

**Title**

German Experience of World War II

**Dates**

1991-1994

**Extent**

18 oral histories

**Repository**

Center for Oral and Public History  
California State University, Fullerton

**Introduction**

The German Experiences in World War II project, as a component of the collections of California State University, Fullerton's Center for Oral and Public History, documents through oral histories the experiences and challenges of German men and women who were willing to share their personal accounts of World War II and Nazi Germany. This project was undertaken by Robert Mulcahy, a graduate student who parlayed his interest in the German perspective into an important body of research material for those interested in World War II narratives.

The transcribed interviews and the original sound recordings in this collection are available for use by research scholars, students, community members, and any other interested groups. Abstracts of each oral history are available here within as well as on COPH's website <http://coph.fullerton.edu/> to facilitate researchers with their topic interests.

**Project Abstract**

This project provides the German perspective of World War II, that is, interviewees - both German civilians and soldiers - discuss their memories and experiences of living in Nazi Germany. Started as a student project, this collection offers a glimpse of German military and home life, Hitler Youth, attitudes about Hitler and Jews, the effect of propaganda, and post-war issues including the Russian occupation, scarcity of food, and prisoners of war. Those interviewed are current residents of the United States and were interviewed in the United States.

**Interviewees**

Anonymous  
Josef Biela  
Erna Block  
Hans Busch  
Christel Hertenstein  
Rolf Hertenstein

Brigitte Klein  
Hans Klein  
Eva Krutein  
Manfred Krutein  
Werner A. Kurkowski  
Hans Lietz  
Heidi Nadig  
Rudi Nadig  
Hanns Scharff  
Kurt Schulze  
Rudi Toepfer  
Wilhelm Gerstner

**Restrictions**

None

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OH# 2340

**Narrator:** Anonymous

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 15 May 1993, 19 February 1994

**Abstract:** An oral history with an anonymous World War II Waffen SS soldier. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Interviewee relates father's occupation. Recalls activities of *Jung Volk* and Hitler Youth, including Nuremberg rallies. Airplanes fascinated him, and in 1943 he joined Flying Corps of Hitler Youth. Discusses experience in Hitler Youth, flying accident that prevented him from joining air force, and Japanese learning to fly torpedo planes at nearby airports. Discusses attending a *Wehrtuechigungslager* (pre-military camp), then a *Reichsausbildungslager* (Waffen SS training school). Recalls meeting General Rundstedt. Describes SS training; struggled with math so he was sent to mountain training unit. Interviewee's town did not dislike Jews, and he himself had a friend who was half-Jewish. Gives opinion why war was fought; recalls air raids. Interviewee was anxious to be a soldier; describes getting police chief's permission to join SS. Gives reasons for choosing SS over army. Interviewee joined in 1943 at age 16; father was not a Party member and was not pleased that son joined SS. SS were automatically members of Nazi Party. Interviewee feels party membership was necessary to get high positions in German society. Recalls experience in *Reichsarbeitsdienst*; after that service he was drafted into SS unit. Describes training in mountains of Yugoslavia, and SS anti-Jewish teachings. Thinks SS weren't enthusiastic about Hitler, especially near end of war, but they fought for their country. Recalls being attacked on train trip. Soldiers discarded gas masks, and Interviewee believes Germany didn't use gas in World War II because Hitler was injured by it in World War I. Interviewee's training school was bombed, so he was transferred to front lines. Gives positive opinion of foreigners who fought for Germany. Interviewee was sent to Slovenia, then Bosnia; rations rarely reached them, but they had plenty of ammunition. Describes searching for and fighting partisans in mountains. Earned Iron Cross for disabling a tank. His unit was heavily outnumbered by people who knew the area, so he never expected to defeat partisans. Discusses mistreatment and killing of German prisoners. German morale was low and they never felt safe. Recalls partisan attack on a village and a Red Cross train. During retreat from Yugoslavia, used "Scorched Earth" policy—destroyed transportation and bridges, but not factories or buildings. Describes retreat through Yugoslavia; many Slovenian civilians were fleeing to Austria as well, and others gave the Germans food; they feared life would only get worse under Tito's rule. Recalls brief interactions with a Croatian and some Mongolian fighters. Other soldiers were hostile towards Interviewee because he was SS, so he covered his SS insignia. Captured by British in Klagenfurt. Describes being searched and interrogated. Slovenians prisoners and many SS were given to Tito's men, who later murdered them. Interviewee realized Germany would lose shortly before he was captured when he heard radio reports of Allied attacks on Frankfurt; previously thought secret weapons would win the war. Describes being moved from camp to camp, then

arriving in final camp in Taranto, where he stayed for a year. Interviewee got extra food for being on soccer team and working as British officers' barber; gave extra to tent mate. Recalls being counted twice daily; overall treatment was good, even though he was SS. Discusses being sent back to Germany, where he was put in an American camp. Describes experience in the camp, and return home to family. Thinks Germans lost against Tito because they were outnumbered and undersupplied. Didn't know about Holocaust during the war, and later didn't believe what he heard about it at first; still isn't sure everything said about it is true. Discusses post-war prejudice against SS; feels some American units who fought against SS units respected them; not all SS units were bad, and some Allied units were brutal. Interviewee immigrated to America in 1958 to get a better economic life.

OH# 2281

**Narrator:** Josef Biela

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 10 December 1991

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Josef Biela, who served as a German soldier during World War II in Russia and Italy. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Biela describes invasion of Russia; wounded near Stalingrad and sent to hospital. Received transfer to southern front because he said he could speak English, then he spent months trying to learn that language. Later, during Cold War, believed America would outlast the U.S.S.R. because people will not endure oppression forever; discusses Gorbachev, and belief that there will never be another war between superpowers; likes plan for European Union. Describes survival as soldier in Russia; German vehicles and weapons performed badly in winter. Describes Russian rocket launchers, German methods of keeping guns usable in cold, supply problems, frostbite. First winter in Russia, Biela was near Kiev. Army avoided most cities because a few people could defend them, just as they could defend mountains passes in Switzerland. Compares howitzers and cannons; feels successes were due to superior German weaponry. Morale not bad because Germans obeyed without questioning, in Hitler Youth and everything else. Discusses German discipline; also medical conditions in Russia. Believed Germany would win until he was wounded and saw that he received much better treatment from Americans, and that many more American planes were ready to be sent to Europe. As prisoner, Biela was amazed to see that Americans printed news of their own defeats. In Germany even those who opposed Nazism did not dare to admit it. Some artillery units in Russia used horses; roads were bad; supplies and ammunition were adequate. Compares Russian and German soldiers. As a boy he was afraid to attend a relative's wedding in Poland because of propaganda that Poles were subhuman and cruel; found that Polish officials were much kinder than German ones, and thereafter

