

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

MARVIN M. MOEBIUS

Anti-Aircraft Artillery and Military Police, Army, World War II.

1995

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Moebius, Marvin M., (1923-2009). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 68 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 68 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Marvin M. Moebius, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the 391st Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion during World War II. After graduating from high school, Moebius talks about work at a tank-parts factory and at an airplane supercharger plant polishing aircraft parts. He describes being drafted, failing his first physical exam, and basic and coast artillery training at Fort Fisher (North Carolina). He comments that basic training was unpleasant and people who didn't fit in were sent off to become instructors. Moebius speaks of shipping overseas aboard the *USS Washington*, being assigned guard duty, fighting seasickness, and arriving in Liverpool (England) during a bombing raid. Attached to the 9th Air Force, he describes being assigned to an airport in Ipswich (England), using Bofors 40 mm guns, and a trick German planes used to avoid radar detection by mingling with returning Allied aircraft. Moebius touches on exchanging personnel with the British and reports seeing some plane crashes at the airport. Attached to the 3rd Army, he details landing at Normandy, crowded conditions on the beach, and learning not to fire carelessly at night because it allowed German planes to pinpoint their position. Moebius portrays seeing the planes fly overhead to bomb St. Lo, shooting down his first enemy plane, and going out to pick up a piece of the wreckage to prove it. Stationed for a time in Châlons-sur-Marne (France), he tells of giving gasoline to an enterprising Frenchman and having a French girlfriend who insisted on how nice the Germans were. Moebius reflects on being able to see German planes at night by moonlight and tells of one close call when his hole was strafed just after he left it. He describes the Battle of the Bulge and the stress caused by rumors of the Germans infiltrating American lines. He details activities in Paris and Monaco while on leave. Moebius mentions being stationed in Reims when the military surrender was signed. Attached to the 1st Infantry Division, he speaks of being assigned Military Police duty guarding SS prisoners and having prisoners who knew tailoring turn soldiers' dress tunics into Eisenhower jackets. Sent to Luxembourg to guard war criminals, he remembers taking pills to Hermann Goering. He details moving to Nuremberg, being ordered to evacuate civilians from their apartment building so officers could be billeted there, and failing to properly translate for Wilhelm Keitel. Moebius describes sitting in as a guard when the lawyers questioned prisoners such as Goering, Keitel, and Hans Frank. He reveals he felt sorry for the prisoners and thought it was a little ridiculous how detailed the questions were when their guilt was already apparent. He recalls a conversation he had with Goering and being struck that Goering was still mentally reorganizing the German Army even though it was clear he would never be a general again. Moebius

touches on efforts guards made to prevent the prisoners from committing suicide. He declares he learned English as a child so he could talk to his German-immigrant grandfather and reflects on the sentiments of German-Americans during the war. Sent home when the war trials started, Moebius speaks of shipping back to the States aboard the *USS Portland* and encountering a terrible storm that killed some passengers and almost sunk the ship. He mentions using the GI Bill to attend the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and having a career in sales. He states he joined the American Legion in his thirties because they held dances on the weekends. Moebius describes the lapel insignia that his unit designed and wore in Nuremburg.

Biographical Sketch:

Moebius (1923-2009) served in the Army from 1943 to 1945. He was chief of Section 608, Battery B, 391st Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, fought in the European theater, including the Normandy Invasion and the Battle of the Bulge, and guarded war criminals in Nuremburg after the war. Moebius was honorably discharged at the rank of sergeant, was vice president of the W.D. Ehrke Co., and eventually settled in Brookfield (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by Karen Emery, WDVA staff, 1998.

Transcription checked and edited by Channing Welch, 2008.

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Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011.

Interview abstract:

Mark: For the transcriber and then we'll just start some questions.

Moebius: Okay.

Mark: Okay, today's date is November 28, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Marvin Moebius of Milwaukee, a veteran of the Second World War. Good morning. Thanks for taking the time out to talk to me this morning.

Moebius: Thanks for calling me.

Mark: I appreciate it. Uhm, let's start at the beginning as they say. Why don't 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.

Moebius: Okay. I was born and raised in Milwaukee on September 11, 1923 and I lived there up until the time that I was drafted. When the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor I was downtown with three of my friends in the museum. After that I graduated from high school and at that time I knew I was going to be drafted so I went to work in a war factory. As a matter of fact it was Oilgear. We were making parts for a tank turret and I worked, believe it or not a 19-year-old, I worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week, nights. So as a result I had very little social life. I was in the first bunch of 19-year-olds that was drafted and I went from Oilgear to supercharger plant where we made parts for airplanes and I was a polisher. During that time I must have picked up some sort of blood poisoning because in my first examination for the draft a letter came back stating that I syphilis or some venereal disease which was kind of weird because I had never had any sexual contact.

So anyways, that was re-examined and I was drafted with a group that was not from my local area and that's the only reason I mention this; I was drafted with a bunch of fellows from Chicago and from Upper Peninsula in Michigan. We were sent to, directly from Chicago, the camp there, to Fort Fisher, North Carolina. I was put into, at that time, it was anti-aircraft but at that time it was attached to the Coast Guard artillery. So we stayed at Fort Fisher and we had some night time exercises where we rolled our guns out on the sand, supposedly there was German subs off the coast and whether there was or wasn't we never were able to determine but it was good exercise. And from there we went to Raleigh-Durham Airport in North Carolina and at that place we were actually in placements around the airport in a mock situation to what we would later find overseas. That

period then was, from there we went to what was known as Buzzard's Bay in, I guess that's--

Mark: That's Massachusetts.

Moebius: Massachusetts, right. And from there we embarked to, overseas. Now that was, the period I just described was probably a little less than a year, the first year that I was in.

Mark: Yeah. I'd like to go back and cover a couple of those things if you don't mind.

Moebius: Okay.

