

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
GILBERT A. KORTH
30th Infantry Division, World War II
1996

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Korth, Gilbert A., (1924-2002), Oral History Interview, 1996

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca.70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

ABSTRACT

Gilbert Korth, a Juneau, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service as a rifleman with the 30th Infantry Division, 119th Infantry Regiment, Companies I and A. Korth talks about his induction, basic training at Camp Bulter (North Carolina), and rifle training in Wales. Transferred to France as a replacement, Korth mentions hedgerow fighting, digging foxholes, being wounded by German artillery fire, and the importance of teaching survival techniques to replacements. He compares the combat he experienced to the battles seen in World War II movies. Korth relates being taken prisoner by German soldiers while scavenging for blankets, marching to prison camp while carrying a wounded American soldier, learning his Geneva Convention rights, and transfer to Stalag IIB. He describes life at Stalag IIB including translating German commands, working on a farm, Red Cross parcels, and using cigarettes for money among prisoners. Korth comments on an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the POW camp and a second successful escape when he and four others reached a liberated city. He touches upon his return to the United States, transfer to Company I of the 201st Infantry, medical problems related to being a POW, and membership in veterans organizations. Korth mentions his reasons for joining the American Legion and the Ex-POWs, and post-war work.

Biographical Sketch

Korth (1924-2002) served with the Army in the European theater of World War II. He was a prisoner of war for six months in Germany before escaping to a liberated town.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer John K. Driscoll, 2002.

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

- Mark: Okay, today's date is August 21, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Gilbert Korth, 30th Infantry Division, U. S. Army, in the European Theater, in World War II. Ah, good afternoon and thanks for coming in.
- Korth: Thank you.
- Mark: I appreciate it. Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- Korth: Well, I was born on a farm between Horicon and Mayville, in Wisconsin, Dodge County, and my father worked for the Dodge County Highway Department. And we moved to Juneau when I was about four years old. And I have lived in Juneau, Wisconsin, most of my life, except for my service time. I been living there. We lived there now, the third house we've lived in?
- Mark: Well, when Pearl Harbor happened, you were then a sophomore, freshman, maybe, at that time?
- Korth: No, I was about a junior in high school.
- Mark: Do you recall the incident and your reaction of those around you?
- Korth: Yes. We didn't even know anything about it. I was out visiting my wife. My future wife, I should say. And they didn't have a telephone, and I didn't know about it until I got home that night. You didn't have a telephone. You didn't have a radio. They lived on a farm and they had no electricity and no radio. So I didn't know about it until I got home that night. On a Sunday night. It was on a Sunday.
- Mark: Was it a surprise to you?
- Korth: It was a big surprise, yes.
- Mark: And, as someone who was about fifteen or so, did you realize that it was going to have implications for your future, shall we say?
- Korth: Well, you know, up to then, they were drafting people up to twenty-one years old. And I was only seventeen. And I was wondering if I would have to go in the service. You know. Between then, or however it was.
- Mark: And, so, you were eventually drafted?

Korth: I was drafted.

Mark: Had you finished high school before you were drafted?

Korth: I was finished the high school, yes. I finished, graduated from high school in June, of 1942. And I was drafted in March of 1943. I was with the first eighteen year old, when they lowered, about the first of the year of 1943, they lowered it to age eighteen. And I was with the first group to be drafted.

Mark: Were you surprised to get the greetings from Selective Service? What was your reaction to that?

Korth: Well, no, I kind of anticipated it. I guess we all planned on it. We knew it was coming. And it was, one of the things about it, you were wondering how long it would take and when it would be, and where would you go, things like that.

Mark: Why don't you just walk me through your induction process. I went through a similar thing, about forty years after you did. Some of the sharpest memories you have of the military are of these trainings. So why don't you just walk me from the induction center. I imagine you had to report at the city hall, or something, and then go on.

Korth: Well, we had to go, we had two draft boards in Dodge County. One was in Beaver Dam, one was in Horicon. And we were attached to the one in Beaver Dam. So, on March 18, 1943, we all went in for a physical examination. And then they gave us what they called a seven day furlough, or whatever it was, and then the 25th of March, we were inducted into the army and we had to meet at the old National Guard Armory in Beaver Dam. And we walked from there up to the railroad road depot in Beaver Dam. And from there we went to Fort Sheridan. And then, of course, one of the things that was more surprising to me, it was like March, it was cold. And they issued us uniforms. And we had, whenever we went outside, we had to wear an overcoat, and a cap, and a pair of gloves. If we needed them or not. That was military. That was the first thing I learned about the military. You had to dress equally. So, that is the way it was done.

Mark: Now, as for the discipline and that sort of thing, did you have trouble with adjusting to that? You know, stand up, sit down, yes, sir.

Korth: Yes, sir. No, sir. Why, no, I didn't have any problem with that. I didn't think. They always told us that after ten days or three weeks, or something like that, we could go on leave, or could take a weekend pass, so something like that. And I was kind of looking forward to that. And, of course, I was obeying the general orders. Like I said, it was different. You go to bed at a certain time. You get up at a certain time. And you had to say yes, sir, and no, sir. And things like that. Whether you liked it or not.