was skeptical of propaganda that French, Poles, and Russians were subhuman. German soldiers treated prisoners with respect. Recalls capturing British soldiers and treating them humanely; received Iron Cross for capture; army had no connection to Nazis, and had different morals; Nazi military group was *Waffen SS*. Compares beliefs about enemy soldiers among various nations' troops; describes treatment of prisoners by different nations' soldiers. Feels Russian T34 was best tank at that time. Discusses Russian partisans; *Waffen SS* responded by killing civilians unconnected with attacks; describes *Waffen SS*. Recalls attack on Stalingrad. Describes receiving wound, first aid, and train trip to hospital. Discusses German morale after Stalingrad. Talks about experience in *Reichsarbeitsdienst*; Germans were not supposed to fraternize with Poles. Describes varied German responses to propaganda; while a prisoner, he gave a message about his condition to be broadcast on the BBC, which somehow reached his parents. Recalls informing Italian troops that they were no longer Germany's allies so they could go home; as prisoner in America, he and other Germans hoped America would declare war on Russia and invite the prisoners to help fight it. Earned Iron Cross by fooling over sixty British into surrendering. Explains how he ended up in Italy instead of Africa; discusses retreat near Anzio. Recalls V-1 bombs hitting England while he was prisoner there. Describes how he earned Tank Destruction award. Compares fighting in Russia and Italy. German prisoners were glad to hear Hitler died. Biela thinks would-be assassin should have shot Hitler rather than taking the chance that the bomb would not kill him. German prisoners read American papers and accepted them as truth. Describes experience in Hitler Youth. Thinks Hitler was a superb orator over the radio, but was frightening to watch. Describes three times he saw Hitler, and pro-Nazi teachings at school. Wonders why Jews are treated so badly throughout the world; recalls experiences with several Jews. At first did not believe Holocaust happened, but now believes it did. Youth admired SS. Biela recalls a Hitler Youth song. Feels that before war Germans felt surrounded by enemies; now trend is toward friendship. As a youth he was anxious to fight in the war; now he is glad Hitler lost. Ends with plea that America help the Russian people.

OH# 2265

**Narrator:** Erna Block

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 11 March 1992

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Erna Block, who fled East Germany with her family after World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Block relates family history; born in Netzen. Cared for widowed father until age 18, then worked in Magdeburg as teletypist. Drafted into air force, working in communications. Describes courtship with future husband Willi, a pilot who was shot

down twice in that period. Describes air raids, housing after marriage. Toward end of pregnancy, sent to Wendgraeben castle in countryside which was used as maternity hospital. Neighborhood was bombed, so Block moved back to father's home in country, along with other relatives; Block risked punishment for leaving air force job. White Russian army passed village; Russians and Germans clashed in her area. Describes effort to help soldiers with burns, also refugees fleeing west. Discusses Russian atrocities. Sister-in-law was required to take in a refugee family; friend saved Block from Russians by telling them she had tuberculosis. Describes Russian occupation; Russians gave women assignments each day; one gave Block valuable sugar for her daughter. Block describes food scarcity after war. Some German soldiers returned to families, feared Russians would arrest them. Block's husband Willi went to West Berlin, got a job with an American motor pool. Block's communist cousin became mayor, promised to protect Block's husband so he could return. Willi's American friend brought food occasionally, encouraged emigration. More description of Russian occupation. Mayor warned Willi he was charged as spy; Block family escaped to West Berlin. Block and daughter boarded train for Black Forest, police removed her and other East German refugees at West German border. Other people helped her reach Black Forest, where she was put in a refugee camp. Husband arrived two weeks later. Family able to leave camp when brother agreed to take them in. Following typhoid outbreak, family decided to emigrate; Block describes her move to Canada. Block's parents and siblings had different opinions of Hitler; many people favored him because he created jobs. Block describes Hitler's justification for war; Block believed him until air force job exposed her to war's misery. Describes experience in *Bund Der Deutschen Madchen*. Recalls no anti-Jewish feeling or negative impact on churches in her village; feelings about war declaration were mixed; most people believed propaganda, but only at first. Describes rationing during war, and after Russian invasion. Discusses wartime transportation and morale. Soldiers from front contradicted propaganda. When Block worked with air force, received messages but couldn't decode them. Reactions to assassination attempt on Hitler varied. Opinions of Himmer and the SS. Air raids convinced her Germany was losing. Discusses girl who denounced Willi as spy, and Germans killed during Russian occupation. Russians tried to make villagers communist, and raped many women before a good officer took charge after war. Describes average Russian soldiers as good people until they drank too much vodka. At first Block did not believe what she heard about the Holocaust.

OH# 2400

**Narrator:** Hans Busch

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 27 July 1992 and 2 September 1995

**Abstract:** An oral history with Hans Busch, who was a German pilot during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Busch recalls conditions in pre-war Germany and his father's political views.

Discusses varying attitudes toward Jews, and his involvement with Hitler Youth. Explains reasons Germany annexed various territories before war. Discusses working as a civil defense messenger, and later helping in a bombed city. Describes strict air force boot camp, hearing Hitler speak, and listening to BBC broadcasts. Explains air force training and ranks. Describes serving in a unit that flew the Messerschmitt 262, a secret twin-jet fighter. Discusses that plane's capabilities. Describes training with first the Focke-Wulf 190, then the Messerschmitt 262. Explains startup procedure for the 262, and how to fly it effectively. Discusses air base security, fuel shortages, plane maintenance, and a crash he experienced. Recalls talking with political prisoners from the Dachau Camp. Describes his only encounter with Allied aircraft. Recalls scarcity of troops and equipment as Germany began losing the war, and numerous transfers just before it surrendered. Describes conditions in the Bad Aibling prisoner of war camp. Feels Nuremberg trials were justified but shouldn't have focused exclusively on Germans; relates some actions by the American military which he objects to, noting that every nation has some unscrupulous people.

OH# 2483

**Narrator:** Wilhelm Gerstner

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 25 October 1994

**Abstract:** An oral history with Wilhelm Gerstner, who was a young German soldier in World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Gerstner was raised in Moersch near French border. Discusses Hitler's appeal to unemployed Germans; compares crime in America with Hitler's Germany where streets were safe at night. Describes *Jung Volk* and Hitler Youth; feels German kids had more respect than present-day Americans. Recalls SS neighbor, a priest sent to concentration camp, and varied opinions on Jews. People were not happy when Hitler attacked Poland; Gerstner's father was drafted, but soon returned because he was needed at home as a machine engineer. Town was briefly evacuated. When Hitler invaded Russia, people felt war was lost. Gerstner became butcher apprentice, then received military training in *Reichsarbeitsdienst* in Czechoslovakia and France. After release he was drafted into Luftwaffe; describes training and war experience in Nagold and Nimes. Recalls partisan attacks, and gives opinion of assassination attempt on Hitler. Describes retreat in France and encounters with partisans. Captured by Americans but soon escaped; caught by SS and assigned to a new unit; transferred to Hungary. Describes trench warfare against Russians; also Russian weaponry and friendly Hungarian civilians. Morale was bad; division was made up of boys and old men. Describes first wounds he received, night reconnaissance, and fighting alongside SS; differentiates between *Waffen SS* and *Gestapo*. Describes attack by Russian Mongols. Didn't dare surrender to Russians. Gerstner wounded in attack on Russians; sent behind lines to hospital. Deserted and arrived back at home village just before French invasion; describes French

