

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT E. POPE
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
JARED KOSCH

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TRANSCRIPT BY
DOMINGO DUARTE

Jared Kosch: This begins an interview with Robert E. Pope in Amherst, New York, on July 28, 2003. The interviewer is Jared Kosch. Mr. Pope, I would like to say thank you for letting us interview you and thank you for making time for the Archives. Could you tell us a little bit about your parents? Where did they come from?

Robert E. Pope: Well, ... my father came from Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, and my mother came from Englewood, New Jersey. We go back umpteen generations to the early 1600s over here from England, mainly from England. ... So, my father was in World War I, in the Navy, and they got married after the war, when he ... got discharged.

JK: Do you know exactly where your father was in Europe during World War I?

RP: Well, ... he was in the Navy. He was aboard a ship in the Atlantic and he was patrolling the western part of the Atlantic. He never got over near Europe.

JK: Can you give me a little more information about your mother?

RP: My mother worked for a while when she got out of high school, and then, got married and lived in her hometown. My grandfather lived in Englewood. Her mother died at an early age. I was ... about a year old when her mother died. Her father died at 102 years of age. So, there's not much more to say. She was a good mother. [laughter]

JK: Where did you grow up? Did you have any hobbies?

RP: Well, I grew up in Englewood, New Jersey, through high school. I had an older sister and a younger sister. I was active in the community. I was active in the church. I was a Boy Scout. I was active in sports, played varsity track and soccer in high school. We had a club called the Englewood Hawks that had nine guys in it and we were mainly for sports. We had a basketball team and a baseball team and had parties and what have you, ... different things. We did some good things, like, at the holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter, we would prepare a food basket with a turkey and stuff for some needy family in the community. ...

JK: World War II.

RP: Yes, before the US was in it, Englewood was the nearest hospital to the Hudson River in this town called Edgewater, which had a lot of big factories in it, ... they were afraid that ... if the Germans bombed there, Englewood was the nearest hospital. ... So, the hospital formed a group called the Hospitalers, which they trained to work in the hospital to relieve nurses. ... Things, in those days, were totally different. They didn't have EMTs [Emergency Medical Technicians] and rescue squads and all of these kinds of things. The only ambulance in the whole area was owned and operated by the hospital and, if you had an emergency, they would take the ambulance and nurses from the hospital out to the thing. We were trained to take over [for] the nurses, to do things that were within [our means], ... a lot of the menial stuff they did taking care of patients. ... We weren't giving shots or medicine or anything like that, but it was good training and I never knew that it would come back to be useful. Just like when I went to Rutgers, I never thought I'd be using anatomy and kinesiology. ... I did spend an awful lot of

time in hospitals and, later on, [I] work[ed] in hospitals, so, these things come back when you ... don't expect them to.

JK: During the Depression, your father was an electrical engineer.

RP: Yes.

JK: Was your family directly affected by the Depression?

RP: No, not directly. Early on in the Depression, my father had steady work. Later on, just before the war, is when it hit us, because of a conflict between my father and a man who worked under him. My father had only three years of college at Stevens Institute and this other fellow came over from Germany before the war. ... My father's side of the story is that he was kind of lazy, so, my father was always on him, but, because he had a degree, he ultimately got above my father and, when the big boss was away, he fired my father. So, then, it became more difficult, because my father was out of work for a while. ... Then, he got to work in shipyards, helping convert [them to the war effort], and, as the war was on, he worked in the shipyards, setting up the electricity for them to do repairs to the ships and stuff.

JK: You said earlier that your family gave gift baskets and meals to the needy.

RP: The Hawks Club did.

JK: Okay. Was that practiced in your house, especially during the Depression? Did anybody ever knock on the front door looking for a meal?

RP: No, but my mother was particularly helpful and did a lot of volunteer things through the church and in the community, but, no, I don't remember anything like that. Our town was not hit as bad as some other areas, I don't think, in the Depression. Oh, we had our share. We had some people, we had a couple, that had big investments and, you know, families in town with their big investments and lost their shirt, so-to-speak, and a couple of suicides and, you know, ... but they weren't close to us. They were things you read about in the paper.

JK: Both of your parents were Republicans.

RP: Yes.

JK: Were there ever any family discussions about their feelings towards President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal?