- Mark: And from Fort Sheridan, you went to South Carolina, North Carolina?
- Korth: From Fort Sheridan, I went to, yes, we all went to North Carolina, to the 30th Infantry Division. And there, you know, we expected, usually, you expect to go to a training center, and get your basic training. But there, we were assigned to units. In the 78th Division in Camp Butler, North Carolina. And, of course, I was established to the 1st Battalion headquarters, of the 311th Infantry. Headquarters Company. Which kind of surprised me. I anticipated, you know, this was a regular unit, and I expected to go to a basic training center. But we got our basic training right there.
- Mark: And what sort of training did you do? I mean, how much of it was on the rifle range? How much of it was just marching around? And military courtesy, and that sort of thing.
- Korth: Well, this basic training was, we were trained as a battalion headquarters unit. We were what they called the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon. Our job was to furnish the riflemen of the battalion with ammunition, and if they trained us how to make bridges. We were making foot bridges. And, then, of course, we had to go through the rifle, with the rifles. In fact, I wasn't even assigned a rifle. I had to borrow a rifle from one of the fellows that were in my unit. So they didn't have enough rifles to go around.
- Mark: Now, basic training often brings together people from different parts of the country. And I think you mentioned that you hadn't traveled too far out of Wisconsin by this time. Was that your case in basic training? Did you get to meet people from all different parts of the country?
- Korth: Oh, yes. There was, there were two, like I said, the pictures of these two fellows from Chicago. Or a suburb of Chicago. I don't know just where they were from. And, of course, we had fellows from Texas in our unit, and we had all over the country, there were different fellows.
- Mark: Everybody get along?
- Korth: Oh, yea, we got along pretty good. Sure. We had like, somebody had a radio in the barracks. I don't know who. I don't know who furnished the radio but whatever station he put on, we had to listen to. And, of course, being, I wasn't too happy about this country and western music, and I wasn't used to it, I might say. But that mostly was what we listened to. Nashville, Tennessee.
- Mark: I suppose that what's on the radio down there.
- Korth: Right. That was on the radio down there. Yes.

Mark: Did you get off the post much? I mean, you were training, but did you get a little bit of local leave?

Korth: Weekend leave? Or, furlough. Not a weekend leave. What we used to do, I think we had to have thirteen weeks of basic, and after our basic, I think, they left us go out. And there was four of us would get together and we'd each put \$10 in the pot. And we'd go somewhere, like Oxford, or Henderson, North Carolina. They were towns of maybe ten, twelve thousand, something like that. Then, when our money was gone, we'd come back. Probably cost us maybe eight, ten dollars for a room. We'd all stay in one room. And so we did that. Probably once a month, we did that. Of course, we only got \$21 a month, you know.

Mark: What did you do? Was there a USO in this town?

Korth: USO. And then we'd go to movies. USO, yes.

Mark: I suppose it was just nice to get away from the army.

Korth: Just a way to get away from the army, of course. Right.

Mark: So, after you left North Carolina, where did you go then? You were with the 30th Division, right?

Korth: 78th Division. No, this was the 78th Division. From there, they, see, this was, we joined in March, 1943. And the along about October, they shipped the fellows out to go to North Africa. And then, I think this was later on, in 1944, they shipped us to Camp Miles Standish. I think that was in Rhode Island. We went overseas as replacements. And I went overseas on May, 13, 1944, and I came back to the United States on the exact date, May 13, 1945. Of course, I had spent six months of that time as a prisoner of war. And then I was, see, we landed in Glasgow, Scotland. And we went to a town by the name of Wrexham, Wales. And there we had more training. They trained us more as riflemen. See, like I said, I was at battalion headquarters, and we had a different job in the United States. But there, we had about three weeks. I don't know. We went over to France sometime after D-Day. I don't know how long it was. Either the latter part of June or the early part of July. Something like that.

Mark: And did you go to France as a replacement still?

Korth: I went to France as a replacement in the 30th Division. I was assigned to L Company, of the 119th Infantry, of the 30th Division. As a replacement. And then I, or course, one of the things that we had to get used to, we had to dig a foxhole. Before we could go to sleep at night. And we usually had partners. We'd dig a foxhole together with someone else. And the Germans, of course, they had

artillery and they had artillery fire. And we had to make covers over our foxholes. We got used to doing that. And, of course, I usually got stuck with guard duty from three o'clock in the morning until five. We didn't get much sleep. Then, once in a while, they would relieve us. And maybe three or four days, and that was all we would do, is sleep, I think.

Mark: So, you got to France. And how long after, as you mentioned, you got there after the actual D-Day invasion. How long was it after you got to France that you ended up on the line?

Korth: Oh, I would say, probably, the next day or so. Right after we got, see, the lines weren't up too far. They weren't even up as far as St. Lo, France, when I joined our division, our 30th Division.

Mark: So, you were involved fighting in the hedgerows.

Korth: In the hedgerows, yes. See, that is why, in the hedgerows, we had the German artillery, all it would have to do was hit a twig in the hedgerows. And it would go off. And we called them tree-bursts. We had air-bursts, and tree-bursts. It was the hedgerow fighting, yea. The French had made these hedgerows and then they planted trees on them, so they wouldn't have to make any fences. So I got involved in the hedgerow fighting.

Mark: Now, many veterans that I talk to remember very clearly their first exposure to combat, their combat experience. Do you recall that, and what was going through your mind at the time?