atrocities. Men of village were put in prison camp in Strasbourg. Gerstner describes lack of food and poor treatment in camp; volunteered to work so he could get out of camp. Old and young prisoners transferred to camp at Bad Kreuznach; describes worse conditions there. Sent home in 1947. Sister married American GI and moved to Iowa; family tried to follow twice but couldn't get clearance to leave; finally sister's husband convinced consulate to grant visas. Gerstner moved to Canada in 1951, then to U.S. in 1964. First heard about Holocaust in Canada. Thinks Holocaust claims are exaggerated; doesn't believe there were six million Jews in all of Europe. Heard about some camps because village priest died in one, but didn't know Jews were sent to them; feels prisoners died in camps because late in war there wasn't enough food for German civilians, let alone prisoners.

OH# 2405

**Narrator:** Christel Hertenstein

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 17 Feb 1994

**Abstract:** An oral history with Christel Hertenstein, who worked as a nurse with the Red Cross near Cologne during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Hertenstein was raised in Bensberg, Germany, near Cologne. Father joined Nazi party because someone had to, and no one else would volunteer. Hertenstein had to join *Jungmaedel*, the Hitler Youth organization for girls; recalls experiences in that group. Later rarely attended the organization for older girls because it was poorly organized in her town. Recalls German expectations for women. Schoolteacher was very pro-Hitler. Shares memories of school, church, lack of crime, and prosperous pre-war economy. Discusses beginning of war. Hertenstein and many other girls joined *Reichsarbeitsdienst* to help war effort. Describes activities, a typical day, and conditions in *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. When term ended Hertenstein went to Cologne University; later switched to trade school and became Medical Technical Assistant. Discusses rationing, propaganda, and disinterest in Hitler's speeches. Wasn't very political, so didn't have an opinion about Hitler. Recalls Hitler's visit to Cologne, and bomb raids there. Married a German lieutenant; describes their frequent separation and uncertainty. Family took in bombed-out refugees. Girls were drafted to anti-aircraft units. Hertenstein worked in women's clinic until it was bombed. Father's hotel bombed but his restaurant survived. People not enthusiastic about war but endured it. Describes war effect on transportation, services, and celebrations. Gives thoughts on attempt to kill Hitler. Joined Red Cross army hospital; describes duties there. Recalls bombings of Cologne and advance of Allies. Some Germans still hoped secret weapons would prevent defeat. Hospital evacuated. Medical unit tried to move into central Germany to open a new hospital, but Allies advanced faster than they did. Unit's medical buses were mistakenly fired on, and some staff killed, Hertenstein slightly wounded. Received medal because of wound. Unit simply waited for war to end. Describes British



occupation. After months managed to get back to Cologne. Didn't know about Holocaust until after war; prefers not to discuss it because not well-informed about it. Husband was Russian prisoner of war; arrived home in 1947 very malnourished and dazed. She had to feed him slowly, and she made him attend all five nights of Cologne's *Karneval* celebration to help him get back on his feet.

OH# 2314

**Narrator:** Rolf Hertenstein

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 24 February 1992

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Rolf Hertenstein, who was a German tank commander in World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Hertenstein grew up in Bad Homburg. Parents owned a hotel and were non-political conservatives; father drafted in World War I. Parents and others liked Hitler because he restored German pride. Depression affected his family little. Hertenstein was a boy scout, then joined Hitler Youth and attended rallies in Nuremberg; later lost interest in Hitler Youth. Got drivers licenses, then joined Reichsarbeitsdienst; recalls activities in that group. Volunteered for army right after he finished his service; chose to join panzer division. Describes "Flower Wars" (no shots fired): friendly reception following invasion of Austria and first invasion of Czechoslovakia; response to second invasion was less enthusiastic but not hostile. Recalls government's justification for invasions of Czechoslovakia. Describes invasion of Poland. Soldiers thought Poland started the war, so they were surprised and disappointed when France and Britain declared war on Germany. Describes various Panzer models. German equipment was superior to Polish. Discusses German morale, and one Polish attack on horseback. Hertenstein volunteered for third year of service, received officer training then returned to regiment; promoted to lieutenant. Describes invasion of France, including combat experiences, German and French fighting strategies, German morale, awards he received, and quality of French soldiers. Gives opinions why British were allowed to escape at Dunkirk. Explains reorganization of panzer divisions. Hertenstein's division was sent to Romania to train Romanian troops; Germans and Romanians communicated in French. Describes leisure activities and extreme class differences in Romania. Recalls rumors about next objective. Describes invasion of Russia, and impressive Russian T34 tanks. Compares Russian and German tanks. Many Ukrainians were friendly to Germans, but some feared them. Recalls battle at Kiev. Later, Hertenstein was direct companion of general but asked permission to fill his platoon's vacant commander position because he was having "chest pains" (he wanted to earn the Iron Cross First Class). Describes an engagement and the deaths of two men he knew and liked. Describes fighting outside Dnjepropetrowsk: once used smoke screen against T34's, and the Russians fled thinking