Mark: First of all, basic training. I went to basic training probably 40 years after you did and there's certain adjustments one needs to make to military life. There's the screaming and yelling, there's the discipline, that sort of thing. What sort of, describe your basic training in terms of military indoctrination. Was it tough? Did people flunk out? And how did you and others readjust to life in the military?

Moebius: Well, actually, at that point, having been drafted there was nobody that flunked out. What they did was, and this was kind of screwy because what they did was if anybody was an 8-ball, or anybody was a lagger, or anybody that was a goof-off, what they did is they took those people and put them into what they called the cadre and they were sent someplace else to train people, which really kind of blew your mind because they were taking the worst examples and making them trainers but in that method they got rid of them. They got them out of the outfit. And I don't mean to say that everyone was like that but a lot of people were actually gotten rid of just because of the fact that they didn't fit in. Now, the basic training I had was really in the field. In fact, I can remember coming back on one 3-day leave and meeting my brother who was in the Navy and he couldn't believe that we didn't have sheets on our bed and that we ate out of mess kits. I did that almost all the time I was in the Army. There was very few times that we were in like a mess hall. It was always outdoor kitchens and we were digging holes in North Carolina and being eaten up by the bugs and that. So I remember the basic training as being very unpleasant.

Mark: Now, I would imagine the basic training, there was a mix of people from all across the country. Is that correct? Or did you--

Moebius: Well, like I said, that's why I mentioned earlier, most of the people I was with were from the Chicago area and from the northern part of Michigan.

That's as far as they went in the group we were in. There weren't really too many from all over the country.

Mark: Now, in terms of now, you went into the Coast Artillery first of all.

Moebius: Yes.

Mark: Who made that decision?

Moebius: Well, that was made by the Army. There was no, you had no choice. I mean, they said, "This is where you're going," period. In fact, there were some that evidently were shipped other places but that's where I was sent.

Mark: I'm just interested in why you were designated as good material for Coast Artillery. No particular reason I take it.

Moebius: No particular reason except that's where they had openings at the time.

Mark: I see. Now, this was your first trip to the South I would imagine.

Moebius: Yes, it was. In fact, it was the first trip away from home. Naturally, it was very interesting to me because in those days, well you can imagine what 50 years ago or more, things were a little more as you would say "Southern" then they are now where we're kind of more all like one. We had, the people actually, I will mention that, the people were not too friendly down there and that I think was based on the fact that that's where most of the Army camps were based and Army camps were not thought of too highly in those days. Fort Fisher was nothing but a bunch of tarpaper shacks actually, set in, well, I think it's--Fort Fisher is an area that's still on the map but I don't believe the camp is still there.

Mark: So, did you get to get off the post much? I'm interested in how--

Moebius: Well, actually there I think the 3-day pass I had that was about the only, in fact I actually was listed AWOL because I got on a train and went back to Milwaukee. I think I was back here about one day and then I had to get back on the train. My brother and I drove on the train, I forget the route, but he went to Norfolk and I went on to Fort Fisher, back to Fort Fisher then. So that was the only time I got home, that one 3-day pass. And as far as time off it was maybe only weekends where you'd get a weekend pass or something and the closest place you could go to was Fort Fisher itself or some of the surrounding towns along the coast there. That's about all there was to do.

Mark: So when you went overseas then, you departed from Massachusetts I take it.

Moebius: That's right. From Buzzard's Bay and I was on a ship that was the *USS Washington*, which was a luxury liner that had been captured from the Germans in World War number One. It was an uneventful voyage. We had, you know, stormy seas and that but nothing earthshaking. The only thing that I remember about it was they told everybody, to avoid seasickness, eat as much as you could. I remember that I was in charge of, at that time I was a sergeant and I was in charge of one of the shifts that did guard duty and one of the positions we had to always have a man on was the brig and the brig was right above the propellers, on the bottom of the ship, and during the stormy seas the ship would come out of the water and the propellers obviously would keep going and the entire ship would shudder in that area and all the people that were in the brig which were, you know, soldiers that had done something wrong, and the guard outside would usually be laying in their own vomit because they were so terribly seasick. So I had to go check that point all the time and actually that made the voyage pass quickly. We arrived in Liverpool. And the night we arrived in Liverpool the Germans were bombing it so that was quite an interesting start to our disembarking in Europe.

Mark: I would imagine it would be.

Moebius: Yes.

Mark: So, when you got to England then, now this was when exactly?

Moebius: Who knows? [laughs]

Mark: Soon after D-Day I take it.

Moebius: Who knows? [laughs] Roughly, I would, actually I can't remember the dates. In fact, I was thinking back on all this before our conversation. I tried to remember the specific dates and that's all a blur. But it would be roughly, I was overseas for two years. In fact, I'm looking at my Army jacket now and I have one hash mark and four small ones. I don't even remember what that all is. I was overseas roughly two years.

Mark: Do you recall if it was before or after D-Day?

Moebius: Do what?

Mark: Was it before or after D-Day?

Moebius: It was before D-Day.

Mark: It was before D-Day.

Moebius: Yes, uh huh. And, in fact, what we did after we arrived in Liverpool we got our trucks and our guns — now I should explain quickly that when we were in anti-aircraft we had a gun that was called a 40 millimeter Bofors and that was mounted on four wheels and it shot 120 rounds a minute. It was not one of these high, like a 90 millimeter. It was, the task it was assigned was any tank and low-flying aircraft. And with that we had two trucks. Each section had two trucks; one pulled the gun and the other pulled the turret with four .50-caliber machine guns on it. And there was approximately twenty men in this section and I was chief of section. I was the head of that and I had two corporals under me and a tech corporal who ran the power plant that ran the range-finder. Now when we got into Liverpool we got in our trucks and our equipment and we drove to Ipswich in England, wherever that is, and we were put in an airport support and we took over from some British anti aircraft outfit so that was probably the nicest station we ever had. There were concrete gun emplacements and it was really quite elegant. Now we actually had some action there.

Mark: Oh, really.

