

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Joseph Marek

Assistant Machine Gunner, 537<sup>th</sup> Panzergrenadier Division, German Army, World War II  
Explosives Instructor, Polish Army, World War II  
Tank Driver, 120<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion, United States Army, Korean War

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**Marek, Joseph** (1925–). Oral History Interview, 2018.

Approximate length: 2 hours 33 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Summary:**

In this oral history Joseph Marek of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, talks about his experiences growing up on his family's farm in southwest Poland, the German invasion at the onset of World War II, his conscription and service in the German Army in France during the war, his service with the Polish Army in England towards the end of the war, and his service with the United States Army during the Korean War.

Marek's early life was spent in a small farming village in southwest Poland about nine miles from the German border. There were few telephones and the schools were poorly supplied. He recalls that people were concerned about Adolf Hitler and possible invasion after Kristallnacht in 1938. He remembers the Germans invading in September 1939 with artillery and tanks. Their farm was in between the invading Germans and defending Polish Army on the second day of the invasion. He remembers being slapped on the third day of the occupation by a German soldier because he did not make enough room for him on the sidewalk. The occupying Germans took away everyone's radios and banned the use of Polish in church.

Marek finished only eight grades in school because of the start of the war. Instead of high school he worked on the farm and then the railroad until 1942 where he witnessed cattle wagons of Jewish people going through a train station he was working at near Auschwitz. Near the end of 1942 he was sent to a labor camp in Germany and when he was eighteen he was conscripted into the German Army.

His training and assignment in the German Army took place in France, first near Bordeaux, and then in Normandy after the Allied invasion, spending time in Calais, and Emden, Germany, on the border with the Netherlands. He served in the 537<sup>th</sup> Panzergrenadier Division. His main job was to change the bore on a heavy machine gun. His unit was never engaged in combat. He describes his daily work in the German Army as a being part of assemblies, marches, building beachhead obstacles, and while in Emden, watching allied bombers fly in from the North Sea and head south to bomb Germany, every once in a while dropping their remaining bombs on Emden while heading back out to sea. Marek remarks that they would occasionally get strafed by English spitfire planes, that there was little to do to entertain oneself and that the discipline was very harsh.

His first indication that something was happening on D-Day was the air raid sirens, and then receiving confirmation from his company commander. They were put on a train transport to Normandy but its engines were strafed and destroyed. They requisitioned bicycles from a nearby village to get closer to the front. He arrived at Normandy about two weeks after the invasion and his unit was part of the reserve forces. When the allies would make a push, they would retreat.

Marek's machine gun crew consisted of himself, another Pole and a German. He describes most soldiers in his unit being for Hitler, but the German on his crew was not. He recalls that the decision to give himself up was not planned. He and his crew purposely lagged behind on one of their unit's hasty retreats and snuck into a barn, bribing the French owner of the farm to let them stay until the

Americans arrived. They were captured by the American forces shortly thereafter. He was separated with other Polish soldiers and sent to Cherbourg, France.

After being transported to England he joined the Polish Army as an explosives instructor in Scotland until the end of the war. Marek stayed in England for about four years until he received his visa for the United States. He arrived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Thanksgiving Day 1949.

Marek received a draft notice for the United States Army in August 1950. He trained at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, and Camp Polk, Louisiana, for about six months to be a driver on Sherman tanks. He arrived at Inchon, Korea, in April 1951 as part of the 120<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion, 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He spent most of his time located on the Han River, about thirty miles east of Seoul along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

He was on the frontline for nine months conducting probing raids into the no man's land. Several incidents that have stuck with him are his tank commander getting killed after their tank became stuck in the mud, the worry of not getting proper supplies, the anxiety at night and flipping his tank over while driving in the snow. Marek describes how his tank unit and the infantry would respond to a Chinese attack, and his opinions of the Turkish and South Korean divisions that they served alongside.

He returned to Milwaukee in August of 1952 and found employment in the printing business as a printer and pressman. He also describes his visits back to home to communist Poland. Marek was a member of the American Legion and Polish Combatant Association. He attended 45<sup>th</sup> battalion reunions until 2001.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Joseph Marek was born on March 19, 1925, in southwestern Poland. He was conscripted into the 537<sup>th</sup> Panzergrenadier Division in the German Army during World War II. He was captured by American forces near Cherbourg, France, and sent to England where he joined the Polish Army until the end of the war. He arrived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in November of 1949. Marek was drafted into the United States Army in August 1950 and served with the 120<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion, 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea during the Korean War.

**Archivist's Notes:**

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript, if possible.

Interviewed by Adam Novey, 2018.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2019.

Audit check and abstract written by Paul Moriarity, 2020.

**Interview Transcript:**

**[Beginning of OH1238.Marek\_file1\_access.mp3]**

Novey: All right, well, today is November 20, 2018. This is an interview with Joseph Marek who served with the German and Polish armies during World War II and the engineers of the 45<sup>th</sup> Thunderbird division in the Korean War. This interview is being conducted at the Elizabeth residence in Bayside, Wisconsin. The interview is Adam Novey. This interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. All right. So where and when were you born?

Marek: I was born in southwest Poland near Czech and German border. And our area, western Poland, was occupied by Germany for 150 years until we got our independence in 1918, the Armistice Day at the end of First World War. And whoever was born there, when the Germany united Poland in 1939, only people who were born in this western Poland, they were declared as a second-class German citizens. We were not able to get government work, but be to drafted to the army. And from this area there were 135,000 Poles were go to the German army. Most of the time most of it was in army. Very few were in the Navy and also in the Air Force.

Novey: Okay, well, go back a little bit. So describe what it was like growing—having—this was just—you were born, let's see, you were born in 1925?

Marek: 1925, yes.

Novey: Okay, what day? Month and day?

Marek: That's March 19, 1925.

Novey: Okay, so you were born just a few years after the end of World War I? So describe what it was like growing up in 1920s and '30s Poland.

Marek: Well, I was born in the small farm, and we had no running water, no electricity. To school there were no buses. We walked to—first four grades I went to the local school, maybe half a mile away, but then from fifth through eighth I went to a better school in the city which was about two miles walk daily, and no buses, no any other transportation, so. And in school at my first few years, like, there were no textbooks. The only textbook was with the teacher. And sometimes they would let you take that textbook home, but very seldom because there was forty children in the class, so, you know, go around, around, it took a long time to get this. And first two years we had no paper. We wrote on like a slate.

Then, because in our village there were the two households who have a—who had a telephone. And if you needed help, if they were gracious to—enough to let you use the phone, fine. If not then you walked to city to get the doctor or whoever you need. One of the telephone owners was a landowners in our village, and the other one was a Jewish family who had a flour mill.

**[00:05:01]**

And incidentally they had two boys. One of them was my age. One was one year older, and we were best friends. They, during the war, the parents perished. One of the sons, the younger son, I found him in England after war. Somehow he was alive.

What else? In school I finished only eight grades because when you going to—started to go to high school World War broke out, and of course our schools were closed. And then from then on there was some schools open, but for German boys. Whoever were declared before the war in the census as a German, they had priority. And I just did work first with my family on their little farm, and then I work on the railroad until 1942. And then I was sent to Germany to due to a armistice, like a labor camp. And from then, that was in end of 1942. And then in—once when I got eighteen year old, graduated, got drafted, draft notice, and I was lucky to have spent the training and all my duty service in France, Northern France. And then when—of course in 1944 when the invasion came, so we were sent to Normandy, but by that time when we got there the initial front was broken. German army was retreating, and we—my unit we were never—we weren't engaged in any combat. We just [??] kept going back.

One day myself and one Polish man and one German, we were crossing a farmer's yard. There was a pig sty. We got into the pig sty, hidden. Stayed there for four years—for four days, I mean four hours, and when they heard the different sound of different noises we got out with our hands up. We were prisoners of war by the American unit, American army. The ally command, they knew. They were aware of the Polish man in army, so right away I got separated from the German. And stayed there. We stayed in Cherbourg for two weeks waiting for transport to England. And once getting to England I signed, volunteered for Polish army

Novey: Okay. Well, go back a little bit.

Marek: Oh, okay.

Novey: And try to fill in a couple of the details. So you said you were working on the railroad.

Marek: Yes.

Novey: And during the—well first, let's go back, go back a little bit more.

Marek: Occupation, yeah.

Novey: What did your family think when you heard that—what had you heard about Germany becoming rearmed and starting to occupy other countries?

Marek: We were very much aware of it.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Very much aware. We almost expected invasion in early summer of 1939, but we signed a pact with France and Ger—France and England that they would help us, but there was not much help.

