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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALVIN H. FAGAN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Archie Fagan on December 2, 2013, in Flemington, New Jersey, in the Flemington Jewish Community Center, which we thank for giving us this space, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for meeting me here.

Archie Fagan: And thank you for having me.

SI: To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

AF: Yes. I was born 1926, February, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to my parents, Nathan and Anna Fagan.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, what do you know about his family background, where the family came from?

AF: Yes. My father came to this country as a boy in 1898. He emigrated from a little town in Russia, near Kiev. As a Jewish boy under persecution, he fled to East Konigsberg in Prussia, and then, ended up in Liverpool, England, and, from there, immigrated to Philadelphia. A steerage ship took him to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

SI: Do you know approximately when he came to the US?

AF: I would say, in my recollection, between 1898 and 1899.

SI: Did he ever talk about the persecution he endured in Czarist Russia?

AF: No, my father was very reticent about that, never talked about the persecution.

SI: Did he ever say what the journey was like going across Europe?

AF: No. He never recounted the roadblocks or the headwinds he encountered on his trip out of persecution into the land of the free, the USA.

SI: Did he come alone or with family members?

AF: I believe he came with some members of his family, yes.

SI: Did most of his family eventually come over to the US or did they remain in that area?

AF: My father came from a large family and many of his elderly sisters did not want to emigrate out of Russia, yes.

SI: Do you know why they came to the Philadelphia area?

AF: They came to the Philadelphia area because the boat they were on, a steerage boat, took them to Philadelphia, instead of any other port of entry.

SI: Before we continue with his side of the family, what do you know about your mother's side of the family?

AF: My mother's side of the family came from Bialystok, Poland, which was part of the Russian Empire at that time. She came as a small child. Her boat also took them to Philadelphia.

SI: Did she come with her family? I assume she did, if she was young.

AF: Yes, she was a little girl, she came with family.

SI: Did she have any memories of Bialystok?

AF: No.

SI: Growing up, did you know your grandparents on either side?

AF: I knew my grandparents only on my mother's side.

SI: Did they ever talk about the old country, what it was like?

AF: No, but I knew some of their background that they endured when they lived in the old county.

SI: Do you know approximately when she came over to the US?

AF: Also between 1898 and 1900.

SI: When your father's family came to Philadelphia, do you know what area of the city they settled in?

AF: Yes. They settled in Old Philadelphia, around the port, [Old City, Philadelphia], but that was where the recent immigrants settled because that's all they could afford, was the lower end of town at the port, yes.

SI: Did your mother's family also settle in that area?

AF: Yes. They settled in that area also, because that was where the port of entry was and where they put their feet down in the New World.

SI: Did your father ever tell you about what it was like getting established here in the US, what his life was like?

AF: He said it was hard. As a young man, he would work, sometimes, fourteen hours a day. He had to wring his shirt out twice because of the sweat in order to make a living, in order to establish himself in the New World. They were taught to work and to save.

SI: What did he do?

AF: My father was a baker. His mother, in the old country, in order to feed her family, baked cakes and pastries and sold it to the non-Jewish part of the town. So, when they came to the New World, they became bakers.

SI: What about your mother's side of the family? Were they able to establish themselves in a business or anything like that?

AF: My mother's side of the family, they were more like artisans or workmen, like pavers or bricklayers. They were more like manual workers, yes.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

AF: We of the Jewish iteration, at that time, they had a marriage broker. So, there was a marriage broker that brought my mother and my father together and they were married in Philadelphia in 1910.

SI: You were born in 1926.

AF: Yes.

SI: Do you have older brothers or siblings?

AF: Yes, I'm number six. I have--I had--five elderly siblings. I had twin sisters, an older sister and a brother, who's still alive, yes.

SI: You were the youngest.

AF: No. There's two siblings that came after me.

SI: When you were growing up, was it still in this section of Philadelphia by the port or had your family moved around?

AF: My family did move around, in order to improve their economic conditions. My father was a baker, and then, he decided to become a merchant and open up a food mart, a little grocery store. So, we moved from the port, I remember, to Tenth and Jefferson Street, a little north in Philadelphia, yes.

SI: He had a grocery store.

AF: He had a grocery store there, yes. My father and mother had a grocery store at Tenth and Jefferson in Philadelphia.

SI: Did you live above the store?

AF: Yes, I was born there. We lived above the store.