RP: No, they weren't really fans of his, [laughter] but, no, ... they were conservative. ... They felt that a lot of programs that came in were misdirected or overkill. ... Yes, if it didn't affect you, then you have a different attitude, if you're not on the receiving end of those benefits, they don't affect you as much as if you are.

JK: Why did you enroll at Rutgers?

RP: ... When I was a senior in high school, I developed a heart murmur as a result of scarlet fever. [laughter] I was going to go to Springfield College, but the doctor wouldn't let me, because it was too physical. So, I went to Bates College, up in Maine, for one semester. I was planning on going more than that, but, then, I got my draft notice in November of the first semester. ... So, I came home at the end of the semester and I got drafted in the military. When I came out of the service, I was married and wanted to use the GI Bill. ... I figured the best bet for me was to go to Rutgers, the State University for us, and so, that's how I ended up going to Rutgers.

JK: Did you participate in the fraternity life at Rutgers?

RP: No. I'm not a big fan of fraternities and sororities and I'm sure that some of them are better than others, in the way that I look at them, but ... they publicize the real wild stories and stuff and we had some up here. ... MTV [Music Television] did a feature on television which was filmed up in the fraternities here at UB [University of Buffalo]. I don't know if you saw that.

JK: I do not think I did.

RP: They had some real problems, partly ... because of things they did as a part of this, to drum up the story that MTV was doing, ... but, no, I lived in a trailer. It was a trailer court by the old stadium and I lived out there. I did play varsity soccer and I did participate in intramural swimming and softball.

JK: Did you have a favorite professor or dean at Rutgers?

RP: Well, yes, and I'm trying to think of his name. He was a speech professor who I really liked, ... because he was a person who told it like it is, and there's not that many of them around. ... His favorite story was, ... he was being paid some sum, which, in those days, was a pretty big sum, a couple of thousand dollars, plus expenses, to speak at something down in Washington, [District of Columbia]. ... When they got to him, after all the introductions and everything, the time for him had passed already. So, he got up and he said, "Thank you very much for inviting me. I think you've all been sitting here long enough, and so, I will say good night," and he sat down. That takes a lot of guts when somebody is paying you, but this is the kind of professor he was and that's the way he was in class. He would say, ... "If you're going to do it, this is the way. Do it right ... the first time." ... That makes an impression. I wish I could think of his name, but that's a lot of years ago.

JK: Can you tell me a little bit about receiving your draft notice while you were in your first semester in Maine? Were you expecting it?

RP: Well, people are getting drafted and the only thing that you didn't know was ... exactly when and ... you didn't know for sure that you'd pass it, but, I figured the chances of my passing it were pretty darned good, because, by November, the heart murmur had cleared enough that the doctor gave me the okay to go out for the basketball team. ... Some of ... the upperclassmen had

already gotten drafted. I made the varsity basketball team as a freshman at Bates for as long as I was there. I was only there for half of the season, but I figured, then, the murmur would have been the only thing that would have kept me out and, since that was cleared up, I figured I'd go. I came home at the end of January for the February draft; they took a certain number every month. The way it was working then, they were going through the alphabet and, in February, they met their quota with a fellow by the name of Philips. ... I got put off to March, to actually get drafted. [There was] a lot of unknowns and we went down to Fort Dix, near Trenton, [New Jersey], and spent a couple of days there in orientation and getting clothing and stuff and we boarded a train for, ... nobody told us where. ... In those days, they were dirty, old coaches and we pulled into this big post that had a sign, "Fort Jackson," [South Carolina]. That's the first we knew where we were going and it turned out to be that they were forming a brand-new division, the 106th. ... They had the cadre, which [are] the non-coms [non-commissioned officers] and the officers had come from different camps. Ours came from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which is the artillery headquarters, because ... I was put in the field artillery, which I didn't even know until we got out ... to the barracks and they told us what outfit we were in. ... The rest of us were all draftees, most of us quite young, either just out of high school or just in our first year of college, and it was an interesting set up, because we had so many youngsters. The average age for the entire division, including the older officers and career non-coms, ... was twenty-one. So, you can see how many eighteen and nineteen-year-olds there were in the whole division and they were ... all like that. We had both basic and advanced training at Fort Jackson. We had a lot of sports, a lot of other activities to get us in top shape. The latest training materials and methods and everything were incorporated in our training. This was going to be a super division that was going to really come in and make things happen. Unfortunately, it didn't work out that way. ... After advanced training, we went on maneuvers in the winter of '44; well, late part of December. It was '43 when we actually left, ... through January in Tennessee on maneuvers. We had eight weeks of maneuvers and, we had a different problem every week and, every problem, we finished in three, three-and-a-half days, instead of five, and the corps officers that were evaluating us raved about ... this outfit. [It] was just what it was intended to be. ... So, we went from there up to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, and somebody higher up made a decision that, because of losses in both the Pacific and Europe, that they would take some of our people out. They took about half of the division and sent them overseas in one direction or the other as replacements. ... What we got in their place was later draftees who hadn't had basic training yet and some fellows that, for one reason or another, did not make it in the Air Force or in the paratroopers. ... They put them in with us and we didn't have time to give them all complete basic training before we were sent to Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts to head overseas, and so, we were at Myles Standish for about three weeks ... before we left. We sailed on one of the biggest of the American ships. It was big enough and fast enough that it went unescorted across the Atlantic to the Azores and, there, it picked up a British corvette to guide us up the coast of Portugal and France to England and we landed in, ... well, it's in here someplace.