[00:10:11]

Novey: Okay, so what was the first thing you heard of Hitler?

Marek: Oh yeah. Oh, it was 1935, '36, oh yes, oh yes. The—also we were aware of the, after in 1937 the Crystal Night, the beating up of Jewish people. So we were aware of this, yeah, yeah.

Novey: So did the Kristall Nacht involve Poland in any way?

Marek: No, no, that was in Germany. The was—stick to Germany, and they—and there's the national Nazi party. They were conducting this beating and arrests. Not all people were—Germans were—I mean, German Jews were arrested that day.

Novey: So what did your—you said you were good friends with a Jewish family.

Marek: Oh yes.

Novey: Were they even more concerned than your family, or was everybody worried?

Marek: They were not saying anything about the. But on the first day—actually on the first day of the invasion on the September 1, that was Friday, by noon I went by the mill, flour mill, they were gone. They sort of disappeared like I don't know where. They probably went to—all people went east away from Germany towards Russia. And what would be next?

Novey: Okay, what was the first you heard of the invasion of Poland? What was your first indication that you were being invaded?

Marek: Oh, the artillery shots. We were only nine miles from the German border, and they crossed the Polish [inaudible] border at 5:00 in the morning, and they got to—close to our town on the very first day. Then on the second day of—that was Saturday, second day of war, Poles were on the one side, Germans on the other, like a two, two small hills. And we were—our farm was in the center. So we were in no man's land for six hours being bombarded and shot at from seven o'clock in the morning till two in the afternoon. Then the Germans moved through, the Poles falls back, and Germans moves [inaudible]. Second day of September, two o'clock we were already under German occupation.

Novey: Okay, so what did you do when this big bombardment was going on?

Marek: Well, we were praying. We were praying. We were, like, in the kitchen we were put down, and we sat under the table, this was some refuge. But, and my mom and next door lady, we had our four—three—two children and then next door maybe four, the

men were gone. My dad was commanded—commandeered to take evacuation train east towards Krakow. Of course he was a train master for the railroad. So, but he only got to, uh, maybe across to Krakow. On the third day he was—his train was bombarded, engineer was shot out. So and then he think of going east until the Germans—the—on the fourteenth of September Russia invaded us from the other side, from east.

[00:15:13]

So he spent three months in Vovna, that's a city right now in Ukraine. And we didn't know his whereabouts for three months until he showed up at home, safe and sound.

Novey: So what was the German policy as they took occupation? Did they search the houses? Did they—

Marek: Oh yes. And they, like, on the second—third day, that was Sunday, I walked to our little town, and I walk on the sidewalk, and coming back from [inaudible] toward me were two German soldiers were with a dog. And I didn't make enough room for them, so they slapped me. And the dog, the dog almost took a bite of my leg. But that was it. And right away anybody who had a radio had to give it up to the local police. If not you were subject to death, shooting.

So we not—so we would not hear any propaganda from the West, yeah.

Novey: Okay, did your family have a radio?

Marek: Yes, we had, we had radio. At that time, radio—our radio, since we had no electricity, you use two volt wet battery and 120 volt dry battery. But it didn't last too long. You had—you use this, the radio, very sparingly. [inaudible] occasions, but what—because the day of the invasion the radio from Warsaw was giving programs until there was a noise in the—they were from bombarded, and no more. We couldn't get—didn't hear no more of this radio station.

Novey: So was Poland—did you or your family expect Russian invasion from the other side?

Marek: No, no, we did not. We don't. But we were always enemy, never had a good relationship. See, Russia, in the beginning I was saying about the Poland not being independent. 1772 three neighbors of Poland, Russia on the east, Austria-Hungarian Empire on the south, and Germany on the west, they divided Poland in three, three different pieces. And of course on the German and the Russia occupation, the worst, not on behavior, but treatment. The Austria-Hungarians were way under. We had relatively free, within the Polish schools for instance there was Polish—in Krakow, Polish university, Jagiellonian. And so we were not too bad off. But still there was occupation.

Novey: So did your father fight in World War I?

Marek: No.

Novey: No.

Marek: No, he was uh—he started working on the railroad, and no. My—I had three uncles. Three of them—both—all three of them were killed in the First World War.

Novey: What country were they fighting for?

Marek: Austria, Austria-Hungaria [*sic*], yeah, yeah.

**[00:20:00]**

One was killed in the Russian. Eastern Poland was something, so the other one was somewhere in Balkan, and the third one goes back to [inaudible], to our home.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: So what was your first impression of the German army coming in?

Marek: Were afraid.

Novey: What was your—

Marek: Very, very afraid.

Novey: Like, and what did—what sort of force did they come in with? Were they coming in with tanks? Were they coming in with horse-drawn—

Marek: Mostly tanks. They had this what they called Blitzkrieg, fast-moving. First tanks, you know, many times—the—but they call them infantry, yeah. And they were moving very, very, very fast. And I don't know what. The—like, I was only fourteen and a half years old, so like I was afraid. I was afraid. Mom, because all our family, my dad didn't have a job, so, you know, it was kind of a hardship.

Novey: So how did life change from before the occupation to after the occupation? And I know you said that your schools were shut down, but what else changed?

Marek: Well, in churches for instance, we're not supposed—you're not supposed to sign—to sing in Polish. So the only people, like my mom, my aunt, my dad, they knew German when they were born under occupation, so that was not a hardship for them, but that was one thing with the church's services. And to get by, away from this, the—our organist, wrote, mimeographed some songs in Latin so not to use German.

Novey: So you began working in the railroad. Were you working with your father?

Marek: No, no, [inaudible]. See, that was another thing. The German Labor Office made a list how many people could say, for instance, our little farm, could be on the farm. So my two older sisters, they were—one of them was supposed to go to Germany to work, and

instead of her I fake my birthday, and with the help of another man we also bribed the German foreman [inaudible] at work with the eggs, with the butter, and I was sixteen only when my work was grownup men working on the tracks. We were changing from manual shifting in the stations to electric. And one of the cities, in 1942, my last days of work were in Brzezinka [??] which was city next to Auschwitz. We see all the Jewish train passing through our station, that station. When the train stopped to, the steam engine, get more coal and the water right away the German soldiers jumped up from the cars and would shepherd dogs, stay, so nobody could get out of wagons.

[00:25:23]

And one good thing, strange thing, German—no, the—Dani, I mean from Holland—from Belgium, the Jewish people, they were transferred on the Pullman carts, like [inaudible] from Austria, from Czech, they were in the regular cattle wagons.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah, yeah, and for reasons I didn't know there was such a difference in the transport. And this, Auschwitz, was from the—from our—our town maybe ten, twelve miles. 1942 we did not exactly knew what was going on, even local people. We knew that it was some—that there were transport going, but what happened then, it was not known.

Novey: Okay, so how did you know that there were Jews on these trains?

Marek: [inaudible] they had Jewish, no, the five-star, and besides, this was done, yeah. No, no, yeah, because there were no other—no other train would go with, only people.

Novey: So were you working under German supervision on the railroad?

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: Or was it under—using the Polish companies that had done this in the past?

Marek: No, that was German company.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: That was German company. It was a company from Berlin, and they had, like, I suppose, some subcontract, subcontracts with the railroads to change the—modify the stations. And we, for instance, to cut the rail, rental machines, hand—it took, well, twenty minutes to cut the—but by two men with saw, with saw.

Novey: So were you able to live at home while you were doing this?

Marek: Oh yes, yes, yeah. I was coming home every night. There were times I come say, middle of the night, four o'clock I have to go get up and go on the train again or to work again.

Novey: Were you lucky to be able to go home, or did other people have to stay at the site you were working?

Marek: No, no, we all were going home, all going home, yeah. And we—this was like a normal eight-hour, eight- ten-hour work but with special times when the switch area, one be taken out and put new one, put in within say, hour and a half or two hours, you have to work until work was done.

Novey: Okay. So let's see. Did you—how were the Germans treating you?

Marek: They were fine. They were okay. Yeah, well, I still—the foreman, I was still bringing him eggs and butter and cheese, so, of course he paid for it, but so I got a little bit of treatment.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah, yeah, but it was because I was, as I say, I was only sixteen, seventeen years old in here with a group of grown men, and it was hard work.

Novey: So when you turned eighteen you said it was hard work, were you glad to be drafted, or what were your thoughts?

Marek: Well, I'm—at that time I—the only thing I was afraid of, not to get wounded in the war. And my mom went with me to city in Czech Republic, [inaudible], all the way there when they—when I had to report in that city, and there from then we—also we got—we were transported to France with a cattle wagon, not the passenger cars.