Moebius: In that what would happen is we were stationed around a number of bases. This is one I remember in particular. The base that we were at were P-47s and I remember that the P-47s took off from this airfield with the first bunch of bombs that they were able to carry. In other words, that was the experiment that they carried these heavy bombs. So they would come to the end of the runway and we were at the end of the runway and you never knew if they were going to make it or not because they were so heavily loaded. Then another time we were at, I forget what base this was but we were at a B-17 base, and as these planes would take off there was no problems but when they came back then the German Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs and whatever they had that flew that far they would come in with those planes and not be noted radar because of the fact that they were mingled in with the American planes, or British Lancasters whatever they were. And then they would proceed to, while they were in a holding pattern waiting to land — you know they were like duck soup, but you know we had to very little shooting because they didn't always get low enough for us to shoot at. We had a limited range.

Mark: Why don't you tell me a little bit about the guns you were shooting.

Moebius: Well, I mean as I say, this was a Swedish gun. As a matter of fact, these things are still, every once in awhile I see in some of these war pictures--

Mark: This is the Bofors?

Moebius: Yes, uh huh.

Mark: I'm not much of a gun expert so I'm going to have to depend on your knowledge here.

Moebius: Well, I mean all I can say is these were, a lot of these were also mounted on our Naval ships because, you know, they could fire so rapidly. The shell they shot was probably, oh, two foot long. Now that's the entire thing, with the casing. And there was two types of heads on them. One was armor piercing which obviously you didn't shoot at planes. And the other was a projectile that would go its range and it would do one of two things. It would either explode at the end of its flight or it would explode if it hit something. So in other words, the secret to these particular guns was the fact that they could shoot so rapidly and they also had tracers incidentally. And you could perceive where you were shooting by this rapid fire, you know, just kind of make your corrections as needed. Whereas, like the other anti aircraft guns they shoot a shell at a certain height and it explodes and that hopefully is in the range of something that it will hit.

Mark: Yeah.

Moebius: Now the 40, .50-caliber machine guns, they were, purpose had two things. One was to protect the backend of our gun. In other words, you shoot forward, you want to have your backend protected. And the other was, of course, .50-caliber, if anything got low enough, obviously, you could just like — that's all the planes had at that time, .50-calibers. So, what else can I say about. Now, when we put these guns in that was one of the, every place we went you had to dig a hole to put this gun in so when we go someplace it always meant a lot of work because you had to get the gun in a certain level so it would protect it so we became quite muscular digging holes.

Mark: I bet you did. Now, in England how often did you have to move around? You mentioned that you did go from base to base.

Moebius: Well now, I'm a little vague on that. I know we went to Ipswich and there was one other place we went but I don't remember exactly where and then from there, after the area where we were, we went to Bournemouth which is in the southern part of England and that was when we were getting ready for the invasion. Now there, you know, that was just tons and tons and tons and tons of stuff and we, I used to think we came in the last couple

days after D-Day but actually I was just reading some of the articles here that I have from the paper and it turns out we went in on like D-plus 30 which still was a bad time. I'd like to tell you something about that.

Mark: Okay.

Moebius: If you don't have anything back on England.

Mark: Sure.

Moebius: Oh, incidentally, when we were in England there was one thing that was of interest. The English and the Americans traded people. We had a couple of Englishmen that came with us and lived with us for awhile and a couple of our fellows went and lived with the English fellas. So that was quite interesting because, you know, they just couldn't believe what we had. And of course we didn't realize how good we had it. When I say that I'm talking about like the clothing and rations and stuff like that. I did get to London on a leave and that was about the only thing. I remember walking around in London not knowing where to go and having a taxi driver insult me because I didn't give him enough tip. [laughs] So anyhow, I can't think of anything else that would be exciting there.

Mark: So, you were going to tell me something about D-Day.

Moebius: Well, I didn't know if you wanted to move to that. I thought maybe you had a question.

Mark: Oh, sure, why not.

Moebius: Anyways, like I said, actually this was a story and I don't know if it was ever true or not but supposedly there was some troops that had to go in the anti aircraft on D-Day and supposedly two colonels got together — our colonel and another one — and they flipped a coin and our colonel won so we didn't go in on D-Day. Now these other people that went in, their guns were put on concrete barges and towed in and I don't know, you know, how many casualties they had but I guess what I'm saying is that I missed going in on D-Day by that much and I didn't miss it really. But anyways, when we did go in they were still confined to a very small area on the beach. In fact, we had to climb the same hill that they write so much about that the Rangers had to go up. As a matter of fact, we had one guy that actually had a heart attack on our climbing up that hill and our guns, they were brought up and actually we were set up in this perimeter that was just wall-to-wall people and equipment. And I remember the first night that we were there, you know, we had to quickly dig our holes and the order was that anything that flew at night was not Allied. That was the early order of

the war. In other words, anything that was flying at night we could shoot at. So the first night we were there the German planes would come over and we'd blast away at them and I don't know if we hit anything or not but, you know, we just had a shooting good time and the next day everybody that was around us came and told us what idiots we were and that they didn't want us to do that again. Now these were not officers, these were enlisted men like infantry that had dug all around us. I mean, like I said, you couldn't hardly walk there was so many people. And we said, "Why, why?" And they said, "Well, you idiots, when you shoot they drop bombs." So you don't want to, then they knew where something was worthwhile dropping bombs on. So we were a little selective after that.

Then the next thing we knew, and I don't know how many days this was or months or whatever it was, but then one morning we woke up to the constant roar of planes and that was when everything that could fly was flying over and bombing St. Lo and leveling that to the ground. In fact, we heard that some of the people that were close to the edge actually were killed by our own bombs which, you know, is always sort of disconcerting. So then after what they called "the breakthrough" at St. Lo there, then we got on our trucks and at that time — now I will mention something real quickly. Being in the anti aircraft I said initially we were attached to the Coast Guard. Well, later on, actually we still had our Coast Guard insignia, but we were attached to whatever arm we were with at that particular time. For example, when we got to England we were actually attached to the Ninth Airforce and then after we got to France we were attached to Patton and the Third Army. So then when he broke out with his tanks and they went through to the Falaise Gap and those areas where they were chasing the Germans, we kind of followed along after them and, you know, dug many, many holes.