JK: Did you land in Scotland?

RP: No, no, it was in England, ... Liverpool. [We] landed in Liverpool and we went to a camp in Gloucester. I don't know how far it is from Liverpool, but [it is] not that far. ... There, we got all our equipment and all of the stuff off from the ship from the trip over the ocean. ... I

think we stayed there for about three weeks, and then, we drove our equipment across England to the English Channel and boarded LSTs [landing ship, tank] to go over to France, an interesting experience. LSTs can't land without a stern anchor and ours broke, so, we had to turn around and come back in and we spent ten days while they put a new stern anchor on. ... Then, we went back across again and up the Seine River and joined our convoy and ... we got up to the front on December 12th. ... The big part of the problem was, they rushed us so fast from Atterbury to Myles Standish, on up over there, that we had no supplies. For instance, I was a machine gunner; I had fifty rounds of ammunition and do you know how long it takes to put that out? Not very long! [laughter] The howitzers in our battery had six rounds of ammunition. That's not enough to zero-in on a target ... much less do any damage. So, as soon as we got in, they sent a lot of trucks back for supplies. They never made it back to us, because the Bulge started and they got intercepted and there was a story in *Life Magazine* about a convoy of trucks intercepted by the Germans in the Bulge [Battle of the Bulge] shortly after the Bulge started. They were on a road called Skyline Drive, and they took them out in the field and shot them all. That was part of our outfit, and so, we had to try and ward off the Germans [with] limited supplies and it was cold up there. We were up in a place called the *Schnee Eifel*, interpretation is "Snow Mountain," and [the] snow was a foot-and-a-half deep. [When] the sun was up, if it was up at all, it was only up from between eight and four. It was so cold that they had what they call snow fog. After the Bulge started, I had field glasses and I'd see shadowy figures out there, but I couldn't tell if it was our guys retreating or Germans advancing. It was that foggy and that's the kind of thing we were in until we got captured. ... We were up there the 12th and the Bulge started on the 16th. On the night of the 19th, they came around and told us that we were surrounded and going to surrender the next morning. For some reason or other, myself and nine other guys, one of which was a lieutenant in our outfit, decided to try and get away. We went up over a hill through woods and we got away for a while. We came across another group of Americans holed up in a little wooded area. We joined them ... on the 19th. German tanks came in and shot at us, direct fire, [all] morning and afternoon from different sides, and we had one bazooka, which was useless, [because], by the time we moved it over to where the tanks [were], they'd unload and get out. So, on the 21st, a command car pulled up and a guy got out with a Red Cross flag. I don't know if he was a German soldier with it or whether he was really a Red Cross guy, but ... we let him come in and he walked around the area, ostensibly to see how many wounded we had and to make arrangements to get the wounded out. When he went back, he told the commander of the group out there what we had in the way supplies and equipment and, particularly, ammunition. So, the German commander gave him a note to bring back, saying, "Surrender now or we'll kill you all." So, the ranking officer, who was, I think, a captain, in this group of about a hundred guys from different outfits that had gotten together there, said, "There's no sense in getting us all killed." So, we told him we'd surrender.

JK: Was that the general feeling through the whole division?

RP: Yes. When you have nothing much to fight with, you know it's senseless to. If you have adequate ammunition, you can put up a fight; that's one thing, but ...

JK: Were there many attempts like the one you made by other groups of men?