SI: What was that neighborhood like? Would you say it was a melting pot? Was it mostly a Jewish community?

AF: No. It wasn't a Jewish community. It was a melting pot, people of all races and, also, recent immigrants to the country. America was in a state of flux then. With the persecution in the Old World, many of the immigrants came to the big cities. They settled in the big cities, like New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore.

SI: Can you give me a sense of what your household was like growing up? For example, was religion a big part of your household life?

AF: We grew up, as children, my mother and father were Orthodox Jewish people. My mother kept kosher. She had two sets of dishes, one for milk and one for meat. We were taught to give charity, to the little blue box, the Jewish National Fund. It was a hard upbringing. My mother and father worked almost around the clock. We grew up, yes, we had to take hand-me-downs from the older siblings there, but we never went hungry. We were never poor. We always had food on the table. I remember, my mother, we didn't have too many facilities, so, she would bathe me as a child in the sink. We made do with what we had.

SI: Did the grocery store sell kosher food or was it for the general public?

AF: No, it was to the general public. We had a very non-Jewish population in that area, yes.

SI: Did you and your siblings, maybe when you were a little bit older, ever have to work or do chores around the store?

AF: Yes. I remember, as a little boy, it was still during Prohibition and I had a big flour wagon, I delivered groceries from my father's store to the speakeasies. I had to knock on the door and they would open the peephole and I told them I was from Fagan's Grocery Store. During Prohibition, it was still before 1934, yes. [Editor's Note: The era of Prohibition began on January 17, 1920, with the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, set in motion by the Volstead Act. It ended with the ratification of the Twenty-First Amendment to the US Constitution on December 5, 1933.]

SI: How did the Great Depression affect your family and the neighborhood?

AF: It was painful. You had over twenty-five percent unemployed. I remember, my father and mother would have to cash--the government gave out welfare orders, so that the people would not go starve. I remember, there were soup kitchens, people would line up. You had a lot of poverty and inequality and privation.

SI: Would people who were down on their luck try to get food from your family store?

AF: Yes, they would come for a meal. My mother and father never denied anybody. They would knock on the doors when we were closed and my mother would feed them.

SI: I know people in similar businesses had to carry a lot of their customers on credit.

AF: That's right. I remember, we had a book and we would wait until they brought in the welfare order or they would get some pay from what little job they had. My father was hard of hearing and he did the manual work; my mother did the bookkeeping.

SI: Where did your family go for religious services, to temple?

AF: I remember, there was a Jewish synagogue. My mother and father were religious, so, when it came to the High Holidays, like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they would close the store. Somehow, they got to a synagogue at Fifth and Lombard Street in Philadelphia. It was the B'nai Abraham, I remember, my memory, and they would pray there, at Fifth and Lombard Street in Old Philadelphia. There, my mother would see her family and my father would see his family. They were still located in that area.

SI: Did other activities center around the synagogue, such as youth groups?

AF: They may have, but I was not part of it. I don't remember any youth groups, yes.

SI: When you were growing up, from eight or so to when you were a teenager, was your life mostly going to school and working in the store or did you have other outlets, other things you would do?

AF: Well, when my next sister came, my mother and father, we already had five siblings, and so, my mother and father decided to send me to my grandparents, from Tenth and Jefferson to Sixth and Spruce, where they lived at in Old Philadelphia. So, I was farmed out during the Depression. I went to school at, I remember, the McCall School at Sixth and Delancey, and that's where I grew up as a little boy and got educated, in the first and second grades.

SI: When you were living with your grandparents, how often would you see your parents?

AF: Oh, my mother would always come down when she had a day off or didn't work. She would come down to see her mother and father, yes, who were getting very old at that time, because they were old when they came to this country. So, they were aging, but they were very religious, yes.

SI: Did your grandfather still work?

AF: No. He spent most of his time praying, yes. Some of their children supported their mother and father. They went to work in the mechanical business, like paving and bricklaying. So, they were able to support their parents and feed them, at Sixth and Spruce, where I lived with them, yes.

SI: Did your grandparents speak English or did they speak Yiddish in the house?

AF: They spoke mainly Yiddish, yes.

SI: Would you say that you became well-versed in Yiddish, fluent?

AF: Yes. Well, I wouldn't say fluent, but my mother and father and my grandparents always spoke Yiddish to me. I had to learn English in public school.