While we were in the area there before the breakout we did shoot down a plane, German JU-88, and my commanding officer and I got in a jeep — and in order to get credit for something you had to have a piece of the plane — so we went to this area where this plane had crashed and actually there was hardly anything left. I mean, it actually, it must have like gone right into the ground because that's all there was bits and pieces in a big hole and I did find a name tag for, which I still have, from this German plane that I chiseled off and after that we were able to paint a swastika on our gun but after that it got to be old hat shooting down planes so we never really did that anymore. It was kind of silly, especially since that was really probably the first enemy bodies or pieces of bodies that we had seen. And that's what it was, was just pieces. We'd seen a lot of airplane accidents in England. Planes that would come in shot up and crash. They were pretty horrible. Really left an impression 'cause somehow the Air Force was always kind of glorious and when you've seen them scattered

all around then they weren't so exciting. Plus the fact that the planes, the B-17s I said when we were there, they would, and I'm not quite sure of this, in other words I don't know the mechanics of this, but evidently some of these bombs on the planes would be armed and when they landed they would jump out of this B-17 and run like the devil and shortly after that this thing would blow up because these bombs were armed. Now I say, I don't know the mechanics of it but whatever happened it was a scary thing obviously.

Mark: I'm sure. So after the breakthrough, I would imagine that you had to move quite often.

Moebius: Constantly.

Mark: Yeah.

Moebius: We would be jumping in our trucks and then after, evidently, after what was that? The Falaise Gap, when they really pulverized the Germans, then they kind of tightened up and then things were a little stagnant for awhile and for awhile we were stationed in the center of Chalons-sur-Marne and I remember that very vividly. And that was kind of a quiet period for awhile. Actually we were dug in in the center of town for some reason or other that's the first place I got to know some of the French people. In fact, there was a man there who, I remember his name yet, Marshall LeClere[??]. He was one of the local entrepreneurs, if you will, and he would come and try and wheedle me out of some gasoline and things like that. And actually I must confess that I did give him a gallon or two, and when I say a gallon or two, that's all it was because he had a motorcycle and he would go out in the country and get produce from the farmers and then bring it back to town and sell it. At any rate, also met a young girl there who was quite beautiful and she used to argue how nice the Germans were. During the entire four years that the Germans were in France her mother, her father had been a French officer, and the Germans had billeted a couple of German officers in her home with her mother and her. I guess for that this French officer got some favors or something like that. But anyways it was really weird because here you were fighting for them and they were trying to tell you how great the Germans were. And, oh, I failed to mention that I was able to speak German but only home-type German. As a result I got along quite famously because that was one of the things that impressed me in Europe was that everybody could speak two or three languages. You know, if you didn't speak French, they spoke German. Although they didn't - a lot of them were reluctant to let you know they spoke German because it kind of made them feel like they were collaborators, you know. So anyways.

Mark: So in terms of the German activities in the air, as time went on did you find that there were more German planes in the air? Or less, fewer German planes in the air? How would you characterize their air war from your perspective as an antiaircraft person?

Moebius: Well, actually I have to confess that there was, you know, not very much German aircraft that we were bothered with. And most, almost all of it was at night. And then what would happen is, as I said, the night was theirs. I don't know whether they had better flying equipment or not but that was one of the things I remember about the war. You know, like today with the snow on the ground and at night there, for some reason or other there always seemed to be a full moon. You could actually see these planes at night and we would shoot at them. Some of them were flying so low that you could actually see the swastikas painted on the tail. So it was, you know, at night, in winter now I go out, I still, it runs through my mind or sometimes when I'm driving back from my son's house up in Kewaskum at night and it's snowy like it is now and the moon's shining, that all comes back to me how weird that was.

I remember one night we were, we had our position, our gun position and it was alongside a road and all we slept in, whenever we dug our gun emplacement everybody with their buddies would also dig a hole, like a grave. In fact, for two years I lived in holes in the ground when we were, you know, these are not like fox holes. I'm talking about if we'd be someplace for a month or two, you know, you didn't lay on top of the ground. You made like a little home in the ground. So anyways, one night along this road there was a convoy of trucks went by and German planes saw their blackout lights and he strafed the entire column and we heard it, the plane coming, and rushed out and then he started shooting and he had like a 20-millimeter canon on his plane, and I'm not exaggerating but one of them went right in the hole where my friend and I had been sleeping before we heard the plane. So I feel I've been spared for something. [laughs] I don't know what yet. But as I say, it was not too many day time attacks and, of course, the only thing we would be concerned with mostly was fighter planes or planes that were bombing the airport and those would primarily be like the JU-88 which the Germans called a "flying coffin" because if they got hit, they never got out of it. That was like our B-25, attack bomber, if you will, or whatever they called it. And they would come in and go down the runway and drop bombs and we'd get, you know, a bunch of shots at them and that was it.

Mark: So as I look over your record here, I mean you were in or near some of the biggest campaigns of the war in Europe. The Battle of the Bulge. Are there any that stand out in your mind? Or does the Bulge just kind of--

Moebius: Well, I mean, when you look at those battles, those were things that covered areas and the fact that I was in the area warranted those particular battle stars.

Mark: Yeah. But from your perspective--

Moebius: Well, I can remember in, actually I think the Battle of the Bulge was the worst and that was—we were not actually in Bastogne obviously, but we were close enough so that that whole period was very scary and the reason it was is there was all these rumors about the Germans wearing American uniforms and the fact that they were very close. I remember one time we had fixed our guns with hand grenades, preparing for an evacuation and leaving our equipment they were so close. You know, the fact again that you just didn't know where they were. They were all around. And your little diorama there, when I saw that, that sent shivers up my spine 'cause I can just picture myself as one of those guys standing there and, with the snow and the inability to know if friend or foe was around you. That is one time that sticks in my mind. And then also I remember when the conclusion of that came, when the Allied aircraft was finally able to take off because the weather cleared and the constant sorties that flew over us, you know, there was no German planes around.