RP: No, not in our battery at least. I don't know about the other batteries, but, in our battery, the rest of them surrendered that morning of the 19th.

JK: Did you and the other gentlemen receive any reprimand for that?

RP: No.

JK: Okay.

RP: No. In fact, we never met up with any of them, because, what happened was, the ones who surrendered on the 19th walked about ten miles, and then, they got into boxcars to ride to prison camp. On the night of the 20th, the RAF [Royal Air Force] bombed the railroads, and so, we had no railroads to go [on]. ... So, this group of about one hundred that surrendered on the 21st, we had to walk about 120 miles in nine days before we could get to railroad boxcars to ride. ... That was tough. We didn't have much to eat and we were very tired and cold from walking that far.

JK: You had German guards at this point.

RP: Yes. They brought some soldiers up to escort us that ... might have been guys who had been wounded or something, [but] that were not amongst the troops that captured us. ... At night, they would put us all in a closed circle, so that they could take turns snoozing in and having enough of them awake to keep an eye on us. ... We tried to huddle up as close as possible, because, when you are in the snow and below freezing temperatures, any body warmth that you can share, it helps, ... but most of us had, to some degree or other, frostbite on our hands and feet. We were wet. ... There was snow, too, ... and you didn't have a chance to dry off or anything so you're walking with wet clothes and stuff. It was a tough stretch. ... Then, when we got to the boxcars, we got there one night, stayed in the boxcars [until] the next morning [and] they started moving. ... After a few hours, they stopped and we're sitting there, wondering what was going on, when, all of a sudden, we started hearing gun fire and it was our own pursuit planes strafing the train that we were in. The kid standing next to me got killed with a shell that went right through his head.

JK: You were outside the trains at this point.

RP: No, we were in boxcars.

JK: Okay. It pierced the car.

RP: Yes, it pierced the car and they were P-47s that strafed us and they had .20mm cannons in the wings and that's what came through. ... Then, the Germans came down and slid open the doors and we all jumped out and ran out into an open field of virgin snow and spelled out, like they do in football games, "US PW." The P-47s came back over a hill and they saw us and they flapped their wings and went on to another target, without ever knowing how many they either killed or wounded of us. ... After they left, we got back in the boxcars and went on to *Stalag* IVG, which was a German prisoner of war camp; mainly, at least a large part of the prisoners in there were British POWs [prisoners of war]; ... many of them captured in North Africa, and this

was their home until the end of the war. ... They put us into these barracks and we got Red Cross packages. The British guys who were in charge ... took the tea out of the Red Cross packages, because they [felt] Americans didn't know how to brew tea. ... So, they took the tea out, and then, they'd give us the finished product. They'd share the finished product with us, but we didn't know how to brew tea, so, they did it. It was interesting; the Germans are great respecters of rank. When we went in to be interrogated, one by one, when we got to *Stalag IVG*, I don't know what they knew about the others, but, for me, they knew what division I was from, they knew where I took basic training, they knew what high school I went to and I was only a PFC [private first-class]. So, I don't know what they knew about the others, but it was interesting how much they did know in those days. ... The way they would find out these kinds of things is they would contact German families, in Germany, who had relatives in the US, ask them to send them materials and they ... seemed very innocent, a yearbook ... and things that were available, and they would compile information. In this day and age, with computers and everything, you can do a lot of different things. This is a comparison. Today, we saw the Iraqi conflict; if somebody is killed or captured, within twelve hours, it's on the television. [Mr. Pope is referring to the 2003 War in Iraq.] The family knows you know and everything in that case. ... We're captured on the 21st of December. My mother got a telegram on January 17th that I was missing-in-action. She got a letter saying that I was a prisoner-of-war three days before. ... I was back in American hands. ... The communication difference between then and now is almost unbelievable.

JK: Can I ask you some questions about the POW camp?

RP: Sure.

JK: What was the general feeling of the soldiers? What was the general attitude inside the camp? Was morale high?