**[00:30:27]**

Yeah, yeah.

Novey: How was that ride?

Marek: It was very bad. It was cramped. I had claustrophobia when we get too close together, yeah, especially at night, the dark. There were like benches, or tables. You had to crawl under a bench and sleep, and of course there was noise, yeah.

Novey: So did you stay in the cars the whole trip, or did they let you—

Marek: All the trip, all the way, all the way to some small city on the English Channel about, I would say, fifty miles west of Calais.

Novey: So when did they first make you register for the draft?

Marek: There were none. There were no drafts. The only thing was—were the census taken in—that was in November 1939 three months after you—the—into invasion. That's why when they were changing, making this, like I said, second-class citizens. And there were

no—if you did not report, then your family will get thrown out of a home, put into labor, sent to Germany to work.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: That was the penalty, yeah.

Novey: Okay, So how did you receive your draft notice?

Marek: Well, there was one of—through mail. You get it through mail, yeah, yeah. And when I got this letter I went to the foreman at—where I was working. I said maybe because I work to—for transportation that I will get a release, but no. He said, “Oh, you’re lucky so—that you were drafted,” and it’s other now [??]. So.

Novey: Okay. So were you going—you were loaded on trains to go over to France. Were you mostly in these cars with other Polish men?

Marek: No, no, see, we were sort of spread out to maybe four or five in a company. We never had, like, a separate unit, no, no, no. None of that. So we mixed up with Germans. So we—and yeah. And most of the time we were within the training, battle training we also did do some work on the beaches for, I guess, the invasion, yeah. Putting I-beams directly towards the sea, and the end of the I-beams there were like bombs. If some metal object came in towards you they would explode, I guess. Yeah.

Novey: So similar to a sea mine except above the water.

Marek: Right, right, and there were some pretty large fields. Again, they put the poles maybe, oh, like telephone poles here.

**[00:35:03]**

And they were connected with wires. On each pole also there was a bucket of explosion. If—and [inaudible] attached to the phone, I mean, the wire they have an explosion, so it was, yeah.

Novey: Okay, was this back behind the beaches then?

Marek: Yeah, that was in the land, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Novey: So what sort of training were you receiving?

Marek: Training?

Novey: Training, tell me a little bit about how you were trained after you were inducted into the army.

Marek: Most of it was with marching, a lot of marching. And I had—I was assigned to heavy machine gun. We are training how to change the bore, like, if you—German machine

guns, they work with fire 3,600 rounds a minute. So every small burst the bore get hot, and we had about, in our unit with the—in our group, everybody carried two or three extra bores. You have to change them. And, yeah I got so adept to it that I beat the young German boys as far as fast as, like do some two, three seconds to change it. And so—and while on the way from our—where we had stationed, we have transported towards Normandy in '44. Also our train was strafed, and the engineer, machinist, they were killed. They were French men.

Novey: Okay, so were you stationed in a big camp or?

Marek: No, no, no, we were on the farm. We had—we spread out in a village, and by myself, one of our heavy machine gun group was in, like, a barn. We were in barracks, small barracks for a while. That was in Southern France, [inaudible], but that was in way, way before the invasion. We were there though only maybe, oh, like three or four months we were back to Northern France.

Novey: So you came to—you first, when the trains brought you from Poland they first brought you up to Normandy.

Marek: No, no, first we went to near Bordeaux, Bordeaux region. And so from there to Southern France, and from Southern France to Calais, English Channel. And yeah.

Novey: Okay. So how did it feel to go from being an occupied person in Poland to being an occupier in France?

Marek: It was real tough. It was tough. I met some Polish people nearby in the last place where we stayed. They were from First World War living in France. It was hard. And what else can you do?

Novey: Yeah, how did your family feel about you joining the army—or being drafted?

Marek: My mom was terrified, and she, well—but otherwise it was just life. You see, you always know—think about I, myself, it was all he neighbors, boys, yeah, so.

**[00:40:05]**

Novey: So what were your instructors like during your training?

Marek: At the beginning it was pretty hard with the language. I took German in the grade school, but mostly that was my—like, you could not make up fluent speech, just mostly grammar, basic grammar. And once you got among Germans anyway it was like each day you grasp more and more the language, and writing home you know not to open my own, even though we write in Polish, I had to leave—deposit the—unsealed envelope [inaudible] commander's office, and they would check it out. And if I would—later on I would write in German, they were [inaudible] straight sent home, yeah, yeah.

Novey: Were you allowed to receive mail from your family?

Marek: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, my parents and, of course, my two sisters stayed home all the time, and my also younger brother who was only six years older—younger than I am. So in [inaudible] eight years old.

Novey: Okay. So when—probably about, you know, a month or two before the allied invasion where there any rumors going around about what was going on?

Marek: Oh yes, oh yes. Actually we were given a furlough. I got furlough in middle of April 1944. And to this day I could not comprehend how because of the heavy bombing in Germany. We had—our train was going through with no—hardly any interruptions. And that was a long ways from France to Poland. Yeah. Yeah, five day furlough, yeah.

Novey: So you mentioned bombing, was there—were you getting bombed in France before the invasion?

Marek: Oh yeah, well, when I was working in the [inaudible] in Emden, that's a city next to Holland on the coast, the—our allied bombers from England, they flew over North Sea until, well, they were going to bomb Germany. Then they switch, direct south, because on the sea [inaudible]. So once they reached land, because they were shattered, and every night bombs will be over our heads, and sometimes they flew further south with the bombs, and many times on the way back for some reason, they some bombs left or they hit our Emden, the city. Yeah.

Novey: Okay. So what news were you hearing about the Rus—the war in Russia?

Marek: Well, we knew anyway—well, we never like Russians. And there was a bigger shock that they would invade our country, but then when the Germany invited Russia in 1941, then they would change the, well, let's defeat the Russia.

**[00:45:07]**

But still, there was a huge difference between even the Germans amongst our—there were—the atrocities, different army, but nowhere near as the Russians. When, of course I wasn't there in 1945, '44 yet, when the Russian army moved, pushed the German out back and win the war on our village, for instance, they would rape the women who were—when they could. My sisters, they were not—they stayed in the barn during the day—not to be seen on the outside, to be attacked.

Novey: Okay. So tell me about—so you went to France in 1943.

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: Tell me about your first winter there.

Marek: Was mild, first winter in—near Bordeaux, very—nice countryside, nice. Everything else was okay. Well, the only problem was you had only one pair of boots you had to wear every day. You—wet day you put them back on wet. There were—we had no socks, but

I could square a piece of material. You wrap your leg, and you have to know how to do it. When you walked marches, you don't do it properly you got blisters on feet.

Novey: Okay. So would you say you were well-prepared for the winter or?

Marek: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, we were—we had no problems with the winter as far as our personal clothing or places to sleep. No, there were no problems there.

Novey: What about getting towards 1944 Germany had had quite a—they were starting to feel the pressure of the bombing on their industry. How were you—

Marek: We were hoping for invasion. We were hoping for an end of war. In 19—no, it was in 1944, oh, '42 yet, from our area in near Calais, Germany started sending the V-1 bombs over to England. And those were very simple engines. What you would now—the only engines in the aircraft are—no, no, not propeller was the other one.

Novey: Oh, the rocket or a jet?

Marek: Jet, very cruel jet engines, and the launching was like on the forty-five degree ramp and with a railroad like in the middle. So the plane—it was like plane. There was a—where there was short rings, and where the engine started, run off up, and get up. And that was controlled inside already before that so that they flew one direction to London.

**[00:50:03]**

And I even experienced in '44 without knowing it in the Polish Army, on to—once to visit my uncle in London the engine—as long as you hear the engine roar you're fine. When they cut off they knew the plane would dive, and there would be explosion. That was the first one. The V-2, Wernher von Braun, he was right in the US working on the rocket. That was a straight rocket. It was straight up. [inaudible] made—it just dove down by itself by gravity. And this one, it was so fast you hear the whistle of a falling down after explosion.

Novey: Okay. So you mentioned that everybody was hoping for—hoping that the invasion would come and the end of the war would come. Did that apply to the Germans within your unit as well?

Marek: Most Germans, the young ones, young Germans, they were absolutely for Hitler. The one—there were a few, one who stayed with us, with our three men who stayed who were hid in the pig sty, he was German. He was a little older than I am—I was, about thirty-some years old, and he was against German, against Hitler, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So let's see. So describe a typical day in the German army, you know, in early 1944, just a typical day of what you would do.