SI: Given that your grandparents were so religious, did they try to teach you how to read Hebrew, that sort of thing?

AF: Well, I did go to Hebrew school, yes, and I was *bar mitzvah*-ed at thirteen. I'm not necessarily educated in the Hebrew religion, but I am educated as a Jewish boy. I went through the rituals of learning to become a man at the age of thirteen, as dictated by the scriptures of our religion.

SI: Living with your grandparents, would you have to do a lot of chores or help them out?

AF: They were good to me. They fed me, I went to school, I prayed. I just had a leisurely life as a little boy with them. They didn't demand too much of me. They were more my guardians.

SI: Were you the only grandchild there?

AF: As I remember, yes, but there was other cousins I had that lived in the vicinity, yes.

SI: Was the McCall School the first school you went to?

AF: Yes. The McCall School at Sixth and Delancey was a Philadelphia public school.

SI: What do you remember about that school?

AF: Very little. I was very little. They were hard times. I remember, the children would come to school with just cardboard in their shoes that covered the holes. They would come with mustard sandwiches, because they couldn't afford meat. It was hard times at that time, yes, but I don't remember any specific events of my childhood at the McCall School.

SI: What was the next school that you went to?

AF: When I came back to my mother and father, my mother and father sold the store at Tenth and Jefferson and moved to 40th and Lancaster Avenue in Philadelphia, in West Philadelphia. They were moving up a little bit in the socioeconomic scale. They were saving their money, working hard, and a dollar during the Depression was worth about fifty dollars now. It was during the depressed [period]. Everything was depressed, the value of money, the value of clothes, the value of food. That's what a depression is. They moved to 40th and Lancaster

Avenue and my next school I went to was the Blaine School at 37th and Haverford Avenue. My memory is still acute of those events, yes.

SI: Do you have any memories of that school?

AF: I have very little memories of that school. It was a very interim period that is almost a blank in my life, yes.

SI: What would you do for fun when you had the chance? What were your favorite activities?

AF: Well, we would read and, in Philadelphia, during the Depression, in the summertime, they had "free swimmies," they were called. So, my brother would take me to the swimmies there and we would swim. It was free, run by the City of Philadelphia. Then, I had a sister who loved to go to the movies, because that was the great movie time, during the '30s, when you had great actors like Clark Gable, Spencer Tracey, Lana Turner, Alice Faye. These were great times for the movies. So, she would take me on the #3 Trolley in Philadelphia, from West Philadelphia across to Center Philadelphia, where we would go to either the Stanley or the Fox movies to see these great films. I remember, we would only pay ten cents. That's how things were depressed at that time, but we saw great movies for ten cents. I don't remember playing with other children during that time, no.

SI: You described the neighborhood as a mixture. Would you say you faced any anti-Semitism at that time?

AF: Well, let's face it, in reality, there's always anti-Semitism, but my mother and father were very tolerant people. In order to stay in business, they had to cater to people of all races, all religions. So, we were brought up to be tolerant and kind to everybody. There were times we had, there was anti-Semitism, but I learned to handle that without getting into any brawls, yes.

SI: As you got a little older, in the late 1930s, with Nazism growing in Europe, there were also groups like the *Bund* here in America. Do you remember hearing about them or maybe seeing marches in Philadelphia?

AF: Yes. During that time, as I was getting older, becoming a young teenager, I remember the German-American *Bund* under Fritz Kuhn. I still remember his name. They ran their *Bunds* in Bucks County, I remember. Then, they were preaching anti-Semitism, anti-Jewish slurs, but, you see, we're a land of freedom and free speech, and so, they were allowed to assemble and propagate and to disseminate their poisonous messages, yes. [Editor's Note: The German-American *Bund*, a pro-Nazi group based on the earlier Friends of New Germany, operated from 1936 until December 1941, when it was outlawed.]

SI: Was there any action closer to home, like people causing trouble in the neighborhood?

AF: No. We grew up in a multicultural [neighborhood] and, out in West Philadelphia, there was a preponderance of blacks and whites. It was a multicultural, multiracial neighborhood that we catered to and my mother and father, during the Depression, did well there, handling the welfare

orders, that people came [with], that were given to the poor by the government, that they could buy staples like butter, cheese, flour, Crisco. They couldn't buy the expensive items that they may be able to buy now, yes.

SI: Around your dinner table, so-to-speak, would your parents talk with you about world events or national events?