RP: Well, I was only there a couple of weeks, not even, maybe, a week. ... Then, they took ... a bunch of us who were privates and PFCs on a train to Leipzig. ... In Leipzig, we went into the railroad station, went outside the front and they had a tandem trolley waiting for us. ... They took us out to a building that had been a nightclub before the war and on what was the dance floor, they had triple-decker bunks with straw mattresses and where the people sat when they were having a drink, ... we had picnic type tables, and that was our home. We had about one hundred of us there. ... So, we just spent the night there, and then, in the morning, we would walk about a mile to the end of the trolley and the trolley would be there waiting for us, and then, take us to the railroad station then. ... We'd get on flat cars and the flat cars would be loaded with ties and rails and stuff and we'd ride out ... to where the RAF had bombed the railroad the night before. ... We'd have to clean out the craters and put down new ballast, that's the rock, and then, put down new ties, and then, put forty-foot sections of rail. ... When you're not eating very well, that's a lot of work. We would have prongs that would grab the tie ... like this, like an ice prong. ...

JK: Like an ice pick?

RP: Two bars went out, so that you'd have four people carrying one section, two people on each end, I should say, to carry the rail and put it in place. ... Then, they would have one technician who would check the width between the rails and check the level and whether they met right, and so on, before we get spikes in to hold rails in place. ... It was hard labor and we did it eight hours a day, seven days a week, and [the] food we had was ... barley soup and brown bread. The bread was like compacted sawdust it was terrible. ... We had barley soup and brown bread for breakfast and supper and for lunch, we had brown bread with a sausage, blood sausage, sandwich, [the] same thing every day, and that's what we did hard labor on. I lost about fifty pounds while I was a prisoner.

JK: In just that one week?

RP: No, ... in the four-and-a-half months that I was a prisoner.

JK: That went on for a week, rebuilding the railroad?

RP: No, that went on all the time. That's what we were there for.

JK: That was your main task.

RP: Yes, and then, we could tell where the bombing was as we could see the flashes of the bombs and hear the sirens and stuff. We could tell about how far and in what direction we'd be going the next morning to work. But, the night of the 21st of February, there was no bombing. ... So, on Washington's Birthday, we just stayed in Leipzig, in the city, and worked on trolley tracks and things like that that needed repairs. ... At around noontime, the sirens went off, and Leipzig ... was a cultural and educational center, not a heavy manufacturing center. It had not been touched once, not even once during the whole war. That day, Washington's Birthday, the B-17s came over, one wave after another, for three-and-a-half hours and leveled the city. They just leveled it and it was a city the size of Buffalo. ... A lot of them were incendiary bombs and they burned for days and days and days. There were fires that they couldn't get out. They wouldn't let us in the bomb shelters and the civilians were going in them, but the guards and the civilians would keep us out. So, we just had to stand out in the street while the bombs fell. Six of our group [were] killed by bombs or debris. ...

JK: Was this the same group of a hundred or were you put together with others?

RP: No, it's not the same group as was captured. This was a mix, some from there, but some from other places.

JK: About how many?

RP: About a hundred.

JK: Okay.

RP: Yes, give or take. ... I don't remember the exact number, but about a hundred and one of the guards that we had there, ... at night, ... spoke very fluent English. He was a comedian before the war. ... He was telling us jokes and asking us about Bob Hope, who he had met at some function before the war. ... [The] next day, they sent him off to the Russian Front, because the officer in charge of our unit saw him talking to us and laughing with us and stuff and put him over on the Russian Front, which is the worst place he wanted to go.

JK: Did the other guards treat you well?

RP: Most of them had nothing to do with us and, I mean, they just did their job. ... One of the guys was a barber before the war and, somehow or other, he had managed to hold on to a pair of hand clippers. ... So, they found [the clippers] when they searched [him]. ... The Germans are great for short hair, and so, they said to him, "You'll stay in one day a week and cut hair," and he said, "Well, you can't make me. That's my trade." He said, "You can't make me do that," and they said, "Okay," took the clippers out of his hands. "One volunteer?" My hand shot up, because I ... think that was better than being out fixing the railroad. So, one day a week, I got to stay in and cut hair. They kept in twelve or fifteen guys every day to do KP and clean up. ... Those were the ones whose hair you would cut while they stayed in. ... One day a week, I would get this. Instead of one day every six weeks, I got to stay in one day every week.

JK: Had you had any experience in cutting hair before?

RP: No.

JK: Did you tell them that you did?

RP: No, I just offered to do it and they said okay. [laughter]

JK: You were in the camp for four-and-a-half months.

RP: Well, then, what happened, after ...

JK: After the bombing of Leipzig.

RP: That took our trolley out.

JK: I would think so, yes.