Marek: We would assemble because we're not, like our company, we were not together in one unit, one building. We are separate. When you get assembled you want one spot, and

then it was instructions, marches. Like if the—our commander didn't like what we were doing he'd put a gas mask on, march and sing. That was hard. That was hard, like hell.

Novey: How often did you experience that?

Marek: Oh, quite often, quite often. One time he came to our area where we were in the barn. We were supposed to be up. We were still asleep. So we had—we marched for four hours for that as punishment, yeah. The German discipline was very tough, very hard.

Novey: So how did you and the other—the German soldiers entertain yourselves?

Marek: Not much. Once in a while we went to a village, but since they were near—we knew that there were French underground people, for safety we stayed in our area.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: So how much of a risk was there with the French underground?

Marek: They were—most of what they did, sabotaging transportation. Like train derailments, some of them even took out the bridges. So yeah, but to—in my personal—I had nothing, no experiences with any. Yeah, yeah.

Novey: Okay.

**[00:55:00]**

So in just the weeks before D-Day were there any—were the Germans expecting an invasion?

Marek: No, no. Actually they were expecting closer to more east, closer to Calais which—where the channel was narrower. They didn't expect that. But that's—excuse me, from—for [inaudible] to Cherbourg that's quite—almost like open sea already to attempt it. So it's quite a long, longer trip across. But it we did not—while we were on this—on the day of invasion there were sirens blowing, and over the radio the invasion was—

Novey: Okay, so sirens blowing were probably air raid sirens?

Marek: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and the only thing, the only planes we—that would strafe us was a fighter planes for the English Spitfires. Whatever they saw anything moving they were shot at.

Novey: So even before D-Day were you being strafed periodically?

Marek: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

Novey: So how would you deal with that?

Marek: Well, you had to. We weren't supposed to—I was supposed to, with my heavy machine gun, I was supposed to have a sight to shoot at those planes. But I never did.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: But my company commander, he asked me after one raid how many fighters I fired on—I said, well, a whole, like a whole bucket, but not a single one. Just to—just pray that I won't get hit. It's a very scary—the sound of bullets, sound of the—where will they hit? Where they fly? It's scary.

Novey: So how would you feel when some of your—the Germans in your unit got hit? I mean, you're living pretty closely with them.

Marek: Oh yeah.

Novey: How did you feel?

Marek: In my company we didn't have any casualties.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: The only casualty was on the train going to Normandy. But—and, well, you just accept it, not like now here you have counselors and the—there was nothing. Even later on in Korea when my tanker man was killed I just came in the afternoon. That was [inaudible] about nine o'clock in the morning we were—came to our tent, and I was given the rest of the day off, and that's it. The next day back to normal.

Novey: So your first indication of D-Day was the air raid sirens.

Marek: Air raids and the commander, our company commander, got the message by phone, yeah, yeah. And so we right there on the high alert.

Novey: Okay. So were you being bombed that morning?

Marek: No, no, no, we were quite a ways from it, from the—from Normandy. I would say 100 miles, 120 miles east.

Novey: So as soon as the invasion started, what was the first thing your unit did?

Marek: Well, we were loaded on the transport train and proceeded to Normandy. And, oh, on the second day we—our train was strafed, and the engine was blown up, so we stayed there.

**[01:00:00]**

So then we [inaudible] there were villages. There were bicycles that were requisite by army, and we rode bicycles to—closer to the front, but the other thing where we had two trucks for kitchen and food supply that they were with us. Yeah, and the field kitchen, they—I must give them their credit. They did a very good job providing our meals.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: So describe the scene as you started coming in toward the front. What were you seeing as you came in towards the invasion?

Marek: First the bombardment. You—after a few days you recognize what shell is [inaudible] around you, according to sound. Like, small caliber bullets, they're like the mosquitoes, you know, and heavy artillery was—depended how high they were. They were high pitch sound. A mortar, when it's shot out, shot out up in the air, and the mortar has a, like a tail, where it flies out it makes noise. Like if a heavy summer wind, you open a book outside, the pages are flying. That's how the sound of a mortar sounds would go flying when it goes down by itself, by gravity only. They will be flying. They'll be—it depends what size a mortar is it. The smallest one, with mortars, we could shoot from below with our rifle. But that was a very, very, maybe 200 yards, and the heavier one was a platform, and that you set a distance. They were more a lot like artillery except artillery was longer reach.

Novey: So how much damage were these—was this bombardment doing to German positions, on the first day?

Marek: [inaudible] hit. We got fox holes, dig little trenches and stay under, underground, burrow, yeah. And—otherwise, like I said, the only thing for myself, I was afraid not to get wounded badly, so.

Novey: So were your trenches that you dug—how close were they to the beaches?

Marek: What?

Novey: How close were your trenches to the invasion beaches?

Marek: Oh, it depended how—maybe sometimes they were one mile, sometimes less, less than a mile, sometimes further than a mile because the, again, the other side of hiding in fox holes was that when the tanks, we knew they were for long distance, knew that there were fox holes, we just—they would drive over and make like a turn so you get crushed.

Novey: So these are allied tanks you're talking about or German?

Marek: Allied, allied, yeah.

Novey: So could you see anything of the landing, or were you far enough away where you didn't?

Marek: We were farther from it, yeah, we were farther, yeah. We didn't get to Normandy at least two weeks after invasion.

[01:05:05]

Novey: Oh, okay.

Marek: Yeah, yeah.

Novey: So still two weeks the Germans had, from what I understand, the Germans had the allies sort of bottled in on the beach head.

Marek: Yeah, yeah. See, the beaches, the high—what do you call them?

Novey: Cliffs?

Marek: Yeah, and because for defense purposes, the high cliffs, they made German force more superior, more effective to kill the people down below in the—on the beach on the sand or in the water.

Novey: Okay. So as you were stationed around the perimeter of the, you know, of, you know, the frontlines, did the allies ever make a push in your sector to break out?

Marek: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

Novey: So how would you respond to those?

Marek: We would retreat, yeah, retreat.

Novey: So did your unit stand and fight at all or?

Marek: No, we—our company didn't fire any [inaudible] wasn't engaged in the fighting in the—for the seven or ten days I was in Normandy.

Novey: So then you were—

Marek: So you see—I think we were like in the reserve. We were moving backwards, but the actual front was still in front of us.

Novey: Okay, all right. So yeah, what were—during this time when did you first decide—make the resolution to give yourself up?

Marek: There was many things. That was not planned, absolutely not planned. Just saw someone. For some reason we saw this pig sty. The guy got in there. It was dark, and after a while there was a big sow hiding there. And once I've heard different speech, give different talk. We got up, and first of all we got to the French farmer. I give him the

Luger pistol. I give a pistol. I give him a machine gun, put it on the floor, and then he called the American soldiers. And they—

Novey: Okay. So go on back just a little bit. As you were retreating, was the retreat pretty well planned or was it pretty hasty?

Marek: Pretty hasty, yeah, especially during the day there were different kind—different times of heavier shelling otherwise. And usually around from 11 o'clock to one o'clock with bullets was like very, very, very quiet. Apparently they had lunch or something, I don't know what. But it started about with sunrise until about 11:00 and then afternoon again. And then so we—yeah.

Novey: Okay. So how did it come about that you—so you're retreating across these farm fields, and how did it come about that you and you said another Polish soldier and then a German—

Marek: The German, yeah.

Novey: —how did it come about that all three of you decided to just wait and give yourself up?

Marek: Well, we were—all three were with our own machine gun crew.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah, and we got sort of a—we lagged on—maybe on purpose a little bit behind our regular company line. So when we got into the building there was no one from our company, nobody behind.

**[01:10:00]**

Nobody would see us, yeah.

Novey: So your three-man machine gun crew, did you get to be pretty close friends with the three of you?

Marek: No.

Novey: Or was it just—

Marek: No, no.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: No.

Novey: And what was the name of the German unit you were with?

Marek: That was, I've forgotten the actual name. It was 500-something division, 537 Panzergrenadier division. Panzergrenadier, the troops that walk with tanks, yeah, behind tanks.

Novey: So when you were retreating were your tanks retreating with you, or did they stay up towards the front?

Marek: My area there was no more tanks anymore left.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah, they were—and some are destroyed by time. I guess they had different areas where the line was more—

Novey: Advanced?

Marek: I don't know what, but they concentrated in some areas more than the others.

Novey: Okay, and what types of tanks were these?

Marek: We had, German, we had the biggest one, the Tiger, that's about forty-five tons, forty-five-fifty ton tank, yeah. It was a crew of six. And they had the different, like in—also in our own army they have the shells for anti-aircraft, anti-metal, and the regular artillery shells. So two different kinds of shells.