Korth: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember too much about that. It's, we had veterans in this squad that I was in. The squad leader. And then we, yea, first thing, of course, they had to teach us was to be careful of the German artillery and the German riflemen. And I was wounded on August 7th, of 1944. And I went back to England, to the hospital. I have a rifle wound in my left thigh. They call it the thigh, but I call it the knee. It is just above the knee. And one of the things I remember the most is we got two replacements in. And they were with us, we must have been in a rest area for a couple days. And we didn't teach these fellows how to take cover. And we were strafed. And bombed by airplanes. And these two fellows were killed. And then I said to the fellows, "Hey, the next time we get replacements in," I said, "you stick with me. I'll show you what you have to do. Like digging a foxhole, and putting a cover on it, and when the German artillery was fired, you take cover in your foxholes." And I says, "That was one thing that they taught us. That we have to teach these fellows how to protect themselves." See, our unit was supposed to lead off the invasion after St. Lo, France. I don't know if you ever heard of that place.

Mark: Unh-hunh.

Korth: Well, anyway, the American Army Air Force came over and they tried to do this. I know, this was the 25th of July. And the 24th of July we were supposed to do this. In fact, our company was supposed to lead the push-off. After St. Lo. And, so they tried it on the 24th of July, and it was very foggy. And our American fighter planes came over and they strafed us, and they killed our company commander, and they wounded our assistant company commander. And then, of course, we were also bombed by this. That is what killed these two replacements that we got in. And, then, of course, we were not leading off, due to the fact that our commanders were killed and injured, we didn't lead the push-off after St. Lo, France. So, we kind of held back a little bit.

Mark: I am sure you have seen numerous World War II movies, and that sort of thing. Veterans are often very critical of these movies and how they are not realistic, and that sort of thing. What is it about combat that is not conveyed in the movies. For example, some veterans will say, the noise, perhaps communications problems. What is it that people don't understand about them?

Korth: Well, see, they don't show you that you have to stand guard duty, and that you have to go up on the front and you have to like, say, for instance, one day there was a German sniper that was firing at us outside in a church steeple. And, those things you don't see. And, of course, we had an artillery, what do they call those artillery forward observers? We told this fellow, now, you get your artillery to shoot, knock that church steeple down, so we can get rid of that sniper that was shooting at us. And that is some of the things. They made it real, sound real, how should I say, like it was a picnic, so to speak. But, then, they didn't show, either, that you had to dig a foxhole before you could go to bed. That you had to cover the foxhole, we had to look for boards first to cover it. Then we'd put the dirt on top of the boards. And then we had to stand guard duty. Like one time, we had captured a little town, oh, just about dusk. And so, we dug our foxhole for the night, and I stood guard duty from like three to five in the morning. And at five in the morning, I thought, well, I was hungry. I'd like to go out and see if I could find something to eat. So I went into a German house, and they had all the bedding stuff off the bed. So, I thought, well, that looked like a good time to take a little nap. So, I laid down and I slept until maybe seven-thirty in the morning. And then, about seven-thirty, I was a little hungry, so I thought I would, normally, the German civilians all left ahead of the German army, I suppose, or behind the German army, whichever way it was. But, anyway, I went down in this basement and there was an elderly German couple with their daughter and grandson in there. And they invited me in for breakfast. So I appreciated. And it was in their basement, they were. You know, they used it like we would use a shelter for a tornado, I suppose. Anyway.

Mark: Now, that was after D-Day, wasn't it?

Korth: That was after D-Day, yes.

Mark: So you were wounded in the D-Day campaign, as you mentioned.

Korth: Yes.

Mark: Went back to England. How long was it until you got back?

Korth: I was in England for two months. I was wounded on August 7 and I think it was about the 7th of October when I got back. And the one thing strange about the 30th Infantry Division, they were the only one that I know of that, I thought, they wouldn't put you in the same unit that you came out of. So I made a little fuss about that. I said, "I would like to get back to Ole Woody and those old buddies of mine that were in my L Company, in the 119th Infantry." But they said, oh, those guys are all gone. They are all gone by now. So, then I was assigned to I Company of the 119th Infantry. It was the same regiment, but it was a different company. So, anyway, overnight, I was assigned to I Company, and the next morning there was six of us came back from the hospital. And they told us that we were no longer assigned to I Company. We would be in A Company, because A Company only had six men left after an extreme battle that they had with the Germans. There was only six men left in the company. Can you imagine a company of two hundred and eighty-five men, there was only six left. So, anyway, the six of us was assigned to six that were left in this company. And so, well, I was a little suspicious of the, our sergeant was, he was a former drill sergeant in a basic training center. And I was a little suspicious of him, you know. Because we had a lieutenant, and the lieutenant says, "Well, now, you go over there and guard that little village there." And so a couple of hours went by, and I finally said to the sergeant, "Hey, you better go find this lieutenant of ours. I don't know. Something doesn't look right in here." So he went back and found the lieutenant, and he had been looking for us for a couple of hours. So, I said, that made me a little more suspicious of this guy. See, being an old combat veteran, I knew what to expect. So, then I was only with this unit three days later and I was a prisoner of war.

Mark: So, you were where when you got up there? I mean, when you went back to your unit, where was your unit at? Up to the German border already?

Korth: Oh, just about up to the German border. Because I was captured in a little town by the name of Barden-Bach, Barden-burg, or Barden-Bach (??) in Germany. So we were in Germany. Yes.