AF: We always discussed them. Well, when I went to school at that time, part of the curriculum was current events. So, I brought that home and I'd discuss it as best I could with my siblings. We were aware what was going on in the world, yes, we were.

SI: Do you remember having discussions about the threat posed by Hitler and the Nazis in Germany?

AF: Well, we did hear about *Kristallnacht* in 1938. We heard all the bad news, but we didn't get the full picture, though, of what was going on in the Holocaust there. We never got the full picture, because the media in this country didn't disseminate all that bad news, but we did get fringes, little snips from Associated Press and United Press that brought in some of the news and some of the reporters and correspondents. William L. Shirer wrote his famous book at that time, in 1939, *The Rise and Fall of the Reich*, yes. [Editor's Note: On the night of November 9-10, 1938, SA stormtroopers and German civilians, with the cooperation of the Nazi regime, carried out a series of attacks against Jewish communities throughout Germany and Austria in which they killed ninety-one people, rounded up and incarcerated over thirty thousand men in concentration camps and destroyed many synagogues and Jewish homes and businesses, an event that became known as *Kristallnacht*. William L. Shirer published *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in 1960; Mr. Fagan is most likely thinking of his 1941 book *Berlin Diary*.]

SI: I was also curious if you were aware of new refugees coming into the community.

AF: Yes. We were aware of other refugees coming in later in the '30s, yes.

SI: Did you get to know any of them or have any contact with them?

AF: Yes. I remember, as we improved our economic condition, my mother bought a home in a Jewish neighborhood around 1940, I remember, in Strawberry Mansion in Philadelphia. It was a strictly Jewish neighborhood. I remember, my mother--we had a large home at that time--my mother, through her astuteness, as she was always financially astute, bought the home and she took in survivors, refugees, from Germany that were coming to this country. She took some of them and put them on the third floor and we would take care of them.

SI: What do you remember about these folks?

AF: They were hard-working, they were professionals. I know that they were either doctors, German-Jewish doctors, or lawyers who had an education. So, I learned to speak with them and they, right away, went to work in this country to find employment. Yes, they paid their way, yes, sir.

SI: Did they ever tell you any stories about what was happening in Europe?

AF: They did in some way, but I guess I wasn't old enough to take all the brutality and the savagery, and the diabolical incidents, I don't remember them talking about. I guess they wanted to forget about it. They were recent people that fled the tyranny and came to this country and they were let in. Because of their education and their background, they were let in under a visa, yes.

SI: Did your family ever talk about FDR and his policies?

AF: Yes, they did.

SI: What was their opinion of FDR?

AF: Well, that's a good question. My mother and father were always small business people, and so, they were more of the Conservative Republican bias there. They respected [him]. I remember, people in the neighborhood thought FDR was the Messiah, that he was the man, and so, they voted for him one hundred percent, but my mother and father were a few of the Republicans in our neighborhood who voted Republican, yes. It was mainly a Democratic area among the Jewish people. FDR was the man of the day and of the decade, yes.

SI: Before you went into the service, had you ever had a chance to travel outside the Philadelphia area?

AF: I remember, one summer, through the YMCA, they had a program for young Jewish boys who were needy. They would send them to a summer camp. I went there, I remember, one time and I didn't like it, and so, they sent me back to my parents. I was homesick. That's the only time I was out of my parents' care until I went into the Army, yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: As a teenager, did you continue to work at your father's store? Did you find other jobs?

AF: Yes, I did. I worked at my father's store until my brother was drafted in 1941, and so, we had to sell the store in West Philadelphia and we came to live in Strawberry Mansion in North Philadelphia. I remember getting a job. I worked in a drug store nearby for twenty-five cents an hour, making sodas and milkshakes and banana splits. As I got older, while I went from junior high to high school, I matriculated to Central High School on Ogontz and Olney Avenue. So, during that summer, I remember working for the United News Company, working the trains from Camden to Atlantic City, selling James saltwater taffy and newspapers. As I got a little older, near my senior year at Central High, I think it was around 1943, I took a job with the US Signal Corps on Erie Avenue. They needed help during the rearmament for war; we were in war already. So, I worked at the Signal Corps until I graduated Central High in 1944.

SI: I have heard Central High in Philadelphia was a pretty good school.

AF: Yes. It was, actually, an all-boys school that was a preparatory school, but I was able to get in there and able to graduate in June of 1944, not at the top of my class, though. [laughter]

SI: You had this job going from Camden to Atlantic City, selling items on the train.