Novey: So back in the pig sty, as you were giving yourselves up, you said you heard the American voices outside. So what happened next? After you gave yourselves up, what was the process there?

Marek: Well, first of all I ripped my German eagle from my uniform because I give—we all to—all three of us, we gave the—whatever armament we had, shells and bayonets and, like, pistols with machine guns, what's—and then there was a—someone in the American army of Polish descent. He could speak a little bit of Polish with the two of us. And like I said, whether we are transported to [inaudible] or wherever the prisons were were temporary, and we, Poles, went to—separated, went to a, like in Cherbourg, stayed there for two weeks.

Novey: So what would have happened if the—if you weren't the last ones to retreat and the Germans found you?

Marek: I were found we were shot on the spot. That's the desertion. Desertion on the—in combat, that's—there's no appeal or anything.

Novey: So were you worried about that?

Marek: No.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: I, for some reason, you know, when you're eighteen years old you don't think sometimes of the—yeah.

Novey: And were you worried that the allies weren't going to take prisoners? That they weren't going to take you prisoner if they—I know later in the war there were times when both sides refused to accept prisoners. Were you worried about that or?

Marek: No, no, no. No, not. The only thing I was worried, before even the invasion, that we were maybe sent to eastern front, to Russia.

**[01:15:04]**

There was entirely different. My one cousin died in the Siege of Leningrad in the winter, and almost, like, practically froze to death. And another of my cousins, he was killed in Italy. My next door neighbor was killed in Italy. So from my own village there were about six young men who lost their lives in the war, either eastern front or west front, Italy.

Novey: Okay, so you're—what was life like in these prisoner detention camps in France?

Marek: They were anxious. There was a—next to us there was a camp. There was a bunch of tents. They were Russians. During the war Germany had big amount of Russian prisoners from the eastern front, and one Russian general, his name was Vlasov, he got together all divisions of the foreign—the Russian prisoner of war, and then Germany made them, like he was fighting with Germans. And these people were, when the allied captured them, Stalin asked them—asked for all of them. And they had to go. They had [inaudible] to Russia. And most of the [inaudible] shot [inaudible] one arm or one leg because of the treason. They committed.

Novey: So do you remember any specific stories about life in the POW camps before you were transported to England?

Marek: No, no, no. No, well, ours was very like we had—first of all, we had pretty good food, right, so the only thing was—were the little pop tents. And it was raining for ten days, and mud all over. And then we—inside we would like, we would dig little trenches around, around the pop tents, but still some water seek inside. No, this was not very, very comfortable in here. And then we land. We were transported on the LST, that's the landing ship. They brought some railroad cars and engines. And we would land. We were put in the hole in the bottom of this LST, and it was quite rocky, rocky sailing to—of course they—see, they have flat bottoms, you know, to get close to shore.

Novey: So you went all the way across the channel in that?

Marek: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Novey: Okay. What were the railroad cars for?

Marek: What happened?

Novey: You said they had railroad cars in the bottom?

Marek: Well, for our army transportation. None of the French equipment was either destroyed or somehow not being operated, right, ready to operate. So we didn't—we were brought out on railroad cars, steam engines, all kinds of stuff.

Novey: So before coming back, what was the area around you like where you were in your camps? Was that where the invasion had taken place?

Marek: No, no, no. No, that was farmland.

**[01:20:01]**

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Novey: So coming across to England, what was the first thing they did with you once you got to England?

Marek: We, first of all got, deloused. Everything was stripped. We were having haircuts, cut—hair cut down, and put under the showers, special showers. So even after that, as if somehow they felt there's some louse in my—but it wasn't anymore. And of course we were given Polish uniforms. Well, we got British equipment in Polish army. British battle dresses, and the rifles, British rifles.

Novey: So how long was it—how long after you were captured was it before you were taken to England?

Marek: Two weeks, two weeks yeah, that was a short period.

Novey: And so it was immediately upon getting to England that you joined the Polish army?

Marek: Well, yes, but that was the idea. That was the idea.

Novey: Okay. So how do you—did you go about joining the Polish army?

Marek: A Polish person, Polish officers were [inaudible] visited the camps. And we got—because we had to declare that we are real Poles, not like spies. So yeah, maybe half a day interrogations, yeah. And then I was sent to Scotland. Spent the rest of, actually part of the time in Scotland.

Novey: Okay. Was that for training?

Marek: Yes, training. We went through some noncommissioned officers training and became—anyway I became one of the instructors, so yeah.

Novey: What were you instructing in?

Marek: How to—we were talking about the different explosives, how to manage it, how to work with it, how to get the explosives to work yeah.

Novey: Okay. So was this training to be combat engineers or just infantry?

Marek: More or less combat, yeah, yeah, yeah. [inaudible] there's like a quarter inch cable explosive, and this you run, you put a one-one one around the, like, a telephone pole and with a detonator. They would cut the pole, regular. It's a sort of fast, so fast explosives that it's—but otherwise if you throw it in a fire without the explosive, a little bit, it just burns harmlessly, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So how long were you an instructor in Scotland?

Marek: Until after the war ended, 1945. We worked for, what, another half a year, but then the English people want to get rid of us. You know, there was no more war, so there were—through the camps, a number of camps, people from Polish communist government came, tried to tell us to go back home. And men with families, most of them, they went home, but there were runaways.

**[01:25:08]**

They cleared as western spies. They hard time to get a job to—unless they would sign the Communist Party. And I, nothing to lose besides I had uncle here in Milwaukee, and so I stayed in England for about four years after war. In 1949 I got visa.

Novey: Okay. Were you still keeping in contact with your family in Poland?

Marek: Oh yeah. Until five years ago I used to visit every year, my home, because Mom and Dad, was '87 when he died, and 1979. But then my—I had two sisters and a brother, and all of them died before I did. But I'm still around.

Novey: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So how did it feel—what did you think when the war ended?

Marek: Relief. Relief and then anxiety. What do I do? I had no education. I had no trade, and while I was in London I worked on the construction, but then I was thinking about eventually when I come to America what do I do? That was the anxiety, yeah. And it turned out very, very well. Thank you.

Novey: Yeah. So what was the process to get a visa to come to America?

Marek: At that time it's different than what is it now with the immigration. In that time each country has a specialty quota, so the number of visas a year. Polish quota was 6,600 a year. So when I went to the American embassy in London in 1945 my—I was given number 20,000-some-300. So I knew exactly at least right away, at least three, three and a half years for if I be eligible for visa. Meantime there are different countries.

[inaudible] camps to Canada from South America to immigrate, to bring people to their countries. I had a very bad feeling about going to South America. There were some people, some of my friends that went in there into Argentina. They were treated like slaves in the farms. Australia at that time did not accept any Eastern European men. They changed in early '60s, 1960s to—actually, when I was in Milwaukee I intended for a while to immigrate to Syria, yeah, further, but then there were the—it's too damn far to visit home.

Novey: Okay. So it was 1949 that—or '48 or '49 that you got your visa?

Marek: Yeah, '49, December—November 1949, yeah. Actually, we—I got a passage on—incidentally the ship was a younger sister of the Titanic, Aquitania. It was the ship that was the last crossing Atlantic.

**[01:30:05]**

And on the way back they went straight to Glasgow to—for to be—we got off for whatever. And November sailing on the Atlantic is very rough. We—instead of four days we went seven days. In meantime in New York, dock strikers went on strike, so we move were—directly to Halifax, Nova Scotia in Canada. From there we were two days railroad to get to Milwaukee.

Novey: Okay. So did you come up the—what way did you come? You came in across the Great Lakes?

Marek: I came through Huron, Huron, Michigan.

Novey: Oh okay.

Marek: Yeah, that was from—see, that was the first train we had a direct train to Montreal. We changed the trains in Montreal. We went through to Toronto and Port Huron harbor and Chicago. Yeah, and incidentally I came to Milwaukee November 25. Exactly that year there was a Thanksgiving day. We got on a train from Chicago to Milwaukee. We're walking around. I see young people dressed up, in festive mood. They—I say, "What day is this? It's Friday—today's Thursday. People should be working." Until my uncle explained to me that this was—it was a holiday. And to this day that is my special day, Thanksgiving, yeah.

Novey: So what were your first impressions of America?

Marek: Well, first I was crazy. I see parking lots, all kinds of cars parked there. I said how come—what—whom they belong? I couldn't imagine that they were even owned by somebody, and of course there was, that year, Thanksgiving was very, very cold. It was fifteen degrees only the daytime, and I didn't heavy clothing, so I had to buy some right away. On the Southside there was a Goldman department store. And he had everything but much cheaper, yeah. So I had some money what I saved in London, in England, so I bought—to buy heavy jacket and stuff like that.