it was gas; another time Hertenstein's crew had to evacuate their panzer when it was hit by two Molotov cocktails; describes trying to locate his battalion after separation. Recalls a time his turret malfunctioned. Discusses incident where Russians murdered German prisoners and took their uniforms. Received Iron Cross First Class. Recalls arrival of Russian winter, and attack on Rostov. Remembers hearing Hitler declare war on U.S. after Pearl Harbor; thought that was an idiotic decision. Recalls attacks by Russian "sewing machine" planes while he was at Trotskowskoje. Describes celebrating Christmas with some of the Russian peasants; peasants thanked them by polishing their boots that night. Recalls winter conditions, and Russians' single attack during that season. Discusses the SS and their commanders. Talks about penal battalions and demotions for cowardice or misbehavior; one soldier was sent to a penal battalion for stealing a Jewish woman's watch in Poland. Says Russian soldiers fought very well with fewer supplies than Germans had. Felt Russians were less industrially advanced but not subhuman; German troops got along well with Russian civilians, but German civilian administrators confiscated Russian goods and angered them. Compares conditions for prisoners captured by various countries. Recalls some Russians working for German army, but knows little about them. Describes soldiers' activities during inactive winter. As commander of company, Hertenstein won men's respect by dividing rations equally rather than keeping extra things for himself. Recalls picking up and testing new panzers. Became adjutant to battalion commander, and rode in spare command panzer. Recalls taking Maikop where Russians had destroyed oil fields and refineries. Encountered Russians in American M3 General Lee tanks, which he found inferior to other tanks. Remembers being impressed by a Russian village's elementary school that taught calculus and German; the German textbook was all Russian propaganda. Hertenstein was promoted numerous times in his same company, and never had discipline problems because his men were also his friends; comradeship is important to him. His troops penetrated further east in Russia than any others; stopped because supply lines were too long and Russian resistance became too stiff. Hertenstein's unit was surrounded for five days, then broke out and retreated while Russians argued about which unit would attack. Worried about mistreatment if Russians captured him. Still believed Germany could win, but had some doubts. Only attacked by partisans once, and other partisans had defected and warned Hertenstein's unit so they were prepared for the attack. Discusses Russian infantry tactic of attacking in waves. After Stalingrad doubted German could win. Hertenstein was sent back to Germany to attend company commander's school; discusses trip and schooling. Allowed to stay in Germany for a while until an ulcer healed; appendicitis and malaria lengthened his stay. Married Christel, then was transferred to "home army" because of illness and sent to train troops in Vienna. Received training on new Panther panzer. Former commander offered Hertenstein command of a Panther company, but illness prevented him from accepting; that commander was soon killed in devastating battle at Kursk, and Hertenstein wonders if he might have died there, too. After recovering, volunteered to return to regiment on the front in Romania. Hertenstein was almost captured when his tank suddenly stopped in a field one night. Recalls action in Romania; morale still good. Some officers tried to stop retreating infantry, but no one tried to stop panzers. At one point there weren't enough panzers, so Hertenstein and crews were used in fox holes as infantry; Hertenstein plagued by continuing attacks of malaria. Transferred to command panzer company and guard battalion at Hitler's

headquarters in East Prussia. Describes compound; notes that all guards were army, not SS. Hertenstein arrived to find someone else had been given his position because they thought Hertenstein had been killed. After two furloughs he was sent back to his old division. He and others were shocked that officers would break their oath of allegiance and try to assassinate Hitler; recites army oath and explains that Germans took oaths seriously. After assassination attempt, soldiers were told to give Nazi party salute rather than traditional military salute. Recalls battle with Russian tanks in which confusing orders led other tanks to retreat, leaving his tank alone. Describes retreat from Russians and rearguard tank tactics. Crossed from Romania to Hungary after the former joined the Allies. Didn't receive very young or old recruits because, as technical unit, they could be more selective about who joined them. Hertenstein promoted to captain and sent to northern Germany for training with infra-red night vision apparatus; on the way his train was attacked by bombers, and Hertenstein's arm was injured. Explains infra-red apparatus and effective battle groupings. Returned to front knowing Germany would lose; tried to get his unit transferred west to avoid Russian capture, but failed. His men were used as infantry and he was sent back to a hospital in Berlin; didn't dare desert for fear that SS or military police would court martial and hang him, as often happened. Discusses military police. Hospital and others finally tried to flee Berlin, but Russians stopped them. Describes Russian occupation of Berlin, and marching east as a prisoner. Heard on radio that Hitler died fighting with soldiers; months later learned truth from Hitler's valet; thought Hitler's suicide was cowardly, but Goering's was admirable. Hertenstein sent to prison camp in Kaunas (Kowno), Lithuania; volunteered to work in order to get out of camp. Decided to wait for release rather than try to escape with some other soldiers; following their escape he was put in an underground prison for several weeks. Later transferred to another camp where prisoners received very little food, then to a camp near Kaunas where they rebuilt a plant and received enough rations. Transferred to camp in Winniza, Ukraine; recalls a German and Russian comparing notes on a certain battle. Russians didn't mistreat the prisoners; by 1947 prisoners could send and receive mail; prisoners didn't get enough food in winter, and many starved. Hertenstein feels Russians are decent people; loves Russian music. Russians identified SS by tattoos and separated them from other Germans. Hertenstein was disgusted by German generals who defected to Russian side. Blames loss at Stalingrad on German High Command. Didn't believe Russian reports about Holocaust; only personally knew of one camp: Dachau where communists were "reeducated." Hertenstein was transferred to a prison camp in Donets region, but not sent to work in coal mines because he was physically unfit; describes how Russian doctors gauged who was capable of working. Notes that Russian civilians didn't have much food, either. Hertenstein given food and new clothes then sent back to Germany. Describes trip. Chose to be sent to British zone; placed in hospital of British discharge camp, then went to in-laws' home in Bensberg. Feels it was a mistake to attack Russia, and gives numerous reasons. Closes by noting that many Germans supported Hitler before the war because he restored their honor, and because they were not informed about the Holocaust and other negative things. States that Hitler and the army officers had a strenuous relationship. Soldiers were incensed that Hitler dismissed capable officers because of his own mistakes; soldiers didn't believe Hitler was a great commander, but they were fighting for Germany and stayed true to their oath. Hertenstein says Hitler lost contact with reality and tried to direct individual

units when he knew nothing of their circumstances; he distrusted generals and relied on men with little military experience, such as Himmler. Hertenstein approves of punishments for Holocaust, but takes offense at punishment of German officers for following orders in war; asks whether American, British, or French officers would have acted differently.

OH# 2298

**Narrator:** Werner A. Kurkowski

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 6 June 1992, 1 June 1993

**Abstract:** An oral history with Werner A. Kurkowski discussing his experience in the German air force during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Kurkowski discusses conditions that aided Hitler's rise to power, and memories of the growth of the Nazi party. Recalls relations between Jews and Germans in his hometown of Danzig. Discusses programs Hitler started, including Hitler Youth; Kurkowski joined the flying section of that group. Talks about activities and conditions in that group. Feels objective of Hitler Youth was to provide discipline and prepare youth for military. Particular national respect was given to families and farmers. Discusses experience in Hitler Youth, and the Nazis' preparation for war. Recalls Nazi invasion of his region; their occupation of it was not harsh. Talks about Russians and Poles in nearby labor camps, and restrictions on Jews. Recalls other Nazi programs, including killing of cripples and Jews. Discusses Hitler's use of media, and Polish prisoners working on German farms. Talks about German losses he didn't hear about on the German news. Joined the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and then the air force; recalls training regimens in those organizations. Seeing dead English pilots his age soured his view of the war. Tired of inactivity near Stuttgart, he joined paratroopers to take active part in fighting. Sent to Italy; slightly wounded at Monte Cassino. Recalls combat experience at that town. Discusses battle tactics, weapons available, soldiers' attitudes, reason for defeat, and how he was wounded. Was transferred to Normandy. Talks about situation there, plot to kill Hitler, and Ally air and artillery superiority at Normandy. Describes typical day at Normandy, living off the land, and two times he barely escaped injury. Mentions hedgerows' role in combat. Stole gas and vehicles from Americans to retreat. Describes the disorganized retreat. Shortly before Kurkowski was captured, he discarded his weapon and put on a medical arm band so the Allies would think he was a medic. That night he escaped. Thinks most Germans wanted to get back to Germany, rather than surrender. Kurkowski's was the last large group of Germans to escape that area of France. Describes aftermath of the battle, and notes that some German prisoners were kept in France until 1950 to rebuild it. After the battle, many German soldiers panicked but the paratroopers stayed organized. Back in Germany his group was rebuilt. He insists German military discipline was strict in France; they were not even allowed to steal from French farmers. Paratroopers often broke the rules and tried not to get caught; if caught, they were not imprisoned but forced to "volunteer" for