Mark: So, how would you describe the time you were captured? How did that happen?

Korth: That was another unusual situation. This sergeant of ours said that three of us were going to dig a foxhole for a fellow that was on guard duty. And you three, there was an apartment house behind us, you three go and find us some blankets,

so we can use that for sleeping. So the three of us went into this apartment house. It was, I would say, about two or three stories high. And there wasn't very much. The German people didn't leave very much stuff behind us. So we had to hunt real hard to find blankets. So we were throwing them down the stairway, the stair well, down to the first floor. And we were throwing them down, and we were looking around. Throwing them down. All of a sudden, we tried to get out of the door of this apartment house, and a German tank was shooting at us. Right over our heads with a machine gun. So, then, we thought, well, we would go down in the basement of this apartment house until after dark, and then we would get out of there. But the Germans came down and got us.

Mark: And there you were.

Korth: And they said, "For you, the war is over." But they didn't tell us the surviving was just beginning.

Mark: Let's cover that, then. After you were captured, why don't you describe how they took you back farther into the rear, and what stages. You mentioned you went to Lemberg eventually. How long did it take you to get to that?

Korth: Well, I don't remember. One of the things that I remember was one of our fellows was wounded. And the Germans didn't give us a litter to carry this wounded guy. So we had to use two tree trunks, so to speak, and our jackets to make something, a litter, for this guy to lay on. So, what we did, we made this litter out of our jackets. Put the sleeves in the twigs, in the tree, and then we put him on there, and then we had to change off carrying him. And this was dark, of course. And then we assumed they were looking for a first aid station. Eventually. And then we put this wounded soldier in this first aid station, and, of course, they left us go. And then we, they marched us to Lemberg, Germany, the prisoner of war camp.

Mark: And what happened there?

Korth: Well, there the American prisoners of war told us about the Geneva Convention. You know, that we had to work, but we were not allowed to run any machinery. Any machinery at the time, and they told us that we had to do some kind of work. But, of course, we weren't allowed to do anything that was, I was only eighteen years old at the time, and I didn't know how to run any machinery, anyway.

Mark: So, at Lemberg, I would imagine, there were some sort of processing. They wanted to get your name, rank, and serial number, that sort of thing.

Korth: Yea. That's right. They got our name, rank, and serial number, and everybody. Yea, then they told us that this was a kind of dispersement center, and then they sent us to Hamburg, to Stalag IIB. Then we were on a train for four days and four nights and I think there was sixty or seventy soldiers on this. I know there wasn't

enough room for everybody to sit down at one time. So we had to change off sitting down, because we had to stand most of the time. And, then, of course, we had a barrel to use for a toilet, and they never left us off for four days.

Mark: Very Spartan accommodations.

Korth: Right. And then, of course, the train was always stopping and starting and jerking, and things like that.

Mark: There was also a very vigorous air campaign against Germany, you know, from the Royal Air Force and the U. S. Air Force. Did you experience any air raids or that sort of thing?

Korth: Yes, we did. One time they had us filling in a bomb crater along the railroad tracks. We had the thing just about filled, so they could put the rails across. And all of a sudden the air raid siren blew. And, then, of course, we all headed for the air raid siren, but we never went back there. Someone told us that our Air Force had dropped a bomb right in the same hole that we were filling. So we never went back there. So, then, of course, they marched us, I suppose, to Lemberg. Yea, we were bombed, and we were in air raid shelters. They had them all made out.

Mark: Now, of course, Korth is a German name. Was that ever mentioned to you at any point?

Korth: Oh, yes. See, my grandparents came from Germany in 1881, and they never spoke English. They talked German to us and we'd answer them in English. And then I took a year of high school German. Well, we had, our football teacher was a German teacher and, in fact, his father came from Germany too. So we, I knew, both my grandparents spoke [unintelligible] and, of course, that is Low German. And then the German that I learned in high school was the proper German, High German. So I knew both dialects, so to speak.

Mark: When you were in Germany, were you able to speak, or understand, any of this?

Korth: Oh, yea. I could speak it. In fact, I wound up, they told us when we got to Stalag IID, like I said, that we had to work. They told us this once more. American, whoever it was, the head of the prison camp told us we had to work and if there was any of us that wanted to stay together, we should let them know. So there was five of us that got to be friends in this time. And we wanted to stay together. So they put us on a farm, a German farm. And then they, well, this one fellow was Italian, one guy was Irish, and one guy was French. And so then we got to this German farm, and they asked who could speak German. I looked around, and nobody else volunteered, so I finally raised my hand. I could. So I ended up as the interpreter. Every morning they would tell us what they wanted done on this German farm. And I'd say, "Now, who can drive horses? Who can milk cows?"

Who can do this, and who can do that?" And things like that. So, we, that is how it was done.

Mark: I get the impression you were moved around quite often.

Korth: Oh, yes.

Mark: But the camp, Hammerstein, is that where it was?

Korth: Hammerstein, yes.

Mark: That seems to be the main place that you were.

Korth: I was there probably the longest, yea. You might say.

Mark: I am interested in your accommodations. And living quarters, and the rations, and that sort of thing. You seem to suggest that things got sparse.

Korth: Yes.

Mark: Why don't you describe these conditions.