Novey: Okay. So what did you do when you got here? Were you living with your uncle?

Marek: My uncle yeah. He was a bishop in the Catholic Church. I lived for about three months in the rectory, and first since there were so many newcomers to Milwaukee, to this day there's an international institute, and this organization, every Saturday evening they were—had, like, get together. And each Saturday was sponsored by different, mostly religious, like, when I went first time there the sponsor were Methodist church for Whitefish Bay. And I—right there I befriended a couple, older couple with their son and their daughter-in-law, and from then on we—first of all he gave me—he told me to go to [inaudible] to printing.

[01:35:01]

He gave me very, very good advice. And incidentally he became president of *Milwaukee Journal* 1985.

Novey: And what was his name?

Marek: Warner Biagi [??].

Novey: Okay. So when had you learned English?

Marek: In England, most of it. When our army was dismissed we still had, like, camps, and we worked for big a construction company. But I decided to go—to live—it would cost me much more to live, but to move with an English family. And that from then I started. First there were the newspapers, like first big headlines. And the, you know, so, and that's the best way to learn. Even now you have the immersion schools for foreign [inaudible] children into—for different languages. Yeah, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So you got here, and then how soon was it after you got here that you were drafted again?

Marek: Six—seven months.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Korean War started in six—June 1950. And I got my letters in April, no, in August 1950 to report. We were transferred there from Milwaukee to Fort Knox, Kentucky. And from then on we stayed there about three weeks. Each day the number of men were sent to different companies, and also for during Korean War two National Guard Divisions, Oklahoma, Thunderbird 45<sup>th</sup>, and California 40<sup>th</sup> Sunburst—the 30<sup>th</sup> Thunder Division. And California division was sent to Germany, and then we were eventually—we were sent to Korea. But first we went to Fort Knox, Kentucky—I mean Fort Knox, well, no, Camp Polk—from Fort Knox to Camp Polk, Louisiana. We trained for about half a year, and then shipped through New Orleans, Panama Canal to—first to Japan then to Korea.

Novey: Okay. So back up a little bit. When was the first time you even heard of Korea?

Marek: When the war broke out. War, no, never heard of it before.

Novey: Did you pay attention to it in the news?

Marek: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: I was always sort of a junkie for news. To today, to this day.

Novey: So you got your draft notice, and how did you feel about that?

Marek: Surprised. First of all surprised. Here I came to America in order not to go to war anymore. Here I am back in war. [inaudible] surprise.

Novey: So what was the induction process like? Did you go to—was it a place in Milwaukee or?

Marek: Yeah, yeah. First, well, first they check you, your physical whatever. And then within two weeks we got notice to report, at that time, Northwest radio station was the end of Milwaukee. Wisconsin Avenue where the Walmart is now there used to be a radio station.

**[01:40:07]**

Novey: Okay.

Marek: So from there they went to Chicago and to Fort Knox.

Novey: So how did the induction process in America, how was that different from the induction process into the German army?

Marek: Well, first of all we already got better pay, yeah. Second we were given more information, more explanation why this happened. The German army was no, no, none of it. It was just your order is such and such, and that's it, no ifs or buts, yeah.

Novey: All right. So tell me about your basic training. How was it like to go from being a, you know, you were a army veteran from World War II. How did it feel to go back to basic training?

Marek: Well, I—very comfortable, very comfortable. Right away I wanted to be in the tanks. So in our 120<sup>th</sup> Company [inaudible] battalion has a company with the bulldozer [inaudible] tanks in front for, like, the Korean where they have—it goes over ditches for irrigation. To cross this you had to—the blade to make even in the land.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah, I like—I enjoyed it, yeah.

Novey: So how did the—how did the training compare to what you got in the German army?

Marek: This one was more superior, yeah, more thorough. More, like I said, more they explain why, why you do this. And you could ask questions. In German army you could not ask any questions, yeah.

Novey: So you—when you first went into the training did you receive a general training, and at what time—at what point during your training did you go into your tank training?

Marek: I wanted to be the driver. Yeah, and I became a driver, yeah, yeah. And that was, they call it Sherman tank. That was like a forty-ton tank with seventy-six-inch artillery gun and two machine guns, one in the turret, one in the driver assistant. So yeah.

Novey: Okay. So you had been around tanks in your German division. How would you compare the Sherman tank with the tanks you had seen in German army?

Marek: The German tank anyway was more superior. More, first of all they were heavier and had better armament. Yeah this, although it was a more of a standard piece of artillery, eighty-eight millimeter gun. That's—this gun was used for antiaircraft, for regular artillery, you name it. Yeah, they had—but ours, tanks were just as—they were like little [inaudible] power.

Novey: Okay. So you finish your training in—so what type—what part of your training did you do in Kentucky and what part in Louisiana?

Marek: Oh, in Kentucky was just the place for spreading recruits. The assignment was the Camp Polk, Louisiana. That's where they started to—with a company, and they started exercises.

**[01:45:07]**

Novey: Okay, so usually in basic training you get usually some leaves to do things off base. What would you do when you got it, when you got a leave?

Marek: Off base? Well, there was a little town called Leesville where we would go there like for the evening, and then we would get a pass to say, til midnight, so we'd go to Leesville. Otherwise they had a PX, entertainment by the USO. They did like a canteen. So you had good entertainment.

Novey: Okay. So at what point did you know that you were going to be sent out to Korea?

Marek: Right away. Right away. But once we got the assignment to 45<sup>th</sup> that was it.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Then it was only a matter of time. Of course with the newcomers, with the regular 45<sup>th</sup> division was under maybe only fifty percent strength. So fifty percent of new men were there to be better together as a unit, yeah.

Novey: Okay. All right, so you had just survived a World War. How did it feel to know that you're going to be going back into a combat area?

Marek: Well, a lot of—mostly I was afraid in Korea of the—we had very heavy rains. We were in the mountains. And our army needed a lot of supply, and there were times it were very hard to get into outposts. So that's the only—I had worried about how to—what—did we get enough? And we get our equipment, our food, our everything else we needed to exist, to fight, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So what was the process of being sent over to Korea like?

Marek: I don't know. First of all we, well, it just—more or less it was natural. When we got to look, to the division, right away we knew we will be in Korea.

Novey: What was the trip like over there?

Marek: Trip?

Novey: Yeah, the—

Marek: Thirty days on the boat, on the ship from New Orleans to Panama Canal. We stop in San Francisco, then to northern Japan. [inaudible] northern island of Japan, Hokkaido. Mitsubishi has huge steel mills there. That's the only place we could dock our ships, at the Mitsubishi Company, company docks.

Novey: Okay. So and did you stay in Japan for any length of time or?

Marek: We stayed about three months.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah, get reorganized, and then we went on to Inchon, Korea in '41, I think, in April something.

Novey: Okay. So you were in the main invasion of Inchon?

Marek: No, no, I—Inchon was already in our hands.

Novey: Okay. This was after that. Okay.

Marek: Yes. We were—because there was a very good harbor, deep harbor for big ships, yeah, yeah. It was already in our hands.

**[01:50:01]**

At least maybe two months after Inchon was—invasion of Inchon, yeah.

Novey: So this was before the Chinese had gotten involved, or was it right after?

Marek: They were—that time, yes, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So we were—the frontlines were right up along the Chinese border at that point.

Marek: Yeah, and then we retreated to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Yeah, we were staying now.

Novey: Okay. So what did they do with your division as soon as you landed in Korea? What did you do as soon as you landed in Korea?

Marek: Well, we—I drove a tank. We did combat. Yeah, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So did they ship you right up to the front right away or?

Marek: Oh yes. No, no, no, sorry, well, maybe within three weeks, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So what was the typical day in, you know, in—at the front in Korea like? What would you do?

Marek: When we were right on the line we were getting food, warm food, twice, at least twice a day. And it was delivered by Korean men who didn't want to fight for the country.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: And got some food and many times extra ammunition for like, for machine guns, for our tank we were delivered shells by truck.

Novey: Okay. So you were basically, as a tank driver you were—your tank was helping guard the convoy?

Marek: Well, what we did was we positioned in the mountain. I was used—we used as artillery, and once in a while either Korean or our side, either side, once in a while they would get like a probing through the no man's land, going to the other side. And I had about two or three times was probing. One time we, I lost my tank commander because we were bogged down on the way back to our position. See, we got early into the no man's land gun was [inaudible] frozen. By the time we got back the other tanks made a mess out of the dirt. We sank. We couldn't get up, couldn't move up. So we're waiting for our relief, somebody would—to pull us out. We were shelled, and when one shell hit my commander right in the neck. Yeah, you hear, you could see there were a few times with the heartbeat and you—with the heartbeat blood was coming out. And there was no help. No help.