dangerous front line work. Kurkowski says the military had nothing to do with the Nazi party. Notes that Hitler visited the troops often until the loss at Stalingrad, then he receded into the background. Kurkowski's unit was all German, his officers were effective, and every paratrooper was trained to be able to take command if all officers were killed. Describes strategies of English military, American military, and French partisans. Kurkowski parachuted in as part of a planned offensive, but support never arrived and he was captured. While a prisoner at Bolbec, he was allowed to leave the camp to work, then moved to a smaller work camp. Developed a friendly relationship with the Americans. Work camps had better conditions than the large prison camps. Describes French maltreatment of German prisoners. Americans moved his work camp group with them to Berlin. Describes conditions in East Germany. Father and sisters fled Danzig for Germany. Kurkowski was put in a Berlin camp with a strict and inept director, who was later replaced by a more effective one. Describes conditions when he was discharged. Went to aunt's home and got a job. Recalls distribution of medals, and the point when he stopped thinking Germany would win. Rumors of new secret weapons and strictness of Ally occupation kept soldiers fighting. Describes bad conditions in Allied prison camps. Shares impressions of WWII leaders and America. Declines to discuss the Holocaust.

OH# 2243

**Narrator:** Brigette Klein

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 19 February 2004

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Brigette Klein, who was a schoolteacher in the resort town of Niendorf, Germany, during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Klein relates family history and Hitler's impact on her community. Enjoyed being in *Jung Madel*; recalls activities with that group. Joined private school and didn't join new *Jung Madel* group because of shyness. Discusses forced retirement of school's Jewish principal. Klein trained to be teacher; exempt from *Arbeitsdienst* because of profession. Explains *Haushaltsjahre*: prospective teachers spent a year helping in a home with lots of children. Joined *National Socialist Volkswohlfahrt* welfare program. Became teacher of fifteen-year-old boys. Recalls bombing of Hamburg and locating mother after destruction of family home. Residence for Klein's students was filled with refugees until law forced families to take refugees in. Klein required to take in children who were difficult to manage. Recalls end of war, and British occupation. Discusses bombing of Hamburg, *Bund der Deutschen Madchen* (BDM) meetings, prosperity under Hitler, government's justification for war, radio restrictions, a member of the Nazi party in charge of watching people in her building, and role of women in German society. Cared more about Germany than

Nazi party during war. Recalls struggle to survive at end of war, also isolation from relatives and destruction of major cities. Discusses changing views of Hitler, and initial beliefs about concentration camps. Thinks Germans disliked Jews because they were too internationally connected and powerful. Recalls rationing and positive German views on farmers and mothers. Relates marriage to husband, and relatives' encouragement to come to America. Morale good during most of the war because all sacrificed together. Confidence diminished when America entered war; final blow was defeat in Russia—people didn't believe propaganda anymore. At first disgusted by assassination attempt on Hitler. Recalls prejudice against men not in the military, and reaction to Hitler's death. At first disbelieved reports of Holocaust; thought camps contained criminals. Discusses British occupation.

OH# 2232

**Narrator:** Hans Klein

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 13 February 1992

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Hans Klein, who was a German prisoner of war in the U.S. during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Klein was born in province of Posen. When province became part of Poland in 1920, parents moved to Arnswalde, Germany, which in turn became part of Poland after World War II. Learned father's woodworking trade. Describes German trade training program. Became model maker for aircraft company until drafted into army in 1942 and sent to Holland. Carried military messages. Later transferred to France, then Tunis. Captured by French foreign legion. Describes legion and harsh camp conditions. Many starved until an American connected with Red Cross accidentally discovered camp. American returned with ambulances and took about 100 of most serious cases, including Klein. Klein sent to prison in U.S. Recalls arrival, seeing black people, and transportation to camp in Tonkawa, OK. Describes conditions there. Transferred to other camps. Described his escape attempt. In 1946 sent to re-education camp to be trained for administration in occupied Germany; got to return earlier than most prisoners in U.S. Family supported Hitler because he improved the economy. Describes Hitler Youth program, and views on Hitler and reason for fighting war. Believed most of Hitler's propaganda. Recalls easy invasion of Vichy France, and his respect and affection for Rommel. Recalls life in Hermann Goering Tank Division, including retrieving damaged tanks, searching for mines, and night patrols. Soldiers were separate from Nazi party; they didn't widely support it, but fought for Germany and its prosperity. Felt no reason to doubt Hitler. Supplies were inadequate; Arabs helped feed them and gave information about the Allies. Describes climate in Africa, and interaction between German and British there. Klein probably received his Iron Cross for mine

searching. Felt sorry for Italian soldiers, and felt little respect for Mussolini. Recalls high morale in the *Afrika Korps*, even in prison camp. Describes his capture at town of Zhaguan. Still thought Germany could win in Africa; didn't know Rommel had left. Many in the French camp died of starvation and dysentery. Stopped believing Germany would win after Battle of the Bulge. Discusses assassination attempt on Hitler, and Hitler's suicide. At first didn't believe Holocaust had happened; thought films about it were propaganda; now believes it. Recalls conditions in Germany when he returned; glad to be free from camp. Describes incident at Tonkawa camp in which one prisoner tried to provide military information to the Americans, and several German prisoners killed him; seven other prisoners who were not involved in the killing were tried and wrongly executed for it. Klein immigrated to America in 1954. Founded the German/American organization known as the Phoenix Club, and is in the process of building a new clubhouse. Received Officer's Cross of Merit from Germany for furthering German/American friendship.