Korth: Well, at the, in the camps, if it wouldn't have been for the Red Cross parcels that we got, and then they would, Let's see, what did we have. Normally, instead of having a parcel of food a week per man, we had to split one. So they made it, the Germans made it sound like they were giving us something, but we knew it came from the American, like we had powdered milk, and we had coffee. And, of course, there was probably a dozen cigarettes in a parcel. And so the food, if it wouldn't have been for the American Red Cross parcels, it would have been kind of bad.

Mark: What did the Germans feed you?

Korth: The Germans, well, they fed us, it was mostly soup. Some kind of a soup. And then, later on, when the Russian army came along, we had to leave this farm, and, as I say, we had to march for sixty-four days. Then they gave us a third of a loaf of bread, and a third of a ring of bologna, and that had to last us a week. And then they gave us, oh, once in a while, they'd come along with this soup, this watery soup. In fact, one time, I think there was a lady that wanted a tree cut down. And they asked for some volunteers to do this. So, I, there was about, I think the five of us must have done that. We cut this tree down. And she gave us, she fed us some soup. Of course, they didn't have any meat. It was mostly cabbage and what else? Cabbage and vegetables, yea. It was vegetables. And so, we didn't really have enough to eat on this march. And then, of course, we slept in barns at night. And we always had a, then, of course, some of the fellows had cigarettes, and they'd

smoke. And then we'd be smoking in this barn, where all the hay was, and as soon as the German soldier, or one of our guards, would come in to this barn, someone would holler "Air Raid!" Because when we had air raids, you know, when there was air raids at night, we weren't allowed to smoke. Because the light would shine. And then somebody would yell "Air Raid!" and we'd put the cigarettes out. Of course, I don't know, we didn't have that many. I suppose some of the guys did.

Mark: Yea, I was going to ask, where did you get cigarettes?

Korth: They were in the Red Cross parcels. And some of the fellows had been prisoners long enough that they, I suppose, had a supply of cigarettes. I know, I quit smoking about thirty days and, of course, mostly because I didn't have any cigarettes. And then, also, in the prison camps, another thing, they used cigarettes for money. We didn't have any money, of course. And they used cigarettes. They played poker. I never played poker myself. And then I learned how to play pinochle, watching the guys play cards. You know, watched them.

Mark: So, the food and those kind of things got pretty scarce.

Korth: Yes, they did.

Korth: What about your treatment by the Germans? For example, the guards, the civilians? Were you treated illy? Were you treated well?

Korth: Well, I thought we were treated pretty good. They were a little afraid of us, I think. Because, you know, the German. Oh, one of the things I forgot to mention too, is when we were on this farm, they would bring our food in the German newspaper. And I'd open up the newspaper, and I'd read it.

Mark: You could read it.

Korth: Tell the boys, say, this is what is going on. France has been, or how far the war fronts was. It wasn't too good. Then, I guess I forgot to tell you, one time they, one of our fellows had to be our cook. So I said, "Okay, who can be a cook?" So we wound up with a guy that was a chef in a hotel in Hartford, Connecticut. I'd say, maybe twenty-five. He was an old guy. Twenty-seven years old, something like that. Of course, I was only twenty at the time, or nineteen, maybe. But, anyway, who could be a cook? So, this guy was our cook. When we worked on this German farm. And one time, the Germans gave us some meat. This cook opened it up and said, "Fellows, I wouldn't eat that if I were you. It didn't look good." So we had five Russian prisoners of war above us. And we gave it to them, and they all got sick.

Mark: He was right.

Korth: Yea, he was right. I am estimating, I must have lost thirty-five or forty pounds while I was a - - I know I weighed a couple pounds less than I did when I went into the army when I was discharged. And I had spent from May till November under the United States food plan. But, we did all kinds of things on this farm. We patched roofs, and we, and, in this northern part of Germany, well, then I worked in, they had us milking cows. Five of us had to milk sixty cows. Morning, we milked the best ones at noon, and night. And, of course, we had to change off. And this fellow that was in charge of the dairy barn, he was a real nice fellow. His name was Paul, I remember it. He told me one day, he said, "You know, it doesn't make any difference to me whether Germany wins the war or not," he says. "I have to work anyway." He was kind of a philosopher. And so, he was a real nice fellow. So we changed off working in this cow barn, because, you know, milk all those cows. You had to milk ten, twelve cows in the morning, noon, and night. So we changed off doing that. And also, one of the things happened, while we were on this sixty-four day march away from the Russian army, our guards were mostly old fellows. Most of the guys had been up on the Russian front. And I am guessing, they were, must have been sixty years old, or somewhere in that vicinity. One of our guards came up to me one day and must have known that I could speak German, and he asked me, "Why do you make war with Germany?" So, boy, I thought to myself, how do I answer that one? He's got a gun, and I don't even have a club. So, finally, I said to him, "Well, why do you make war with France? Why do you make war with Austria? Why do you make war with Poland? Why do you make war with Russia?" That ended the conversation, of course.

Mark: So, this march, and the Russians. As you mentioned, you got to read the paper. And so perhaps you were aware how the fronts were progressing.

Korth: Yes.

Mark: I suspect you were aware that the Russians were coming your way.