Novey: So how long were you making these probing raids along the border?

Marek: Oh maybe I did about three, three or four times. That was in one day, one day proposition.

Novey: Okay, and were you just operating as artillery support for these?

Marek: Yeah, yeah. And at times we were shelled, but most of the time when we—when my commander, to probe, it was bright days, and our fighter planes were always above. So the Chinese were quiet. They didn't shell us, very few, very few times because with the powder, the heat, flame would show the pilot's—the position. So they did not do much.

**[01:55:04]**

Novey: So when did the—this was still right along the northern border right?

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: So what was the first indication you had that the Chinese were going to make an offensive?

Marek: I was afraid. I was afraid of Chinese because our army needs a lot of supplies to exist, to fight. Chinese, they're very, very, very little. They even—now they could exist on practically of—on very little to survive. And we needed a lot of help.

Novey: So when the Chinese advance came what did your unit do?

Marek: Well, we were through—we were fighting back, shelling, yeah.

Novey: Okay. And how far did you retreat that first—during that first?

Marek: We didn't retreat too far. We waited, stayed. Only one time, one mountain, the ridge of a mountain [inaudible] to Chinese, and then we—next day we got it back. It was a—that was a very, very hard combat. You know, it was called the, what, the Iron Triangle, two different mountains, and the big fighting was taking place.

Novey: So to somebody who hasn't ever seen combat, describe what combat's like, was like in Korea, those days.

Marek: Most of the time it was okay. With exception I was always very afraid at nights. And your imagination, sometimes it seems like at night you see something moving, and actually there was a stump. You're ready to fire the damn thing and it was a stump in the morning when the sun came up, yeah. And to fire at night it would be worse because then you were showing your position. You will be fired back, yeah. You were your own way to survive.

Novey: So then at nights you were often on outpost duty?

Marek: Yeah, yeah. Well for—see, all nine months we were on the frontline. There was a schedule for going back into. If you had—for each month in the combat on frontline you

are given four points. You needed thirty-six points to be re-evacuated home or in the reserve. I got, we did first time nine months. I got my thirty-six points. And of course that—by that time already my two year duty almost expired too, the same time.

Novey: So how did resupply work? Was resupply—was there ever a time where the army wasn't getting supplied?

Marek: That it what?

Novey: Where the army—where your sector was not getting supplied with what it needed?

Marek: No, no. Of course not every hour was, you know, heavy bombarding, heavy shelling. There were times it was very, very quiet. And as far as getting our, whatever we needed, supplies, was no problem.

**[02:00:02]**

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah. Only one time where they had this monsoon rains. There were about four days rain like this rain like you hear sometimes within a few hours you saw seven inches of rain falling down. This was like before the monsoon rain came you see the sky was like a yellowish sky, quiet. And that was a sign that, every year, the monsoon rains occur in this—in that areas.

Novey: What was the winter in Korea like?

Marek: Cold. Winter, actually beginning of November we got snow already. We went, and since this was area like all the whole front in the mountains, roads were made by bus, pretty narrow on the side of a mountain, and with the snow on the ground the tank was very, very slippery. You could hardly drive it. They told me once to drive, clean up one area with big snow, snow drifts. I went there, slid down sideways and made two summersaults and landed on—in the valley. [inaudible] no harm there but my machine guns. My machine gun on the turret was damaged but otherwise no problem.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: So what was—you were—so by this time the line had sort of stabilized along the 30<sup>th</sup> parallel. So what—where were you along the parallel? Can you name any towns you were near or hills?

Marek: We were, let's say, about thirty miles east of, oh, the Korean Capitol.

Novey: Oh, Seoul?

Marek: Seoul, yeah, yeah, on the Han River. Han River go—flows through eventually to Seoul, yeah.

Novey: Was this near the, like, the Kumwha Valley area, the [inaudible]?

Marek: I forgot the name of it, yeah.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: But like I said, about thirty miles we were east of Seoul.

Novey: Okay. What was—describe what a Chinese infantry attack would entail.

Marek: The bugles?

Novey: Yeah, just describe the whole—their whole process during an attack.

Marek: Well, they were in great masses they come closer with the bugles and a lot of noises. Or like bongs, like, how to put it, like in the—

Novey: Drum-type?

Marek: Gongs, yeah, yeah, and of course that was—they were more—when they did this they were very badly exposed because they were on the open area. So not too often they did this to—or in my experience anyway.

**[End of OH2138.Marek\_file1\_access.mp3]**

**[Beginning of OH2138.Marek\_file2\_access.mp3]**

Marek: Probably the first winter when I wasn't there yet, when we went almost to the Yalu River, I wasn't there yet, yeah. We came to Korea when the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was established with a few incidents back and forth, like one or two different regions, mountains changing hands, but basically we were on stable line of defense.

Novey: So were you ever involved in a push to take another ridge?

Marek: Yeah, there were once in a while, yes.

Novey: So describe the whole process of that.

Marek: This was the, I guess, it's before the no man's land probes where they would probe. Where they could—less resistance, you could gain some ground. If we—if there was too much resistance we came back to our positions.

Novey: So during these, like the Chinese infantry attacks, how would a tank crew respond to that? How would your tank crew deal—what would your tank crew do when the Chinese would attack?

Marek: Well, I had the—we would shake them with by guns and machine guns, yeah, yeah.

Novey: Okay. Would the infantry be supporting your tank or?

Marek: Oh yeah, oh yeah. That was a regular infantry. On one side we had the Turkish battalion. They're the best fighters in the world. On the other side we had a South Korean division, which was very doubtful. We were afraid of this left side of our position because the Koreans, for some reason. And in the back, in the rear there was a Swedish field hospital of the—like you would see in the *MASH* with the helicopter flying in the valleys with the buckets or—and turrets on the side. Yeah, every morning there were helicopters flying through to the hospital.

Novey: So what did—you mentioned the South Korean units. What did—was the general impression of them and why?

Marek: Well, for—in my opinion they were not dedicated to fight for their own freedom. That's my opinion, yeah. You see, some of them, like I mentioned before, some of them who were bringing us food to frontline, those were Koreans, young Korean men who refused to join the army, their own army. So they were given the job as a [inaudible] not to fight.

Novey: So tell me about these Turkish troops that you mentioned.

Marek: Oh, they were great. They were great. And they did more of the no man probing than we did. And they—the best, best. We were really lucky. We were glad. We were glad we had those on the side.

Novey: Okay. So do any particular experiences stick out in your mind during these months you were in Korea? Stories or?

Marek: Not really. We did—a few times we did—I got a pass to Seoul with our own trucks for the—I mean for twelve hours, but otherwise just daily your routine. And you had to keep maintaining your equipment.

**[00:05:03]**

There was always something to fix for the tanks to be 100 percent ready. So that was enough.

Novey: Okay. Describe the process of maintaining the Sherman tank in a combat zone.

Marek: Well, you have to, first of all, you have to check your track because they tend to—the bolts tend to loosen up while working. So you have to keep tightening it up. Then to gas up a tank, it holds seventy gallons on each side of a tank, seventy gallons of gasoline. And that—if you didn't have a pump you pour it with a bucket or with gasoline containers, it would take a long time. Every so often you have to change the gears, the front gears that move the tank. This, again, this was like a, I don't know, thirty or forty gallons of oil you had to dispose of.

Novey: Wow.

Marek: Yeah, so yeah. Because you see your breaks with the handles with the—were on each track you—one track breaks down, the other one goes, so makes a turn.

Novey: Okay. Did your crew ever make any modifications to your tank to—

Marek: No, no. The only thing I did once, with the bulldozer blade I had a hydraulic system, and one time one of the connectors, elbows was from one inch to three-quarter inch change. One time the thing broke off or burst. O anyway, I had to go to where the Repo Depot, that place where all vehicles which are damaged or not being able to fix right away, they were sent back. And this Repo Depot I got my extra piece, what I would need it for.

F1: Excuse me, I am [inaudible].

Marek: Yeah, so. Otherwise no change.

Novey: All right, so you mentioned the Repo Depot, that—where'd you get extra parts, and if they had—

Marek: They would send it back to US.

Novey: So the—you said they had disabled vehicles and stuff that you could take parts off of?

Marek: Yeah, yeah.

Novey: So speaking of the disabled thing, what would happen when a Sherman tank got hit?