AF: Yes.

SI: Would you commute from Philadelphia every day?

AF: Yes, I would commute, take the trolley, from West Philadelphia, or where I was in North Philadelphia, took the trolley car, either the #9 or #10, and go to pick-up the ferry at Front and Market Street and take me to Camden. For a nickel, I could go a long way. That's what the prices were during the Depression.

SI: Was that the summer before Pearl Harbor?

AF: Now, Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941. My memory is not that clear, but I would say around that time, yes.

SI: That last six months before America entered the war, was there a lot of talk about America potentially getting into the war in Europe?

AF: Yes. There was a lot of pros and cons. We had what was known in this country as isolationists, who felt that we shouldn't get involved in Europe, that we didn't have to fight in Europe and shed American blood, but FDR, in his wisdom, started Lend-Lease and we started to help the British, who were endangered when France fell in May of 1940. France fell under the *Blitzkrieg*. England and the UK were beleaguered right now, because they were in danger of being invaded by the Nazi hordes. So, the British Royal Air Force, in which [Winston] Churchill claimed, "Never did so few do so much to save so many," the RAF, and the British, at that time, had perfected radar, and so, it helped them to fight off the German *Luftwaffe* [air force] that started to bomb British cities, yes. [Editor's Note: In March 1941, the Lend-Lease program opened a steady channel of supplies and war materiel from the United States to the Allies.]

SI: Were you listening to these events on the radio?

AF: Yes, we were listening to those events. So, there were people in this country that almost were divided, to become peace and also to enter. It was not until the Japanese hit us at Pearl Harbor did we have one hundred percent to enter the war, yes.

SI: Were your parents for or against getting involved in the war?

AF: My parents were really pacifists. They endured privation, persecution, brutality, but they were sensitive to the needs of humanity. They hated persecution, of course, they hated the German dictatorship and what was going on. We feared, with the French falling, that the British were endangered. So, they hated war, but they defended America's right to defend itself.

SI: Where were you when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor being attacked?

AF: That's a good question. It was a Sunday in 1941; I think I was around fifteen years old. My mother had an old Zenith radio. We heard it around one o'clock in the afternoon that the Japanese had hit Pearl Harbor, Battleship Row, and there was a lot of burning and devastation, that they destroyed our airfield there, the barracks. So, we knew that we were at war, yes. We heard it on Sunday, December the 7th, around one PM in Philadelphia, yes.

SI: Was there any immediate reaction in your neighborhood? Was there any fear or panic?

AF: Well, there was no fear or panic, but, when Roosevelt came to Congress the next day to declare war, and then, Germany declared war on us two or three days later, they started to organize Civil Defense in our neighborhood, in which we had to blackout the windows. My brother-in-law became in charge of the Civil Defense area in our neighborhood. So, we knew we were at war, yes. There was no panic, but there was fear, yes.

SI: Was your brother already in the service?

AF: No, I don't remember. I believe he was drafted later in 1941.

SI: That must have been cause for concern for your parents.

AF: Yes, it was, yes, it was. My mother was in tears. My father was more stoic; he knew what war is and what persecution is and what brutality is and what savagery is. My mother, as a mother, was more sensitive, yes. Men are more steeled to war than women are, yes.

SI: After your father sold the store, did he get another store in Strawberry Mansion? What did he do after that?

AF: Another good question. There was a need of labor at that time and my father, I don't know, must've been in his fifties, late fifties, he took a job at the Philadelphia Naval Yard and would walk every day to the Philadelphia Naval Yard to work on the ships there.

SI: How long of a walk was that?

AF: Miles, but my father was a walker, a very strong man. He could tear a telephone book in half, that's how strong he was.

SI: What kind of work did he do in the shipyard?

AF: I guess all kinds of labor work. He was a good carpenter, too. He did carpentry work. He was an excellent carpenter, very good woodworker. My father was very talented with manual labor and, also, a good businessman. Yes, he was multitalented.

SI: Did your mother ever work outside the home, aside from working in the store?

AF: Never. She took care of eight children. That's a job.

SI: Do you have any other memories about how the war changed your neighborhood, how its impact could be felt in your life before you entered the service?