Mark: Now, when you weren't actually engaged in combat, which is some, a lot of the time, what did you do for — I mean, describe a typical day for me in terms of what sort of duties you would perform, how much spare time you would have, and when you had spare time how did you occupy yourself?

Moebius: Well, you know, actually I remember one time I was sent to Paris with a bunch of trucks to pick up some stoves from an Army depot that we had to take back to where we were billeted, so I had a few days walking around Paris. And actually I went to the Folies-Bergere. Of course, you know, at that time that was, you see worse on TV now, but that was a big--

Mark: At the time though it was--

Moebius: Yeah, at the time. And it was really weird, you know. Here was a war going on and all this glitter and glitz. Then I walked along in the famous areas and I have to confess that the Army pictures had so impressed me that I was afraid to talk to girls, [laughs] which must seem very novel nowadays. But, you know, we did. You'd go down in the area called Place Pigalle where the call girls hung out and we'd engage them in harmless banter but never really would do anything with them. Then I was, there was one time when, and I'm not exactly sure of exactly when this was, but there was one time when things were quiet and they permitted a few of us to go on a 3-day pass to, on a 3-day leave to the

resort area in Grasse and Cannes so I rode a French train down there, and then I spent three days down there. I went through the, what, oh, the castle down there where the little town where our Princess Grace lived.

Mark: Oh, Monaco?

Moebius: Yes, Monaco. I went, of course, you know, we just drove in the courtyard in the sightseeing bus, you couldn't get out because that was another country. Then I stayed in a resort. And this was all Army-run, incidentally. It wasn't really on my own. And then we went to perfume factories and I bought some perfume and some jewelry that I brought back. And then when I got back to my unit then things heated up again and I was, I and the group that I was with, were the only ones that ever got to go down there so that took care of that.

Then the, near the end of the war as — and when I say near the end of the war, we were stationed in Reims and we had been pulled back, you know, now there were no German planes around but still we had to go through the mechanics of the thing. And we were stationed in Reims and I was right across, my gun position, was right across the street almost from the building where the peace was signed. So, you know, we saw all this activity. Eisenhower, you didn't know it was him, obviously. So all this activity, you knew something big was going on but here we were, right across the street from it.

There was something else I wanted to mention about. The other thing was we were in a position, and because there were no more planes, we were pressed into service as like military police, and we stacked our guns — this is near the end of the war — and we guarded an SS camp that had like 10,000 SS troops in it and we would take those guys out on work details and that and I remember every time I'd line them up and, 'cause I could speak a little German, and the first thing we'd ask for would be, "Is there anybody that's a tailor?" And, of course, a whole bunch of them would step forward 'cause they knew it was easy duty but then when you question them you found out that they weren't necessarily really tailors. Anyways, the reason we were so interested in tailors, that was the time when we were taking our long tunics, dress tunics, and cutting them down and making Eisenhower jackets because they weren't issued yet. So these guys would take these long coats, cut it off for us and then, you know, sew like a cummerbund on that you could fasten and we had our ready-made Eisenhower jacket.

Mark: Oh, that's interesting.

Moebius: [laughs] So anyways, then from there, from that type duty, again like I said, we really didn't have any planes to shoot at anymore, then we start all of a sudden one day my particular battalion was sent to Bad Mondorf in Luxembourg. There we went to a beautiful castle which I don't remember whose it was but there we started to gather up the war criminals. Of course, we didn't know it at the time but then when we got there, you know, we obviously recognized — Goering was there and a few of the others — Streicher. They weren't all there. They were gathered in various parts of Europe. But this was one place. And I remember at night had to take pills up to Goering, which, he was on dope and they were weaning him off of dope.

Mark: What was he on, do you know?

Moebius: Pardon?

Mark: What was he on?

Moebius: Actually I don't know but I think it was like morphine or something like that because that was before crack and that type thing. I don't know what these pills were. If they were the, you know, watered down version or what. All I know is when you came there he was waiting for you and shaking and couldn't wait to get them in his mouth.

Mark: Now, I'm curious. I mean this is kind of a curiosity thing, but you spoke German. And did you have the temptation to say something to him?

Moebius: Oh, yes. I did.

Mark: You did?

Moebius: But you know, actually, you weren't supposed to.

Mark: Yeah, I didn't think so.

Moebius: And the other thing I was going to lead up to that, not lead up to that but get into that — after we were at this area where we got a bunch of them together then one day somebody, an officer came up to me, one of my officers, and said, "Marv, I hear you can talk German." I says, "Yeah." But the German I talked was not what he was thinking of. But anyways, that got me in trouble actually. So I was put on, with him and, now I forget who, there was a Colonel Endres. He was the big guy. I don't believe he was on the plane. It was just my officers, the captain and a lieutenant and that. And we flew in this small plane to Nurnberg and there I was told that I had to get, go to this one building which they had picked

out and it was like a huge apartment complex, and I would go to every door, and of course there was people with me, and I told these people that they had to get out instantly, they could take nothing along but their clothing and coal and food. And out they went. And this building then became where the officers were billeted after the war criminals were gathered. And this was in Nurnberg where, as they called it, "Justice de Boyd" was and the Nurnberg prison. Now we were selected, my outfit, the 391st, was selected to be the guard for the war criminals. Then they were taken from all these places and brought to this prison. And that's where I got into trouble then. After I had evacuated all these people then this Colonel Endres who was the head of this thing, he wanted to talk to each one of these war criminals so I was called and the first person I went into was Keitel who was, as they said, Over the [Oberkommando??] "haber der Wehrmacht. [??]" He was the German chief of staff, a general, over everybody. And this Colonel Endres said, "Now you tell him this. Tell him," and I forget the exact words but that he was a prisoner, he was going to get no luxuries or anything like that, that he was, this was bad news for him. So anyways I started out with all these high-faluting words and of course my home German was not equivalent to some of the high legal terms he used so anyways I started to fluster and Keitel looked at me like, you know, what am I saying? He didn't understand. So then this Colonel Endres he just went ballistic and stalked out because he was embarrassed. He wasn't mad necessarily at me but he stalked out, we all stalked out and they went back and did this at some future date with somebody that really knew how to be an interpreter.