Korth: Yea. No. Well, not really. Just, they just usually described, it was kind of surprising to me, one day, it was on February 10, they came to us and told us we were moving out. And that was a kind of surprise to me. They didn't have much in the German newspapers about the Russian army. It was mostly about what the American and the British were doing. And then, of course, what we were doing, we had quite an orientation on that when we were in Wales, that time, before we went over to France. That our American Air Force and the British Air Force were cutting off the German supply lines, their fuel, and their food supplies, to the German army. And then, of course, when we were on this sixty-four day march, I saw one time, I saw a horse with a hind quarter cut out. A dead horse, mind you, along side the road. The people were marching away from the Russian army as well as we were. And they usually kept us separate from the civilian people. Then,

also, another funny thing is. This is my favorite Canadian joke. We had six Canadian prisoners of war with us. See, Canada didn't just declare war against Germany. They were members of the British Air Force. Anyway, they had different uniforms than we did and every morning the Germans would count us. And they would line us up, and they would say, "Wo ist die Canadian?" "Where are the Canadians?" Finally, one day I said, "What are you Canadian guys up to, that the Germans are suspicious of you? Every day, they want to see where you are." Escape, or something like that. And I forgot to tell the story about, and then while we were on this sixty day march, one night they gathered us all together. And here, the farmer counted his chickens, and he was missing one chicken. He had like ninety chickens and he had only eighty-nine left. Someone had taken a chicken out. And it turned out it was our buddy, the guy that was our chef, in our German farm, there. He had, they had stolen this German's chicken, and they had ate it, and the Germans never found a feather. A feather or a bone. So, apparently they didn't, they must have buried the whole thing.

Mark: [unintelligible].

Korth: Yes. Probably. They did a real good job, yea. And, of course, I wasn't going to question them, either. I didn't want to know what they did with it, because I thought, well, if the Germans did, maybe I'd have to tell them, or something. I didn't even want to know what they did with the bones, or the-- And then one time, we were, they had us in a German barn, and inside there was a grain drill. Covered up with a binder apron, and underneath were the seed potatoes. So we ate the seed potatoes on this farmer. Ate them raw. Nobody asked us if we ate them. I guess we all did.

Mark: So, the Russians finally did liberate you?

Korth: No, we were liberated by the Americans. Yea.

Mark: Describe that for me.

Korth: Okay. That was a little different, unusual thing, too. We had heard rumors that the American army wasn't too far away. And when we got to Saalthal, Germany, the five of us guys decided, hey, this isn't for us. Let's get out of here. Because we don't want to get involved in any army back-and-forth. So we escaped. But we did it during the day. And we marched down the farmer's lane, and they caught us. Our German guards held us back. They took us back to our establishment, back there. So, the next morning, we said, well, we did a foolish thing yesterday. Let's escape again. So, we escaped, but this time we went through the woods to escape. And we got, we wound up at an intersection, where there was a police officer directing traffic. And all of a sudden, our guards came along, and they wanted to take us back to the camp. And this German policeman says, "No, you can't You aren't even allowed in this town. This town has been declared a free city." Like

they tell us, they did that if they had, say they had a church or something like that that they wanted to keep. I suppose, maybe, a town hall, or something like that. They declared it a free city, so the Germans agreed not to defend it, and the Americans agreed not to attack it. So, they took us back to the police station, this policeman did. And he said, our comrades would be there within an hour. By golly, they were. This was about ten o'clock in the morning, I'd say. Eleven, our troops came and they liberated us. And then, another funny thing that happened, we went to a hotel. We thought, oh, that was a good place to go. We'd stay in this hotel overnight. We'd have a nice place to sleep. And the next morning, I went down to the kitchen. We wanted to get our breakfast. And here the chefs in the hotel, they were trained to cook breakfast for the guests. And every time they turned their back, one of the GI's would take the pot and take it off the stove, and put theirs on. So, I think I watched this for an hour and this was really funny. So, then, there we go. We were liberated by the American army.

Mark: Why don't you walk through your steps going back to the U. S. I imagine you had some debriefings and that sort of thing?

Korth: Oh, let's see.

Mark: Camp Lucky Strike?

Korth: Yea. You've heard of that?

Mark: Oh, yea.

Korth: Okay. So, then they took us by, we went by truck from Feldieuba, Germany, to a town called Hildesheim. There the American Air Force had a airport, there. And they flew us back to Camp Lucky Strike. So we didn't have to, if fact, I got my first airplane ride when I was wounded, in France. I got my first airplane ride across the English Channel, to the hospital. But, anyway, of course, they took us to Camp Lucky Strike. And we waited there a couple days.

Mark: They started feeding you out of there?

Korth: Started feeding us. And we started eating. Yes. Oh, one more thing I should mention. I met one fellow that I knew. Well, after I was wounded, first they had the evacuation hospital, and then they had a field hospital. And when I was in this field hospital, I was going into the toilet. And this fellow came out. A fellow I knew, from Watertown. Or from Clymon (??), I should say.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

Only lived about ten miles away. And he wasn't a classmate of mine, but I just knew him, that is all. In our area, at that time, the Clymon kids had a choice, as to

go to Watertown to the high school, or to Juneau, to the high school. So his brother went to Juneau High School, and he went to Watertown. But I knew this fellow, anyway.

Mark: Small world. So, you got back to the States. You were discharged, was it November?