RP: That took the electricity, and so, we had to walk the whole twelve miles. So, they just got us up earlier and we would walk all the way to the railroad station, and then, go out to fix [the rails]. ... That had a bigger toll on us, because most of us ... were starting to [wear down], the longer day and the more walking before going to work, and then, walking all the way home. Most of us got one thing or another. Some got injured because the German people were incensed that our guys had ruined their homes, ... that they would throw stuff at us when we were walking to and from the railroad station. ... So, some got hurt, some got sick, many got malnutrition and dysentery, including me. ... There was, like, an infirmary that was being run by ... a couple of

British doctors and a couple of British medics and they took me there and I was there for, I think, about ten days or two weeks while I recovered. ... Then, they shipped me and some others out to join a group of American prisoners that were on a farm out in nowhere, you know, farmland. They moved us and the guards out there. There, we had about a thousand Americans and they moved us as they ran out of either food or water, if they ran the pump dry or they got no more food out of the fields and stuff. They would move us, but always closer to the Americans than to the Russians, because, when the war was over, they wanted to be captured by the Americans, not the Russians. ... So, we were out on these farms, I don't know, a couple of weeks, I guess. ... What they would do, one day, we had this, you know the big milk cans? Well, we had those and we ran the well dry on the farm we're at, and so, they were having us take one across and get water from the farm across the street. Another guy and myself, it was our turn to go over and get water. When we got around the back of the farm where the pump was, we noticed the guards couldn't see us. So, we sat the can down and took off and we walked for thirty-six hours. Then, we came across an American jeep and they took us back to their outpost, and the next day, they sent a whole convoy of trucks in to pick up the whole thousands of the guys. The German guards offered no resistance, because they'd rather be there than ...

JK: Than with the Russians?

RP: If SS [*Schutzstaffel*] troops came around, they would just shoot their own, if they were not doing what they're supposed to.

JK: In Leipzig, during the bombing, you said that the POWs were left outside while the soldiers and the civilians went into the bomb shelters. Did some of the soldiers who were guarding the POWs stay outside?

RP: They'd stay right by the exit, ... the entrance to a bomb shelter, so that they could still see us. ... Like, if you're in downtown Buffalo, you don't know anything about the place, you don't know how far it is to the American lines, ... if you started moving, you might be worse off than where you are, you know.

JK: During the last few weeks that you were in the prisoner of war camp, did the Germans' attitude towards the POWs change? Like you said before, the Germans would have rather surrendered to the Americans than to the Russians. Did they start to ask you about procedures for surrendering?

RP: Oh, yes, they'd get reports on the radio ... in the farmhouses of what was happening and ... that the Battle of the Bulge was over and the Americans were moving quite rapidly through Germany towards the Russians. ... They knew that the end was inevitable; they just didn't know when it would be over for them. ... To give you an indication of an attitude, when the two of us were going down this road towards the Americans, we knew we were in the right direction towards the Americans we came to a fork in the road. ... There was a farmhouse in the middle of the fork and on the porch was a German soldier necking away with a *fraulein* and we stood there for a couple of minutes; "Should we ask him which way?" Finally, we hollered to him, "Which way, Americano?" and he didn't even stop what he was doing. He just pointed to the right, and so, it was the right road. [laughter]

JK: Were there ever any instances of harsh treatment by the Germans during the time that you were a POW, not necessarily to yourself, but maybe to somebody else in your camp?

RP: No. ... Back when we're first captured, when we were on that march, there were times when you just would say to yourself, "I can't go on." ... Then, they would poke you in the back with the barrel of their gun and say, "(Raus, raus?),," and you'd better, because they weren't leaving any[body behind], at least not alive. That was their orders, ... and so, as much of a struggle it might be to get up and get moving, you did it. ... Basically, as I say, the most harm was done by our own planes. ...

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JK: How did you and your fellow POWs feel about being strafed by Allied planes and being in Leipzig during the bombing? Was there resentment at the time?

RP: On our part?

JK: Yes. Were there mixed emotions?

RP: Well, mixed emotions in the sense that you weren't surprised when you saw that there was no damage in Leipzig. ... It would be unusual for them to get through the whole war without anybody striking them, but, yes, it was frustrating during the bombing. ... Then, the walking afterwards, because, you know, the people cursed us and threw stuff at us, and so on, and you can understand their hurt, but it didn't make it any easier to tolerate the abuse the citizens were heaping on you.

JK: Was that a daily occurrence?

RP: Yes.

JK: Did the German soldiers allow that?