Mark: Yeah, it's a tricky business, actually, to interpret.

Moebius: Oh, yes. And I remember one of the things that this Keitel, when I fumbled through, one of the things that Keitel asked for was if he could have some shoe polish. And that was, **[End of Tape 1, Side A, ca. 45 min.]** you know, that I could make out and I told the colonel that he wanted shoe polish for his boots and, well, that really made him mad too. He said, "You know, your military days are over, buddy. You're not going to look like a German general anymore." So anyways, then we were billeted in some local houses and, once again, this building that we were sent to, the common soldiers if you will, was like an apartment building, but it was nothing like the ones that I had emptied for the officers. And I remember, you know, they had to leave all their furniture and the first night we were there we had all this nice, I still remember the bedding was red ticking and, aw, it really looks luxurious. It was a feather bed. But this stuff was just loaded with fleas. Of course, when we found that out, you know, we took all this out and burned it and deloused ourselves but that was common during the war, all the fleas. That's how typhus got started. And then there was one elderly woman that that door was always

closed. And of course we had enough room so that nobody ever bothered that but then we became aware that this woman was still living in there. She was quite elderly. Well, when they found out she was living in there, I had to throw her out which didn't make me too happy. But anyhow, the experience there was — now there we were attached to the Big Red A, I forget what, I don't even remember what that was.

Mark: Oh, the First Infantry Division?

Moebius: Well, actually the First Infantry Division, the Big Red One, was the ones that took over the day that the war trials started so I never saw any of that. But I thought, in my mind, I thought I had seen the interesting part because as a sergeant my duty was every morning to go to the prison and there was a roster of war criminals that were to be interrogated that day and we would take, we would pick one of those, go and get him from the cell, handcuff him to us, walk through an enclosed enclosure, and take him to this Palace of Justice and to the assigned room that he was going to be interrogated in. In this assigned room was a lawyer/officer, and with him was, depending on who it was, there was Russian officer/lawyers, English officer/lawyers, and then there was an interpreter and there was a stenographer, and I would sit there as the guard. What I would try to do is pick the same person because if you did that you would find a sort of a theme, you know, that made some sense rather than bits and pieces of the whole thing. So I would try, I usually tried to take some of the generals like Keitel and Jodl. I also sat in a couple of times with Ribbentrop and also with Dr. Frank who was the gauleiter of Poland, tried to kill himself. Actually, I have to say that many times I thought that the whole thing was kind of unfair.

Mark: In what way?

Moebius: Which sounds un-American. Well, for example to cite the most glaring case, this Dr. Frank from Poland who was responsible, I'm sure, for killing many people, but when they captured him he had like six truckloads of diaries and, you know, everything recorded down to the nth degree and, you know, here they were establishing this big case against him and going through the fundamentals of justice when really, you know, he was guilty from the word "go." I mean, there was no way he was going to get out of this. And the same way with the generals, you know. They would say, this lawyer/officer would say — now I'll play act here — say, "Well, General Keitel, on the 10th of October at 9 o'clock in the morning, 1941, you signed this order authorizing immediate death to partisans. Is that true?" Well, you know, I mean give me a break. I can't remember what I did yesterday and these guys are supposed to remember specific days and

times that they had done some things that maybe they didn't even look at but, you know, they obviously were guilty. I'm not saying they weren't.

Mark: Yeah.

Moebius: So anyways, there was obviously some exciting things that happened there like this Ilse Koch who supposedly made lamp shades out of prisoners, tattoos and that. Well, she got pregnant and they ever found out what GI did that, he'd have been shot. Seriously.

Mark: Pretty sure it was a GI though.

Moebius: Well, yes. We never knew. Obviously, I can't even say there was rumors but it happened some way. And I remember talking with Goering as we walked through the covered arches one time. He asked me what I was in. I remember lying to him and telling him that I was in the paratroopers because I was, you know, that was a word in German I could say with, fallschirmjager, that's paratrooper, you know. That kind of rolled off my tongue nice. And then I said that I had had to get out of that because I was supporting my mother, which that was a true statement. But anyways, then I told him I was in antiaircraft and he was telling me how if he had the chance again, he would reorganized the German antiaircraft. And I forget exactly whether he said he would have made them a separate unit or he would have made them attached to, I think that's what he said, that he would attach them to like infantry companies or tank companies rather than having them separate. But I thought, boy, here's a guy that's going to get hung and he's still reorganizing the army. Well, then there was another fellow that we were supposed to, and you've probably seen pictures of this, there's always a fellow standing in front of the door, American soldier, that looked in the door and was supposed to watch these guys 24 hours a day and yet this one guy, I forget, he was a, I think his name was Ley. He was a labor minister or something like that. He got in a corner with his toilet and stuffed towels in his mouth and hung himself.

Mark: I was going to ask, what were some of the challenges and things to look for when guarding the prisoners. Obviously, suicide would be one of them.

Moebius: Well, that was one of them. You know, if you saw one of those cells and looking through it you could see almost the whole thing except this toilet. And then, of course, the fact that, you're probably aware of the fact that Goering secreted these pills away all during that stay. We would have flash inspections and check through everything. And they had very little in their cells. They were permitted no luxuries of any kind and still they managed to keep this. You know, it really blows your mind. And then

seeing Hess [sp??], you know, and wondering what his story was. Well, of course, no body ever found out.

Mark: Yeah.

Moebius: It was really something. I would think that that was the highlight of my war experience.