Korth: Yes. I got back to the States and then they gave us what they called a sixty day - - First, we went to, ah, this fellow from Chicago I was with, he and I stayed together. And we went to Fort Sheridan. And then they, let's see, how did that - - oh, we got off the train and we went to Fort Sheridan, and somehow or other, we spent a whole night riding the street cars in Chicago. Going to the speakeasies, so to speak, and back and forth. And we got into Fort Sheridan, and they gave us what they call a sixty day delay in route. Because, at first, they told us that they were going to feed us up, and fatten us up, and get us ready to fight the Japanese. Because the war in Germany was over with, about the middle, when we were in the middle of the ocean. So, I got back home, and I met my future wife. We had been classmates together. We graduated from school in 1942, from high school. And we were married on my sixty day delay in route. And then I was anticipating to go over to Japan and fight the Japanese, but I was - - they sent us down to Miami, Florida, and from there we spent - - there was ten days. My wife didn't go along. Her mother wouldn't let her go. She didn't leave her go yet. So, anyway, I was assigned to a hotel there, in Miami Beach, and I think I spent most of my time either going to the theater. We went there. We had good, you might say, orientation. We went to the doctor's, we had a physical examination, and I spent most of my time in the dentist's, getting my teeth fixed. And then I even signed up to do some deep sea fishing, but I had a doctor's appointment. I couldn't go. So, anyway, all my ten days, I spent either in the doctor's or the dentist's. And then they sent me to Camp Rucker, Alabama, and there, that was an advanced infantry retraining center, at the time. Now it is a helicopter training post. But, anyway, I remember, they put me, well, we all called them reple-deples. You probably heard that, too. Reple-deples, replacement depots. I was put in a replacement depot and I spent a whole week there. And on Saturday, I was getting kind of bored. There wasn't anything for us to do. So, I went over, and there was a band, a regimental band, about a block away. And it was a Saturday morning, and they must have had orientations, you know. They spoke about how the war was coming, and how we were getting ready to go over and fight the Japanese. So then I got back to my barracks, and here my sergeant was. Boy, was he mad at me. He was ready to club me. He had been looking for me. He said, "I got a good notion to make you carry your stuff to your unit." So, then, I was assigned to I Company, of the 201st Infantry. And this was an advanced infantry retraining post. And they had spent two and a half years up in Alaska. And I spent most of my time listening to their experiences in Alaska. In fact, they were bombed by the Japanese airplanes. Attu! They were only like fifty miles from the Russian border. Anyway, I spent the time I was, oh, the mail clerk went home on a ten day furlough because his father was

sick. So I took his place. And then he came back one day, and his father died. So he went back again. He had another leave. And then the company clerk went on, he got married. He went somewhere to get married, and he had two three-day passes, so I took his place. I was an acting company clerk. And then they closed up this camp, and then I was looking forward to go to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Kentucky, and all over the place. I was even looking forward to getting to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. To get closer to Wisconsin. Even, I was looking at Camp McCoy. So I went up two hundred and fifty miles further, up to Fort McClellan, Alabama. Well, that was a basic training camp. So then I was discharged on November 9.

Mark: And the rest is history.

Korth: The rest is history. Right.

Mark: I'll make this brief. I know your time is about up. But, having been a POW, POW's often have particular medical problems, and readjustment problems after the war.

Korth: Tell me.

Mark: Well, you tell me.

Korth: I've got more problems with my teeth. I have a standing appointment at the VA here in Madison. I think every month. Sometimes twice a month. I am going. I had one, two bridges made and now I had, today, I had a filling came out and I had that replaced. And they want to put a, what do you call it? Something over the top of it.

Mark: A crown?

Korth: Crown. Yea. Okay, he wants to put a crown on it. And also I had to go in for x-rays. And way in the back here, this tooth that is bothering me is up here. And the one that is, this is real bad, and it's real bad, and decayed. The dentist says. So he always wishes me luck. So I have an appointment for September 25 to go back. And then, also, I got feet. I have my, a real bad bunion on my right foot. And I have had trouble with my feet. In fact, I had frozen feet when I was a prisoner of war. See, when we were on the sixty-four day march, we don't realize that the part of Germany we were in was like fifty-four degrees. It was like our Oshkosh is forty-four degrees, and this was fifty-four degrees, like up in Canada. And this was in the winter time we were marching, you know, away from the Russians. And I had frozen feet while I was there. And this nurse, I asked this nurse, "How you going to test me when I had frozen feet?" And she says, "I am going to take the temperature of the bottom of your feet, and then I am going to put your feet in ice water for twenty seconds, and in twenty minutes it should be back to the

original temperature.” So, she gets this ice water all set, and then she says, “Oh, the temperature of your bottom foot was eighty-four degrees.” She put it in ice water and for twenty second, and she took it out and wiped it, and now she says, “We will wait for twenty minutes.” But after twenty minutes, she said, “Well, let’s wait another twenty minutes. We’ll make sure.” So she put the thermometer on the bottom of my feet and it was only seventy-four degrees. And she said, “There is no doubt in my mind you had frozen feet when you were in.”

Mark: Was this right after the war, or some years after?

Korth: No, some years after. This was, oh, golly, Ralph Pope was kind of-- POWs encouraged us to do those things. That was about, what? A couple years ago, maybe, huh?

Mark: Now, this gets into my last area of questions. And that involves veterans organizations and that sort of thing. I take it you have been involved with the American ex-POWs?