OH# 2242

**Narrator:** Eva Krutein

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 28 January 1992

**Status:** Unknown

**Abstract:** An oral history with Eva Krutein, a German immigrant whose city in present-day Poland was taken over by the Germans in World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Krutein discusses German invasion and rule in her town of Danzig (now Gdansk). Her family was friendly to Poles and Jews. Danzig was only bombed once, and she later met the pilot who flew that mission. Germany considered Danzig liberated, so it received more rations than German cities. Nazis told Krutein's father to fire Jewish workers but he refused. Krutein later became refugee from Russians; discusses that experience in her book *Eva's War*. Recalls German invasion of Danzig; Poles fought back but many Germans welcomed invaders. Discusses concentration camps for political prisoners; knew nothing about other camps for extermination. Americans were anti-German when she immigrated in 1960's; recalls targets of German propaganda, Nazi opposition to religion. Describes her participation in the *Flugmeldediens*t (Flight Report Service). Discusses morale, view that war was unavoidable, war propaganda, brutality of invaders (Germans in Russia, then Russians in German territory), and restrictions on transportation. Most people believed propaganda. Germans were treated better than Poles in occupied Danzig; Krutein contrived to give extra cigarettes to a Pole, was very afraid of discovery and punishment; same Pole later helped her father when Germans were treated badly after war. Discusses black market. Nazi membership was secret, and few were accepted into party. Discusses the SS and SA. Recalls people's opinions of Hitler and his speeches; Krutein preferred hearing

speeches by Goebbels, though she didn't agree with him either. Despite restrictions, Krutein learned to play foreign music, also read forbidden books; *The Grapes of Wrath* impressed her and changed her view of America. Discusses black list for troublemakers. Describes sense of Aryan superiority, and reasons for prejudice against white Poles. Discusses effect of Stalingrad defeat on people; Krutein's husband wanted to postpone having a baby until they could see what would happen in Stalingrad. Discusses American propaganda during first Persian Gulf War. Recalls differing reactions about plot to assassinate Hitler. Wishes Danzig had returned to being a free state, not become part of Poland. Discusses her book *Eva's War* about months preceding and following the end of the war. Annoyed at American ignorance about terrible conditions in post-war Germany. Feels war is the wrong way to solve problems.

OH# 2241

**Narrator:** Manfred Krutein

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 23 January 1992

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Manfred Krutein, who was a German submarine officer in World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Krutein was born in Königsberg (later Kaliningrad); family moved to Kiel. Recounts early naval career, father's disapproval of Hitler, experience in Hitler Youth and *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, and the beginning of World War II. Recalls government justifications for war, propaganda, and Nazi policy toward churches. Describes life in a submarine, morale on board, battle experience, and comparison with Italian submarine tactics. Feels Hitler's attack on Russia hurt German confidence in victory. Navy very disconnected from Nazi party, sometimes even hostile toward it. German leaders realized too late that subs were more useful than battleships. More description of submarine life, and extreme tension when encountering depth charges. Krutein generally felt very safe on subs. Describes depth charge experience, and typical patrolling day. Discusses naval tactics. Identifies subs he served on; one later given to French. Thinks war is crazy and fighting for ineffective politicians is foolish. Describes submarine weaknesses and design improvements. Describes service as reserve officer; Krutein was actually a construction officer gaining experience to help naval officers and architects communicate; his dual experience relieved friction between those groups. Earned Iron Cross by working at submarine's listening device to evade destroyers. Discusses working under famous commanders, their post-war plans, and participation in war crimes trials. Describes hitting a sinking vessel. Discusses Hitler's strategies regarding England and Russia; compares Napoleon and Hitler. German navy expected to invade England with heavy losses. Discusses situation in wartime France. Explains ranks he held. Describes Allied invasion of France, German defense of St. Nazaire, and his escape to Germany where he ran another shipyard in Wilhelmshaven. Discusses reactions to



assassination attempt on Hitler; people were relieved when Hitler did die and end of war was in sight. Recalls British occupation; due to a mistranslation the British put Krutein in a concentration camp for a brief time; says the British wanted to punish German leaders by putting them in camps and treating them badly, as the German government had done to other groups. Describes demilitarization of Germany, including initial plans to destroy the city of Wilhelmshaven, the surrender of German ships to Allies, destruction of shipyards, and a loophole that allowed Krutein to keep his shipyard running. In 1951 Krutein emigrated to Chile, then the U.S.; feared Germany would be rearmed, or Russians would take over. Became involved with mining, then ocean-mining. Helped the U.S. salvage a sunk Russian sub in 1973. Krutein's wife Eva fled Russian invasion of Germany in 1945; she relates her experiences in the book *Eva's War*. Krutein hopes his experiences encourage others to resolve problems through negotiation, not war.

OH# 2309

**Narrator:** Hans Lietz

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 13 August 1992

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Hans Lietz who was a child in East Germany during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Lietz was born in small resort town of Leba, formerly part of eastern Germany but now part of Poland. Father was a cabinetmaker. Lietz recalls activities of Hitler Youth; too young to participate but wanted to. Discusses parents' political views. Food shortage at end of war didn't impact them because they grew their own food and fished with hand grenades. Family took in refugees who warned them to flee Russians; family did not want to leave, but were later driven west. Many Germans committed suicide out of fear of Russians. Recalls Russian's arrival and family's brief evacuation to Labehn. Describes Russian atrocities, and methods women used to avoid them. Many Germans were sent to Siberia. In Leba, Russians needed Germans to fix things. Lietz describes struggle to find enough to eat. Russians often stored raided goods in open railroad cars where everything would be ruined. Lietz still keeps in touch with people from Leba, and plans to return. Describes arrival of Polish opportunists who were even worse than the Russians. American care packages were often sold on the black market, rather than distributed to the poor. Russians and Poles hated each other. Many children were hurt playing with discarded ammunition. Lietz family forced to leave Leba on westbound train; didn't dare leave train when it stopped for fear they would be left behind. Briefly stayed in refugee camp near Stettin where Poles took most of their belongings, then sent west to castle near Dusseldorf. Father returned from American prison camp and got work repairing castle; father was paid in food and wood, and he later used the wood to make a fortune with a cabinetry business. Lietz had little contact with

English occupiers, except at the sports club. Father was drafted late in war; probably captured in France, then was sent to prison camp on Rhine where he almost starved. Uncle escaped from a group of prisoners the Russians were taking to Siberia. Lietz recalls a boy who the Russians took in to serve their officer; boy escaped when they tried to take him back to Russia. Another boy's mother tried to kill him when she drowned herself; he survived and was taken to Russia where the soldiers told him to pretend he was Russian. He later became a sailor and jumped ship in Scandinavia.

OH# 2223

**Narrator:** Rudi Nadig

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 17 November 1991

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Rudi Nadig, who was a German paratrooper in World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Nadig was raised in Tettwang, Germany. Mother disliked Hitler but father very pro-Hitler. Nadig didn't enjoy being in Hitler Youth; group taught hate of Jews and Catholics, but not of U.S. Schoolteacher ideologies differed. Little hatred of Jews in Nadig's town. Recalls parents' opinions of war, conditions for Catholics (including Nadig's family), radio restrictions, fear of openly criticizing Hitler. Nadig became barber and moved to Friedrichshafen. Tried to avoid attending Hitler Youth but got caught. Recalls air raids, experience in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, and plot to kill Hitler. Joined air force to avoid being recruited by the SS. Describes SS recruiting and brother's bad experience serving with *Waffen SS*. Describes Kohlberg boot camp experience and militia. Transferred to Gardelegen for training and heard about nearby concentration camps for the first time. Transferred to Salzwedel for paratrooper training, but never had to jump because there was no more fuel for planes. More interested in survival than German cause. Transferred to Italy. Got sick and sent to hospital in Bolzano; friendly doctor put cast on Nadig's arm so he wouldn't be sent to front early. Enjoyed Bolzano and tried to avoid being shipped out. Eventually shipped to Monte Cassino. Discusses fighting partisans and Allies in Italy. Thought American troops weren't very effective at that time. Rations were bad. Got along with Italians. Describes German retreat. Officers often ran during fight. Firing squads increasingly common, and he was forced to participate once. Further memories of the retreat. Captured by Italian partisans, and held prisoner by Catholic priest who allowed people to beat him every day. Escaped after three days disillusioned about Catholic Church. Another partisan helped Americans capture the group Nadig was retreating with. Nadig happy to be taken prisoner. Sent to prison camp in Pisa. Recalls conditions, and Germans soldiers' contempt for officers imprisoned with them. Officers and soldiers had differing reactions to Hitler's death. Transferred to other camps; recalls experiences there. Nadig escaped from camp but returned. Sent home and found food scarce. First heard of Holocaust in American prison