Marek: Well, it depends. We're hit from the front very, very, very seldom will it do any any harm because it was an inch and a half thick plate, armor plate. If you got hit on the side your gas tank will burst, and you it starts a fire. Like one, the one time also I had this—my assistant driver, our chaplain was to take ride to this no man's land once. And we run before we got into no man's land area where the minefields are, our men from our company to the cleared track sixty-feet wide to just to go through without being it, run on those mines.

**[00:10:21]**

And they had, that time, the Chinese made wooden boxes for landmines. And our detectors did not recognize them. So I run on the, one of the Chinese mines, and my tank burst. We lost one tank, yeah. But no other—none of the crew was hurt. We got enough time to get out.

Novey: What was it like trying to get out fast?

Marek: Well, it was hard. Like from our driver and the assistant driver, there's a hatch, and you had to lift yourself up to get out of it. You know, when you smell, you see flame around you you get a little panicky. But we got out.

Novey: Okay. So do you remember any other close calls?

Marek: No, no, not at all, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So how did it—how did you feel as your nine months were coming almost, you were almost done with your tour?

Marek: Well, I felt good. There were things I felt sort of sorry for myself that my friends from the company, they had families to welcome them. I did not have anybody. Yeah, just alone, and that was kind of—but also lucky, also lucky and glad to be back.

Novey: So what time of year was it when you returned to America?

Marek: Fifty-two.

Novey: Fifty-two?

Marek: Yeah, October—no, August 1952, yeah.

Novey: Okay. So did you—were you required to stay in for a little while, or did they immediately discharge you?

Marek: No, we got to—landed in San Francisco, took a train to Colorado Springs. We got discharged, and then from Colorado Springs there was a train to Milwaukee, yeah.

Novey: So what was the out processing like for that?

Marek: Oh very nice, very nice, yeah. [inaudible] I always had a lot of riding trains. One of the greatest rides were from San Francisco to Colorado through the mountains, Colorado, was great. And one place, one pass we did three engines behind to push the train over the ridge, yeah.

Novey: Wow. So you got back to Milwaukee, and what did you do immediately after you got there?

Marek: I went back to work. I worked for a while with the Mill Furnace Company in 20<sup>th</sup> and Oklahoma. Went back to it. By then my friend from journal, he told me to—suggested I would go into printing. Now I started at W. Krieger [??] in 1943 in, I think, February as a—started with a broom and wound up 35 years later was a printer, pressman, and at that time in '60s, '70s printing was very well-paid, very good employment.

**[00:15:00]**

In Milwaukee wasn't known too much, but it was one of the big printing centers in the US.

Novey: Did that have to do with the paper-making companies right nearby?

Marek: We worked with paper companies. We had a lot of papers [inaudible]. We had papers from Finland, special like for some special edition like catalogues were printed for Neiman Marcus, one of the big stores in Dallas, Texas, very upscale, for Marshall Field, all kinds of them. And there's all those special papers from abroad, mostly from Finland.

Novey: Okay. So—

Marek: We had papers here to. From Wisconsin we had papers, from Ohio.

Novey: So you mentioned going back to Poland to—every now and then to visit your family. What was your first trip back to Poland like? And when was it?

Marek: Oh, very, very anxious. Very anxious. To begin with, we landed in Warsaw, stayed overnight. You had to, when you register you had to surrender your passport. Then they will give you just a little tab with name on it, number of it, and so, and you right away you are interrogated by police. Came into—the next day we took a train home to my hometown. Right within twenty-four hours I had to register at the militia with the police station. They were interrogated me for an hour and a half.

Novey: About what?

Marek: Anything, even stupid things as how many trees you have around your house? You know. But anyway, that was it. Of course I never told them that I was in the Korean army, I mean, American army in Korea because that would be a no-no, yeah.

Novey: So what was it like seeing your family for the first—what—how long was this after the war, first of all?

Marek: Well, I saw my family last time in April '44, and next time I was in July 1965. That's twenty-some years ago, twenty some years, yeah. And my mom was already gone. I didn't see my mom. My dad, my two sisters, and my brother, and one sister died in 1935 from diphtheria, so we were all together we were five children in our family.

Novey: Okay. So what did you do after come—so after you came back, have you ever been involved in any veteran's organizations? Like the Veterans of Foreign Wars or the American Legion?

Marek: American Legion, yes, yeah, also I was also a Polish Combatant. I was the equivalent to American Legion, Polish Combatant Association, yeah.

Novey: Is that—is that based in America or?

Marek: Yeah, yeah. Right now they are almost—I don't think they exist anymore because most of us are gone.

Novey: Okay. So how were you received into the, like, the American Legion with people knowing your background having served in the German army?

Marek: Well, at the beginning I was very anxious, very afraid that I wouldn't be accepted, but later on there's no problem.

Novey: Okay. All right, so and have you ever attended any reunions for the different groups you served in?

Marek: Oh yeah. The forty-fifth until 19—or 2001, every year we drove to Oklahoma City.

**[00:20:03]**

For reunion, yeah, yeah.

Novey: And just to confirm, you were in the—were you in the 120<sup>th</sup> Regiment in—

Marek: One Hundred Twentieth Battalion, yeah.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: In the four[??] division, yeah. That's combat engineers. The battalion supplied, for instance, all they transported, transportation also, but telecommunications, phone service, road building, bridges built, drinking water, this is for [inaudible]. That was our battalion's job for the—yeah.

Novey: Add talk about—talk just quickly about the honor flight.

Marek: Oh, it was great. First we were welcomed here in Milwaukee by American Legion and other organization. Then in Chicago—then in Washington there was a band from all the five different—

Novey: Branches of service?

Marek: —branches of the United States. And then the whole, everything was all planned so well, it was quite an experience. The only thing was we were—that was November 1. It was pretty cold and windy in Washington. They weather didn't cooperate too well. Otherwise it was great. Yeah, and then of course landing in Milwaukee with parties of people cheering you when you walk in, that was awesome, awesome.

Novey: So try to—reflecting on all this, try to summarize how you feel about your experience in the military overall.

Marek: First of all I feel very lucky that I'm alive. I've seen so many people being hurt, and I was very, extremely lucky. And secondly yeah, you never plan these things. They go as

you progress in life, and you have to accept it normally as normal, an occurrence, and just hope for the best.

Novey: Okay. So how did your experience in the military change you, like, change how, you know, the path of your life and your career?

Marek: The only object I had when I had my family, my children, to educate them because since I myself I was not, they were to get higher education, and also very lucky, my children did get good education. They were very good students, and that was my best part of my life.

Novey: Okay. What would you want people who listen to this interview to know? You know—

Marek: Like I've said many times before that I'm extremely lucky that through the wars, through the—I stayed out of harm's way, and I enjoyed my rest of my life. The only thing right now, my wife is not—she's almost wheelchair patient, so I am—even though we live here, it's some hardship on me too.

**[00:25:00]**

Novey: Mm-hmm, okay.

Marek: Yeah.

Novey: So why is it important for you to do an oral history, or why'd you agree to do an oral history of your service?

Marek: What was that?

Novey: Why did you agree to get interviewed about your military service?

Marek: I don't know. I'm lucky. I'm lucky. Some—the social director from this, Elizabeth, she was the one who made all these arrangements. I'm very glad she did it, and I'm thankful for it. So yeah.

Novey: Okay. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add that we haven't addressed?

Marek: Not really, not really. I really hope that—I don't think I deserve all this attention. I'm just a normal person who did whatever he had to do, and yeah. I have a lot of people to be thankful to even here my—because my buddy Warner [inaudible] from journal, that's one person I—unfortunately he died. Incidentally, you know, he also served in 45<sup>th</sup> in the Second World War.

Novey: Oh, okay.

Marek: Yeah. They were—they waited on the—from the South of France with General Patton.

Novey: Okay.

Marek: We all went to Dachau to the concentration camp.

Novey: Well, do you have—what advice do you—I mean, you’ve been around the block a few times. What advice do you have for future generations?

Marek: Say what?

Novey: What advice do you have for future generations?

Marek: I will hope that the sacrifice of the fallen men and women will make the world better. And at the present time it’s not very—I worry about the young people, about the world. It’s changed so much in my lifetime, and overall the change is for much better, but right now it’s somehow, in my opinion, deteriorating somehow, so.

Novey: Okay. All right. Well, thank you very much for doing this interview.

Marek: Well good. I have—we go to lunch right now.

Novey: Okay. All right, well, thank you very much.

Marek: All right. Thank—

**[End of OH2138.Marek\_file2\_access.mp3]**

**[End of Interview]**