RP: There's not much they could do, except to avoid it themselves.

JK: Was there a Red Cross presence in or around Leipzig at all?

RP: No. We didn't get any Red Cross packages the whole time we were in Leipzig. All we had was what the Germans gave us. In February, just before the bombing, we had a couple of nice days and a couple of guys swapped with Polish forced labor guys, who had more freedom around the city. ... They would come with a coffee cake or some kind of pastry and they swapped a sweater or some piece of clothing that they could then go and either use it or sell it to somebody and, occasionally, somebody would [trade] a treat like that, but not very often.

JK: The forced labor prisoners were not involved with your POW camp at all.

RP: No, they were in Leipzig, but we only saw them at work.

JK: Did you have any contact with them as far as your work?

RP: We had some, but ... in most cases, they were like supervisors. They weren't doing the hard labor work, but ... they had done enough of it that some of them would do the measuring and, you know, things like this with the rails and stuff.

JK: You were filling up the milk cans.

RP: With water

JK: The milk canister with water, and you had gotten away. It took you just thirty-six hours to reach American troops.

RP: Yes.

JK: Did you inform the Americans of the location of the farm? How long was it before everybody else was freed?

RP: The next morning. They sent a convoy out to get them. Yes, we gave them fairly good directions, where to go, and they came back with them that day. In fact I think they might have made two trips, because I don't think they had enough trucks up there, to get them all, but they had them all before the next day was over. ... They were looking for somebody to tell, because they had heard reports that there was a large number of American prisoners some place back there and they didn't know just where until we were their contact to pinpoint where they were, so that they could pick them up.

JK: At that time, the last weeks before you escaped, did you have any idea how close the Americans were?

RP: No.

JK: Could you tell at all, possibly Germans' attitudes in the camp that something was going on and they were close?

RP: No, ... we really had no idea, ... when we started walking, whether we'd be walking for one day or a week. We just were going to take a crack at it. ... The first day, we were going down the road and we saw dust off in the distance and decided we'd better hide until we saw who it is and it was a halftrack with three SS guys in it. If they had seen us, they'd have shot us on sight. They were terrible.

JK: Had you been privy to any of that directly, any SS involvement?

RP: No, normally, they didn't have anything to do with prisoners.

JK: Possibly passing through the camp. Like you said, if they had been in the area and seen how the Germans soldiers were acting with the POWs, they would probably have shot them.

RP: Not by design, anyway, no if they came upon a group, it was only en route to some other place that they were headed.

JK: When the American transports went to pick up the rest of the POWs, did they also take the Polish prisoners?

RP: No, ... the Polish weren't with us. They stayed in Leipzig.

JK: They stayed in Leipzig. Were there any other groups?

RP: Just Americans. This large group was just Americans, but they did bring the German guards back with them, too.

JK: How many German guards were there?

RP: I don't remember now. ... I might just guess maybe ten or twelve.

JK: Was it a constant group? Did they switch or?

RP: No, that was a group. They stayed with us for the several weeks that we're out there in the farms.

JK: Where exactly did you meet up with the American troops after you had escaped from the POW camp?

RP: Well, it was near a place called Nurnberg, not Nuremberg, but Nurnberg and that was a college or a university town. Some of the university buildings were being used by our troops as headquarters and as a field hospital and things like this. ... They'd been there in this one area for a couple of weeks before they could advance. ... They got ahead of some of the other fronts and were waiting for the fronts to catch up to them before they went farther. Then, we were only there a short time and we boarded planes to fly to Camp Lucky Strike, which was in Le Havre, France, and we stayed there about thirty days for rehab. We had constant nourishment, to get us all back as fast as possible before sending us home. We had breakfast at eight o'clock. At ten o'clock, we'd have an eggnog, noon, we'd have lunch, three o'clock, we'd have another eggnog, six o'clock, we'd have supper and, nine o'clock at night, we'd have another eggnog. ... When you have that many eggnogs, ... I looked like I was six months pregnant. [laughter] We just rested right there, we tried to work out and get our physical conditioning back and stuff like that. It was just too much and I'm sure, today, that with the nourishment advancements that they've done, they would have done it differently. They would do it differently than they did it then.

JK: When you were back in France, after you were liberated, did the POWs stay together? Were you all together or were you split up and sent to different places?

RP: Well, we all went the same way, Camp Lucky Strike, which is a big camp in France.