Mark: Now, how did you treat the prisoners? I mean, did you treat them with some sort of respect? Or did you, from what you could tell, how did the others treat them?

Moebius: I have to say that I did. Not undue respect but like I said I felt kind of sorry for them because, you know, they had none of the horrible visage if you will, or features that you would picture on the monsters that they supposedly were. They were just people, you know. And like Keitel, he was like, at my 19-, 21-year-old age, he was like a nice grandpa. To me, you know, I just - and I have to say, it sounds un-American but after all these years I can probably say that, I kind of admired the Germans because I guess I am German. Even during the war you know they always seemed to have the best equipment and knew what they were doing and I admired them. One of the reasons I did is when I got to England, I mean, things were not like they were in America. They were, you know, sort of substandard, okay? And then when we got to France, I couldn't believe it. I said, my God, I can understand why the Germans beat these people. They just were so backward in everything. The toilets, for example. And when we got to Germany they had toilets like we had but the French had these holes in the ground and they just seemed so backward. I just blew my mind that, you know, you could - I guess that's kind of the super race feeling coming out or something.

Mark: Well, now, I was going to ask you about your ethnic background. You spoke German. How German was your household in Milwaukee? It could be of many different variety of ethnic background.

Moebius: No. My parents were second generation German. My grandfather, that's how I learned to speak German, my grandfather and grandmother. I was speaking German at eight years old equal to what I was speaking English. That's the only way I could converse with them. He couldn't speak English. I'm a Moebius and I have a Moebius history where one of the Moebius' was a hero in the Franco-Prussian War, and when he came over this was a big deal. It was always written up in the *Milwaukee Journal* especially during like World War I. They ask him comments about what he thought, you know, how the Germans would do and, naturally, he thought they were going to win. So, you know, I guess I came from that

background where I was kind of sympathetic to the Germans over the other countries. Although I wasn't going to be a spy or anything like that.

- Mark: Yeah. Now back in World War I people of German heritage, as you perhaps know, had some problems. People would accuse them of disloyalty and that sort of thing.
- Moebius: That's right.
- Mark: In World War II that doesn't seem to have been a problem with you.
- Moebius: No, because, you know, at that time there was, you know, not much of that ethnic separation like there was during the First World War where people said - although I will say that my mother, I remember this, had a bridge friend, in fact I still remember his name. His name was Dr. Ossendorff [sp??]. He was a German. And he killed himself and he was under investigation for Nazi leanings. And, you know, they had found Nazi paraphernalia, flags and that kind of stuff, in his house. And during the early days of the war I can remember some German things, I forget the name — oh, you know, some of the, like neo-Nazi-type groups like Camp Carl Schurz--
- Mark: Yeah, there was German-American.
- Moebius: Camp Carl Schurtz was around, you know, a lot of people went to that. But then when things really got sticky after Germany entered the war that kind of died out. I don't think there was any of that that I remember.
- Mark: Yeah. No, there was the German-American Bund that was active in Milwaukee. You recall this in some way? Now, you were just a young guy, of course.
- Moebius: Oh, sure, sure. In fact, you know, I followed the war quite closely. In 1939 when the Germans were in it I guess at that point I was kind of on their side.
- Mark: So, in your household, as a youth, did Nazism, did that sort of create debates among family members and that sort of thing?
- Moebius: No, no, no there was none of that. In fact, I think I probably was more interested in the war than my dad was. As a matter of fact, you know, that my grandpa had passed away at that time and it was just my mother and father and they had no involvement or feelings about it at all. It was just a war. In fact, I tried to, I didn't mention this but after the war started — now, you know, Japs the bomb — I tried to enlist in the Air Force with a

friend of mine because I wanted to be a pilot. At that time there were so many people doing that — I knew I was going to be in the first bunch of 19-year-olds that was drafted — at that time they closed the Air Force enlistment. So then you know I had to wait for the draft. Then right after I was drafted then they reopened the Air Force and some of my friends went into that, which I'd have rather been in. So, incidentally, just after this, while we were guarding these German prisoners there was a point system you're probably aware of from talking with other people.

Mark: Right.

Moebius: And I forget how many points I had but I think I had like 94 or something like that and they were sending people home that had like 30 or 25, so we were all worked up about that. So the day that we said we were going home was, as I said, about the time when the actual war trials were going to start and that, you know, was, well, I suppose I would have liked to stay in retrospect, but at that time I couldn't wait to go home.

Mark: Yeah.

Moebius: And we went to LeHavre and I had one ambition after the war and that was to be, they were taking, in order to get the people home as quickly as possible they were taking people and putting them on Navy ships to expedite the return and I said, boy, that's one thing I'd like to do is go back on a Navy ship. Well, I got my wish. I was put aboard the ship that was the *USS Portland* and that was a cruiser and we got out of LeHavre and encountered what the captain later in New York told the newspapers was the worst storm he had seen on the Atlantic in 28 years. And on that ship, it almost sunk, we encountered this tremendous storm and an aircraft carrier took off with us — their flight deck was blown back and they went back to LeHavre but we kept going — and this ship listed at one point like 47 degrees and we were told later when it was calmer that normally at 45 degrees it's a question of whether it will keep going or not. And I remember when the storm was at its height the ship was tossing around and there was two hangers on this cruiser that had, during the war, housed sea planes. They had taken those out and put bunks in it and they had from floor to ceiling stacked with bunks and during one of the waves of the storm a wave knocked those doors in and in order to save the fellas that were in there, the captain turned the ship in... **[ca. 14 second gap]**

Moebius: Then bent after it hit this wave and it was really the worst, that was worse than anything I had seen in the war — the bombings or shootings I was in. Being in this ship, in the bowels of it and then at one point the loudspeaker said, "Seamen, man your watertight doors." And we said, what's that? And then the sailors told us, of course maybe they were trying to frighten

us although they were frightened, too — they said that’s what we do just before the ship sinks so that compartments will not flood if they break apart. And we were in this storm and when it finally abated, in order to get all these fellas that were in the hangers — there were three people killed — in order to get these fellas who were in the hanger that were wounded, that weren’t dead, we went to the Azores and landed there and I was so scared that I almost jumped ship except that my Army training held through and I didn’t. But they took these fellas off and flew them back and then we had an uneventful trip back to the States where, I say, we saw in the paper — in fact, I still have the clipping — it says “Two GIs Killed, Fifty-two Hurt on Gale Torn Cruiser” and the captain said worst storm in 28 years. That ship was then taken from, after it was unloaded, it was taken to the shipyard and it was cut up for scrap.

