means.

FENZEL: Discipline. Self-discipline.

COHEN: And how to see a job through to the end. How to, you know--yeah.

FENZEL: Well, that's like, one man that I really admired in life, and he just died yesterday, was Lee Iacocca...And he brought Chrysler back, and I always admired him. And one thing he always said that I always remembered. There's no such thing as a free lunch. There's nothing for nothing. You don't get anything—you've got to give something for everything you want. And that's what he remembered from—that's one thing that I get out of life.

COHEN: So it's interesting. Is there something you'd like to talk about that we didn't cover?

FENZEL: Well, the only thing is, we could talk about the automobile business and stuff like that. I had some challenging things come up, so we could talk about that. I don't know if you want to go in that right now. But that was one lesson I learned, to never give up. When things look bad, just keep on going. Persevere.

COHEN: Persevere.

FENZEL: And that's one thing I've learned in life. For example, I don't know if we've got time or not. Just a--it won't take long. So anyway, I go to work for Chrysler. Okay, and I get sent to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I went out there first of March; I got out there first of March. I started in January. February, first of February. So they put me in the field first of March.

Twenty-two dealers, okay, all through central Iowa, top to bottom. One month later I had eleven. Eleven quit. Things were kind of rough for Chrysler at the time. They came out with a new model, was it--Narrow on the outside, roomier on the inside. The forward look. Well, it didn't go over. These dealers were quitting in droves. I said, oh my God. I called up Dad. I said "Boy, Dad I made one hell of a mistake." And he says, "Now listen, I'm gonna tell you something." I'll never forget. Dad, if you're listening, I've said it before. He says, "Just go out there and beat the bushes. You've got some great people out in Iowa. They're all self-made men. And give them the message, tell them what you've got to sell. You've got a great product mechanically and everything like that. It's not all looks and stuff like that. Remember that. And tell them you've got a company that will back them." And Chrysler was good about backing up a warranty and stuff like that. Quality was good. And so we've got great engineering. Walter Chrysler's place of business. That's where he started, in Oelwein, Iowa. I said, Oh God I forgot that, Dad. He says, "Just beat the bushes." So one year later, I had twenty-one.

COHEN: Wow, from eleven.

FENZEL: I thank God, from eleven I had twenty-one. And I did what my dad told me. And I didn't get down. I could have gotten down, but I didn't get down. I was kind of a maverick. They could never get a hold of me. I was always meeting somebody. And regional office got mad at me. They said, "Where in the hell are you all the time? You're gone." Thank God I was able to produce, but you know one thing that kind of kept me going, because I mentioned Walter Chrysler. Walter Chrysler, he started out as a railroad engineer in Oelwein, Iowa. He was from Kansas City to begin with. But he was the mechanic for the Great Northern Railway and their shops were in Oelwein. So that was one of my open points. So I pull into Oelwein--and I had Illinois plates on the car, and they were what they call manufacturing. You'll see that now, MFG. and that means car manufacture. And it had manufacturing plates on it. Fifteen. That was Chrysler number. Manufacturing Fifteen. So I pulled up in Oelwein about eight o'clock in the morning, about thirty-five miles from Cedar Rapids. I always used to leave home early, and I pulled into town there, and I said, "Well, I'll have a cup of coffee and find out who's what and who's on first and all that." I pulled up right in front of this restaurant. I had this flashy Dodge. It was a high powered one. And this old guy comes out. "Say, hey there, Sonny," I was much younger then. "You there one of those block men?" "Block man meant field man, and that's an implement term, like John Deere International, they had block men calling on them. Well I said, "I'm not. Yeah, I guess you can say so. I'm with the car company. I'm with Chrysler." "That's what I thought. You know what?" I said, "No, what?"

“Did you know Walter Chrysler?” I said, “Oh no he died in 1939”, and he says, “You know, I used to work with him. You know he got his start here in Oelwein.” I said, “Yes, I know that.” “Do you want to see where we started out?” I said, “You said we did. Did you work with him?” “Oh yeah, he couldn’t drive?”

COHEN: My goodness. You met the teacher and the trainer of Chrysler.

FENZEL: Couldn’t drive. So he says, “Yeah, come here. You want a cup of coffee?” I said, “Yeah, I’ll buy you a cup of coffee.” And we talked and I go in the restaurant. This is here one of these block men. I said, “Hi guys, how are ya?” All these farmers and all that. He says, “Now, I’m gonna tell you something. I’m gonna take you to Walter Chrysler’s, the barn where we worked.” It was a white garage. It was about a big two-car garage like you see in Chicago here. And you know, I told you he couldn’t drive. But anyway he wanted to know about automobiles. So he says, “You know what, we used to go to the Chicago auto show, and we bought a Buick. And he says, I had to drive it back. I drove it back, and he took it apart, put it back together, and we drove it. We took it apart, put it back together... It was three times, three times. Then I taught old Walt how to drive, and you know the rest of the story.” And I always remembered that. You gotta know--Knowledge is power. And I remember that, too. That was a military term, too, but we used it in automobiles, too. So that was something I learned in civilian life, too. So, anyway, so that more or less sums things up. But I’ll never forget, and I used to tell these guys too, talking about slogans. I played lacrosse at Hopkins, and when you go into West Point, over the mess hall there’s a quote of General Douglas MacArthur--I’ll never forget this. It applies to civilian life—“When the going gets tough the tough get going.”

COHEN: --going, right.

FENZEL: I’ve never forgotten that. That kept me going too. I remembered that in college. I learned that in college. So anyway, that’s more or less sums things up, Leah. In a nutshell. I don’t know if you’d like to enlarge anything.

COHEN: No, no, I really thank you very much for coming in.