JK: You were there for thirty days. Did you come home immediately after that?

RP: Then, we boarded ships and came back to New York and went home on furlough.

JK: What happened after the furlough?

RP: Well, the first furlough was a POW furlough of forty-five days, and then, we were supposed to go to the Pacific Theater, because the European Theater had ended, but the Pacific Theater hadn't. Well, during that forty-five days, they had ended the Pacific, so, they sent us a telegram giving us a thirty-day extension, and then, report to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for discharge. So, that's what happened. I had another thirty days home, and then, I went to Fort Bragg for a couple of months, until they processed all the forms and drills and more physical stuff.

JK: What did you do after the war, professionally?

RP: I got out in December of '45 and I entered Rutgers in February.

JK: On the GI Bill?

RP: Yes, and I went summers, so that I did four years in three, finishing up in January of '49. ... I was in education with a major in health and physical education and a major in English. ... Many men who were drafted while in upper classes came back and graduated before me, so that teaching jobs were few and far between. ... So, I decided, I still had some GI time, ... I'd go for a Masters degree. ... I contacted three or four schools and Indiana University was the first to respond with all the information. ... They accepted me as a graduate student starting that February. So, I packed up and went to Indiana for three semesters and got my Master's degree. Then, I changed my major from teaching to parks and recreation. ... I took a job in New Jersey. You know where Deal is, down by Asbury Park?

JK: Yes.

RP: Down in Deal, they were just starting a recreation department. Well, I was let go after one year, because it was appeasing to the voters, who wanted something ... when they didn't get it. They eliminated the department one year after starting it. ... I thought, "Geez, that's too political for me, too." I went to work for the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and I worked for the YMCA in four different locations for thirteen-and-a-half years. ... In those days, it was very provincial and Y secretaries were like ministers in many ways and their wives were like ministers wives, expected to be involved. ... I had some parting of the ways over that and a friend of mine helped me get a job with a national fund-raising firm, because I did fund raising with YMCA. So, I was with them for six-and-a-half years. They were headquartered in New York City, but, again, I went out on assignments all over ... the East, between New York and North Carolina, then, an assignment that brought [me] to Buffalo, to campaign for Children's Hospital here. Then, I did one for Roswell Park Cancer Institute, and then, I went with Millard Fillmore Hospital, which is another of the big teaching hospitals here and I was with them for

thirteen-and-a-half years. ... I was vice-president of Medaille College for two years and I went with another fund-raising firm headquartered in Illinois that did work in the States and in Canada. ... I did about the better part of three years in Canada and seven years in the States, a total of ten years with that company, again, never moving from here, because I went on assignment from home. If I was doing a feasibility study, I'd be gone for three weeks; if I was doing a campaign, I'd be there anywhere from six months to a year and that's what I ended up retiring [from].

JK: I think we are just about out of time. I'd just like to thank you for the interview. I know it was a condensed session, but I hope we covered the major points.

RP: Yes, and you'll find that that article was really nicely done that I gave you. So, if you read that, you'll find a little more about the 106th Division, ... because there were criticisms about the 106th and they weren't justified, I mean, the criticism that they surrendered without trying to fight, which was not the case, as I have indicated. The amount of arms they had and ammunition and stuff, they didn't have anything to fight with. So, ... the commanding general was court-martialed, because he told us help was on the way and supplies were on the way when they weren't. ... So, he was reduced from a two-star general to a full colonel after the war because of that. ... He was trying to get us to hold on thinking maybe something would turn, but you can't turn much around when you don't have any ammunition to do it with. ... Hitler was throwing everything he had into pushing the Americans back to the Atlantic Ocean. That was his last ditch effort, ... the Bulge, and there's been other articles written about some of the most vicious fighting in World War II [that] was done. You hear a lot about Anzio and when they first made the landings at Normandy and some of the battles that they had with the Japs in the Pacific and so forth. The Battle of the Bulge ranks up there with them, because the Germans threw everything they had [at us] trying to make one last ditch stand and that's the way it is or was.

JK: Do you have anything else that you would like to add to the tape?

RP: No. I'm quasi-retired. I work at the golf course three days a week and play golf a couple of times a week and try to enjoy life.

JK: Great. Again, thank you very much. I appreciate it. This ends the interview with Robert E. Pope.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Michael Sorge 10/13/04

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/20/04

Reviewed by Robert Pope 11/29/04