camp hospital, but thought it was untrue. Believed it back home after meeting someone who had been put in a camp. Later saw movie of still photos about the camps; one photo supposedly of dead prisoners was actually of German soldiers killed when a train was bombed. No one in his town wanted to talk about Holocaust. Recalls French occupation of town. Father and brother were put in harsh French prison camp because of association with Nazi party and SS. Brother forced to join foreign legion, sent to Vietnam. Nadig married in 1950, and decided to leave Germany because of bad economic conditions. Moved to Canada, struggled to find work and overcome prejudice. Established a barber shop and sent for wife and children. Disliked cold and unfriendliness in Canada, so moved to California. Struggled there too, but eventually got established.

OH# 2224

**Narrator:** Heidi Nadig

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 17 November 1991

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Heidi Nadig. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Nadig's parents had thirteen children. When she was 2½ years old they gave her to another family that lived in the same building; she did not learn the new parents were not her original parents until she went to school. Her father lost his job because he would not join the Nazi party. Nadig worked on a farm, then was forced to serve in Reichsarbeitsdienst, then worked in a factory. Reflects on life with husband Rudi. Recalls money devaluation, BDM (Bund Der Deutschen Madchen) Nazi group for girls, rise of Hitler and differing opinions of him. Felt children's view of Hitler depended on parents' views; her family disliked Hitler. Describes German concept of woman's place. Describes father's jobs, rationing, family vegetable garden, and air raids. Had to help BDM clean up Friedrichshafen after bombing. Recalls Nazi opposition to churches, BDM encouragement of discrimination, and killing of handicapped. Discusses beginning of war and people's fear. Recalls methods of subsisting, anger at Hitler, and Nazi impact on schooling. Discusses dancing during her courtship, transportation methods, black market, and father's refusal to join Nazis. Nadig upset that all Germans are blamed for Hitler's decisions, feels many disagreed with him but were afraid to speak up. Thinks only half of Germans believed propaganda, and most were afraid of war and disliked SS. Nadig did not know about concentration camps. Describes some Germans who were fanatically pro-Hitler. Recalls attempt to assassinate Hitler, community bonding, reaction to Hitler's death, and desire for war's end. Describes harsh French occupation. At first did not believe in Holocaust; learned of it from French occupiers. Recalls post-war curfew. After long courtship with Rudi, became pregnant so mother would give permission for marriage. Discusses immigration to Canada; felt unwelcome there so moved to California. Originally from Reute, Germany, near Friedrichshafen. Feels Americans should get their information

about Nazi era from Germans who experienced it, and that Americans should pray nothing similar happens in their country.

OH# 2245

**Narrator:** Hanns Scharff

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 18 February 1992

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Hanns Scharff, an interrogator for the Luftwaffe during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Scharff discusses memories of World War I; father died of wounds, Kaiser abdicated, food was scarce. Describes divided opinions about Kaiser's abdication. Recalls Bolshevik uprisings in Germany; communism appealed to poor textile workers in areas like Saxony. Describes rise of Nazis. During WWI, people were very pro-Germany, pro-Austria, pro-troops. As war ended, conflict began between conservatives (later Nazis) and communists; Scharff views it as conflict between haves and have-nots. Scharff's wife is descended from leaders of Prussia. Scharff discusses propaganda from both sides, French invasion after WWI, and historic relationship between French and Germans. Recalls inflation in Weimar Republic; grandfather paid textile workers with his own printed money or with food. Peasants in countryside suffered less than intellectuals in city, so peasants were more conservative and less anxious for change. Germans believed in Wilson's Fourteen Points; they were outraged by the harsh Versailles Treaty. Scharff describes inflation further; finance minister Schacht stopped it. Hitler rose by promising poor Germans "work and bread," and by starting building projects to employ people; they elected him because they liked the prosperity. Scharff discusses Nazi SA men who fought communists in the streets. He traveled often to South Africa on business for a German car company; married an Englishwoman there. Disagrees with Jewish discrimination; feels there are good and bad Jews, as with any group. Thinks many Germans believed anti-Jewish propaganda, but Jews were not mistreated in his small town. Austrians wanted to unite with Germany, and vice versa; Croats fought faithfully for Austrians. Discusses seizing of Czechoslovakia, and history of religious conflict in central Europe. Germans were shocked by the beginning of WWII, excited about defeat of French, and concerned about bombing of German cities. Propaganda convinced Germans that invasion of Poland was justified. Luftwaffe support for Hitler depended on outfit; Scharff's was mostly English-speaking and anti-Hitler, but first duty was to fight for their country. Scharff thought it was a mistake to declare war on the U.S. because it was friendlier towards Germany than other nations were. Germans were surprised that the U.S. would help Britain, which had oppressed it under King George III, instead of the Germans which had sided with America in the Revolution and the Civil War. Discusses flight of Rudolph Hess to Scotland. In

Luftwaffe, Scharff was specialist of U.S. fighter commands; trained himself to know certain units and commanders very well. Scharff befriended many prisoners and still gets together with some of them. Few prisoners confined their discussion to the required “name, rank, and number.” Scharff learned many things simply by being friendly and seeing to prisoners’ needs. Once learned a signal that American pilots were low on ammunition; informed the Luftwaffe, and later learned that a German pilot who saw the signal let the American go home rather than attack a defenseless pilot. During war Scharff new little about Luftwaffe because he studied and interrogated Americans. After war, Scharff went to South Africa, but found his family broken so moved permanently to U.S. Introduces sister-in-law from Germany. Recalls legless British pilot Douglas Bader who lost his artificial legs when he was shot down; Germans arranged brief truce for spare legs to be flown over from London, but British bombed airfield after delivering legs. Bader escaped, was caught, and was guarded in hospital; eventually was given his legs and sent to POW camp. Defeat at Battle of the Bulge convinced Scharff Germany would lose. Disagreed with assassination attempt on Hitler; thought it was childish and would not have helped. Mentions the Rote Kapelle pro-Russian resistance. Scharff had a friend in the assassination conspiracy. Scharff was captured by American forces; served as an interpreter so he did not suffer like other prisoners; describes harsh conditions in camps and compares them with German camps. Describes shooting of a prisoner. Feels it is important for historians to stick to the truth, but acknowledges that years of study still leave him far short of knowing everything. Didn’t believe accounts of Holocaust at first and has read many articles questioning its existence; isn’t sure what is true, but feels people should move on from it; he maintains friendships with numerous Jews. Received Iron Cross for work in *Luftwaffe*, and the Star of Good Hope award from South Africa for work with their prisoners of war.