Korth: Oh, yes, I am a life member.

Mark: When did you start getting involved in that? Under what circumstances?

Korth: Oh, boy, I didn’t even know they existed. How did I get that? Oh, I know. They started a local unit. What do you call it now? A post? A chapter. Right. See, there is nine chapters in the state of Wisconsin. And a fellow by the name of Clarence Beltman contacted me and said that they wanted to start a new chapter in West Bend, Wisconsin. And so, well, that is what got me started on it. And since then I have got a couple other guys interested in it. In fact, one of the fellows died since then. So, I joined the ex-POWs, and I joined the American Legion, of course, right away.

Mark: After the war.

Korth: After the war, yes.

Mark: And so you got discharged and joined the Legion quickly.

Korth: Soon after.

Mark: For what reason?

Korth: Well, it was in town, and it was, they had, what the did was they had a meeting of the veterans, and we were to decide what we were going to do, whether we were going to join the American Legion. See, there was an American Legion post in town already. Whether we were going to join this American Legion post or

whether we were going to start one of our own. Some kind of a veterans organization. So we had a meeting in the Red Wilmot's place, one of his upstairs. And he, we decided that we were going to join the American Legion. And that is what we did.

Mark: And were you involved? Actively involved? Did you hold any offices?

Korth: No, I never held an office, but, in 1961, they started a firing squad. And I have been a member of that ever since. In fact, they bought the uniforms and every time when there is a funeral, we have, in fact, they wanted me to be sergeant at arms, but I am involved in too much other stuff, so I wouldn't take that position. But, anyway, a couple times, a couple funerals, we didn't have a sergeant at arms, so I acted as the sergeant at arms. And we have quite an active organization, yes. We, I belong to the Disabled Veterans. And then they started a Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter in town, too, and I joined that. But I don't go to the meetings. My wife and I have, we have six children and we have eighteen grandchildren now, and--

Mark: That keeps you busy.

Korth: Keeps us busy. Yes, then they say, "What do you do when you are retired?" So, then when I came back from the service, I joined, well, I worked for an electrician, first. And things weren't going too well there, so I went to the Dodge County Highway Department and I worked there for nine years, in the highway department. And then there was an opening in the traffic police, Dodge County Traffic Police. So I stayed there for twenty-four years. I worked the second shift. I worked thirteen years from six at night to two in the morning. And then I worked another eleven years from four until twelve. And then our kids were all gone, and I decided, well, my wife would need company at night. And then, we sent all our kids through college. All of them? And whenever there was a part-time job opening, and this was sometime after the Korean War, they were short a rural mail carrier substitute. So somebody, in fact, he was a veteran of the World War II, he was a rural mail carrier, and he wanted a substitute. The substitute that he had was, oh, he was a plumber. And this rural mail carrier, he had a piece of shrapnel near his heart. He was a veteran. He had to come here to get that shrapnel taken away. And he would be gone for a month or two. And the fellow that was his sub couldn't be able to get away from his plumbing business that long. So they asked me to be his substitute. So I did that for twenty years. Then he made out a slip, and at the beginning of the year, what days he wanted off. So he always wanted off between Christmas and New Years. And, so, well, I did that for twenty years. Then, after a while, when the night shift got to be a little too much, I had a chance to get it full time. A rural mail carrier. One of the carriers retired, and I was the senior sub, senior substitute. So, I did that for seven years, hauled the mail. I was on one route for five years, and then I went back on Route 2, the one I subbed on. And so I got to know all the, most of the people. And, well, that is it. Know their

names, their families, their daughters names.

Mark: Well, you certainly seem to have stayed busy.

Korth: I stayed busy. Oh, yea.

Mark: How did you take time to stop in today?

Korth: And, then, one of our kids went to Oshkosh, to school. Oshkosh University. And he wanted to go to Florida. On the Easter break. And I said, "Listen here, son. When you get out of college, you won't owe anybody anything, because what you couldn't make earning in the summer time, I made up. And, as a result of that, you are not going to Florida." And he didn't go. None of our kids did. Our daughter went to, I remember, she went to nursing school in 1970. We had to have \$1,988 to put down, to put down. And then, my wife, she is my banker, all this money that I made as I was a rural carrier substitute, we never spent any of it. She always put it in a separate account. And then when we had to have this \$1,988 for our daughter to go to nursing school, we had it. She got a scholarship from the Disabled Veterans, too, so, \$250.

Mark: I know.

Korth: And the difference, and then, of course, our kids, one is teaching in Madison. One teaches in Watertown. One is a pastor, a Lutheran minister. One is, the east side of Madison, yea. He teaches in Madison. And our daughter is a nurse, of course. And then the other son teaches band music. My wife is a musician. She was a piano player. And he takes after her. So he is a music teacher at Monticello, Wisconsin. He lives in Verona, not too far away from here, too. As I say, our kids went to college, and when they got out of school, they didn't owe anybody anything. [unintelligible] One nurse we have. She is the only girl. We had five boys and one girl. She works at an old folks home. What do you call it? A nursing home? Yea. The hospital has it, next door to the regular hospital, they have a nursing home. Old folks home. And she works there. So, our kids all--

Mark: Turned out well.

Korth: Yea.

Mark: That is about it. Is there anything that you would like to add?

[End of Interview.]