Mark: So, the war’s over and you’re back home.

Moebius: I’m back home.

Mark: And it’s time to get on with the rest of your life now.

Moebius: Right.

Mark: So, I suppose I should start by asking what your priorities were and what you wanted to do. And then, how did you go about pursuing them?

Moebius: Can you hang on just a second?

Mark: Sure.

Moebius: Okay. It’s a good thing we’re coming to an end. My wife is saying it’s pretty darn near close to time. Anyways, my priorities when I got home was obviously I was going to take advantage of the GI Bill. And that’s what I did. Except I was so reluctant to leave home I went to the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. And, of course, that was, you know, a short, there was, I forget how it was. Two years or something like that. So that’s what I did. And then it came time to move to Madison and in the meantime I had gotten married so I said, “Who needs this stuff?” So I quit and went to work as a salesperson for Beechnut Baby Food Company. And then from there I went on in a sales career but there was a time, when my son started college I said, “Hey, if I start back now, I’ll finish with him.” So in 1970 I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and went on to take some graduate work. The urge was gone so I quit about half way through.

- Mark: Now, when you went back to school, were you still eligible for GI Bill benefits? Or did you pay for that on your own?
- Moebius: No, I got sustenance for months and also, you know, my books and tuition were paid for.
- Mark: That's interesting. Now, just after the war--
- Moebius: And I lived at home.
- Mark: Yeah. Just after the war, when you went to school, did the GI Bill cover most of your expenses?
- Moebius: Yes, it did. It, you know, at that time, I forget what I got per month but, you know, it was not enough to live on but I was living at home and there was enough for me. And the fact that they paid all the schooling and the books. And later on, I will say and maybe you're not interested in this, the rest of my college was paid by the State of Wisconsin. They paid my tuition and they paid my books.
- Mark: By the Veterans Affairs department here?
- Moebius: Right, right. I had to apply every year. Of course I was too late to get, you know, any subsistence but that was, I have to say, thousands of dollars.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Moebius: And that was the only, you know, we never got a bonus so that was my way of, well, not my way, I wasn't getting even, but it was a great help.
- Mark: Now, do you think you would have gone on to school had it not been for your military service?
- Moebius: Uh, I really can't answer that. I think probably no. I probably would not have gone to school because at that time it was not as big a thing as it is now.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Moebius: You know. And at that time I was like 23, you know, time to get on with your life.
- Mark: Yeah. I've got a couple more questions here. I'll try to make them as quickly as I can. In terms of finding work after the war, one of the big problems veterans sometimes face is that the job market is glutted and

there's a lot of guys looking for jobs and not that many jobs. When you got your sales job was that something prized? Did you have trouble getting that?

Moebius: No.

Mark: Or did you just sort of go down and apply and got it?

Moebius: I went down and applied and got it. Oh, I also, while I was going to school I worked part-time at a company that's called Schuster's, which, you know, they're no longer in business. It's like they later became Gimbels and later became something else. I worked in the shoe department there part-time and then after I quit school until I found a job I was working full-time and I was only with that baby food company for like a year and it was an ad I answered in the paper. And then from that I answered another ad which was with Campbells' Soup Company that I got as the result of being in the grocery field with the baby food and that was a step up. And then I, you know, just kind of went from there.

Mark: I've got one last thing I want to cover and that involves veteran's organizations and that sort of thing. Did you ever join any of the big groups like the VFW or the Legion? Or did you join any smaller groups?

Moebius: I was an American Legion member for 15, 20 years.

Mark: When did you first join?

Moebius: Uh, well, actually I probably did not join 'til I was about 30ish or so and then a lot of my friends, we were into a dancing mode and the Legion club in Milwaukee here had weekend dance stands and that's how I got into that really. It was not because of any political action-type thing.

Mark: And you stayed active for how long? Or you stayed a member for how long? I was going to ask how active you were.

Moebius: I did that until, oh, about 23 years ago, so I was an active member maybe like, what, 15 years or so. I think I quit when I was transferred to Des Moines, Iowa for four years and then I never went back again.

Mark: Have you been to any reunions of your unit?

Moebius: We had two reunions. The one I didn't get to and the other one I got to in Milwaukee here and it was nice to see that we were going to have one again and then we, I sent my check in, it was going to be in Michigan, and

then I got my check back and they said there was not enough interest so it was cancelled. So we did get two of them and that was it.

Mark: Those are all the questions I had. Is there anything you'd like to add or anything?

Moebius: No. Just I'll probably think of a million things after I leave you.

Mark: Oh, I always do too. That's the way it is.

Moebius: In fact, I'm looking at one thing here. Just wanted to mention when we were in Nurnberg there we designed our own lapel insignia, which I still have, which was a big shield with the top part blue and the bottom part was red with a Nazi eagle smashed and then the red, which was supposedly depicting Germany in flames, was the scales of justice. And above that was a key, and I don't know what that meant, but we had a German company make those for us and we wore those until we came back.

Mark: Huh, that's interesting. You shouldn't throw that away.

Moebius: I won't.

Mark: Okay. Well, I thank you for taking some time out of your busy schedule.

Moebius: Okay.

Mark: To talk to me today. I appreciate it.

Moebius: I hope I didn't bore you too much.

Mark: Oh, no, not at all. It was very interesting actually.

Moebius: Okay.

[End of Interview]