OH# 2280

**Narrator:** Kurt Schulze

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 22 July 1992, 8 April 1993

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Kurt Schulze, a German pilot during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Schulze relates background; born in Kassel near Frankfurt, then family moved to Berlin; father in civil service. Schulze in Hitler Youth and saw Hitler often; describes Hitler Youth experience. Recalls restrictions against Jews; Schulze himself got along well with Jews. Feels most people believed Hitler’s propaganda. Recalls experience in school and in *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. Describes government’s justification for war. Recalls training and experience in communications section of air force. Describes retreat in Russia during winter. Transferred to France to take part in bombing of England; trained as pilot; didn’t

think German air force could beat British. Discusses attacks on England, defense against British night-fighters, soldiers' morale. Describes a mission when plane was damaged and he had to parachute out. Transferred to staff position, then volunteered to be fighter pilot; sent to Petsamo, Finland, to fight Russians. Compares nations' degrees of training. Flew over neutral Sweden as a "diplomat" to reach base in Finland. Describes planes he fought, and an engagement in which he was shot down and rescued by a German patrol. Compares plane models. Flew reconnaissance missions over Murmansk. Discusses retreat through Norway, and battle in which the ship *Tirpitz* was sunk. Took over training squadron near Dresden; felt training program was inadequate. Transferred to Danzig in vain attempt to stop Russians; discusses refugees and constant bombings. Transferred to squadron in Norway. Compares food in different areas. Defeat at Stalingrad convinced him Germany would not win war. Relates how he earned his Iron Crosses. Became prisoner of war in Norway when war ended; describes experience in prison camps. Told Americans he lived Kassel so he would not be sent home to Berlin in Russian-occupied zone. Sent to French prisoner camp with terrible conditions; Schulze was treated even worse than most because he was an officer. Volunteered to help dismantle radar installations, but didn't get along with commander so refused to work and was sent to another French camp. Describes medical conditions in camps, and how he informed his wife he was a prisoner. Few prisoners escaped; most just tried to conserve their energy because they received very little food. Regarding Holocaust, Schulze knew German government had incarcerated people, but had no idea it killed them in camps. Immigrated to U.S. in 1953 and feels it is like paradise.

OH# 2244

**Narrator:** Rudi Toepfer

**Interviewer:** Robert Mulcahy

**Date:** 29 January 1992

**Status:** Digital audio

**Abstract:** An oral history with Rudi Toepfer, who was a German submarine officer during World War II. The interview is part of a project researching German experiences during World War II. Toepfer was raised in Insterburg in East Prussia, joined navy in 1937. Father was Master of Masonic Lodge. Recalls political groups and *Jung Stahlhelm*, a patriotic youth group later taken over by the Hitler Youth. Describes Hitler's rise to power, compares Ross Perot's presidential campaign to original appeal of Hitler. Discusses SA and SS; SA recruited him early because he could drive; recalls SA activities. Gives opinion of Wilson, Roosevelt, and Truman. Discusses German anticommunism, and experience in *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. Compares German and American prison policies. Describes situation that helped Hitler gain power, civilian casualties during war, and Nazi's minimal impact on churches in Toepfer's town. Says that no nation wanted to accept Jews, and that Germans and British discussed relocating

Jews to Palestine before the war. Discusses Hitler's speeches and post-Versailles conditions that led to war. Describes early military career, blockade tactics, and invasion of Norway. British sank his ship, but he swam to shore and Norwegian farmers helped him. Became submarine training officer, then Chief Engineer Officer of a sub. Compares experience on sub to movie *The Boat*; describes life on sub as boring and spartan. Discusses patrolling for convoys; goal was to prevent supplies from reaching Communists. Describes managing weight so sub did not tilt. Crew listened to forbidden foreign radio stations at sea. Sub crews were educated; navy screened volunteers, then screened again for those they put on subs; no sub crewmen were draftees. Discusses sinking of ships and incorrect American impressions of German sub crews; feels he was fighting Communists and that Americans should have done the same. Describes attack on convoy of fuel tankers. Sailors on watch at dusk sat in a dark room beforehand so their eyes would adjust to darkness. Skipper kept crew apprised of attacks' progress. Toepfer declined to guess how many ships his sub sank. Morale was good, and crew was highly educated. Toepfer has arranged three reunions for survivors from his sub. Germany bombed British cities after British bombed German ones. Claims Hitler didn't want to rule Europe but to unite it, like the current European Union, and that since the British were of Germanic descent Germany wanted to work with them; says Germany kept trying to make peace with France and England, and Hitler let the British escape at Dunkirk so he could befriend them. Says Hitler wanted peace and German people were not enthusiastic about war; feels U.S. should not have entered war. Describes food on sub; men grew beards because they didn't have enough water to shave. Members of military weren't allowed to belong to Nazi party. Feels democracy is ineffective and Hitler was a good leader who made Germany safer. Discusses wolf pack (sub attack group) and depth charge strategies; when depth charged, gave orders that would keep crew busy and distracted. Discusses U.S.'s ineffective early naval strategy, and sub maneuverability. Toepfer's sub was captured after he left duty to pursue a Master's degree; met his future wife while pursuing degree. Assigned to pocket-battleship *Leutzow* in the Alta fjord; little activity, so officers held ski tournaments to keep crew occupied. Recalls one battle north of Iceland, and success of another pocket-battleship named *Scheer*. Describes ship's chain of command. Volunteered to fight Russians on eastern front. Feels U.S. was unwise to help communists do so much damage in Europe. Volunteered for panzer brigade; received training, then was sent to front where he and other volunteers were formed into a division. Russians kept pushing them back, captured Toepfer and sent him to hospital because of a wound. Toepfer escaped and used forged certificate to get through Russian posts. Headed for American lines and was captured, then escaped again and located parents. Recalls difficult conditions after war. Discusses atrocities committed by soldiers from both sides, and English bombing strategies. Feels all committed war crimes but only losers were prosecuted. Parents left Insterburg after father's factory was bombed, and thus avoided contact with Russians. Discusses Iron Crosses and how he earned two of them. Describes antitank weapons and tactics. Relates circumstances that led Admiral Doenitz to write to him twice. Recommends the book *The Forced War* as source for accurate information on World War II.