AF: Well, with the war came rationing, and so, certain things became unavailable. My father was working and my brother, later in '41, was drafted. There were shortages. We had no car, so, we didn't have to worry about gas rationing, but there was food rationing, yes, there was. Most of it went for the war effort, but we survived. My mother could make dinner out of just potatoes, that's how good of a cook she was, yes. There was privation. During war, most of the essentials went to the Army, yes.

SI: You said you got your job with the Signal Corps in 1942, or was it 1943?

AF: No, '43, as I remember, yes.

SI: What were you doing with the Signal Corps?

AF: Just strictly labor, carrying things around to different places. They just needed hands. I'm not technical. I'm more of a learner and a speaker; I'm not good with my hands. I just did a lot of things that they told me to do. "Yes, sir," I did it, but it was a job that paid well. They needed help. Most of the people were in the Army or the Navy; they needed civilian help. I was still a teenager, so, I was employable, yes.

SI: Where was the building located?

AF: The building, I remember, was located around 29th and Erie Avenue in North Philadelphia, yes. I would take the trolley car or the bus there for a nickel, and I was only paid once a month by the government, so, we had to make things work out financially.

SI: Were there any ways that your school was affected by the war?

AF: Yes. I was at Central High at that time and we had volunteers that raised money and sent gift packages to the troops, yes.

SI: Did they have any classes designed to get you ready to go into the service or how to do a special skill related to the war, like physical training classes?

AF: We had physical training, we had PT, but we had no specific course. It was strictly an academic high school, for learning, but we did have physical therapy, yes, to strengthen us, but nothing that trained us to carry a gun, though. I didn't get that until basic training camp, yes.

SI: Some schools had classes in Morse code. Did you have anything like that?

AF: No.

SI: Obviously, the war was a looming event, but, if it had not been there, did you have a sense of what you wanted to do with your life? Did you want to go to college or into a certain career?

AF: I did know that I wanted to go to college. After that, I was always in retailing. My mother and father were retailers, business people. I knew that I needed to go to college in order to better myself, because that was part of our culture in my religion and in my family. I didn't aspire to greatness or to any fame or fortune. I knew I was going to work and make a living and raise a family. That was endemic to my religion, yes.

SI: With all the pressures of the war, was there any opportunity to socialize? Did they still have dances?

AF: Sure. I still went to my prom. We still had that, but we had very limited resources. We still had to contribute to pay for the DJ. I had to hire a tuxedo. Yes, we still lived, we still had a social life, but it still was colored by the war, though, yes, put a blanket on any joy or fun.

SI: Do you recall, in your neighborhood, maybe even in your family, if anybody got wounded or killed, was there any reaction if someone lost a son or a daughter?

AF: Yes. In my neighborhood, it was a Jewish neighborhood and some of them were killed. Flags were put out and the sorrow was felt in the neighborhood. We went over to give them our condolences, yes. There was sadness; it was wartime. We were fighting [on] two fronts, in the Pacific and in the European Theater, yes. There were casualties, missing-in-action, killed-in-action; it affected our neighborhood, yes.

SI: When you moved to Strawberry Mansion, did you go to a different synagogue?

AF: Yes. I remember going to the B'Nai Jeshurun at 33rd and Diamond Street in Strawberry Mansion. We went to the B'Nai Jeshurun synagogue. I remember the name, yes.

SI: Was that also an Orthodox synagogue?

AF: It was not Orthodox, it was Conservative. It was middle of the road. It was more modified than for the strictly Orthodox or the strictly Reformed. It was more moderate, in the center.

SI: Your grandparents' generation was probably strictly Orthodox.

AF: Yes.

SI: Would you say it was during your parents' generation that they became more Conservative?

AF: Yes. I'm afraid--well, let's be honest--from Orthodoxy, the trend in coming into America and assimilating with the general population, they moved from the Orthodoxy of the right to the Conservativism of the center, but not to the progressivism of the Reform.

SI: You graduated in June of 1944.

AF: Correct.

SI: How soon after were you getting draft notices?

AF: Another good question. Under federal law, we had to register for the draft. There was a national draft law, national subscription. So, when I reached seventeen, I had to register at our local draft board and, when I graduated high school, a week or two later, I received a letter from Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Greetings, report for induction."

SI: Once you reported, can you take me through the steps of going through your induction, your physical?

AF: Yes. Well, as I remember, I reported--when I left my home on that day, my mother was terribly [upset]. She was on her knees; now, her second son was going. It was hard, but I did not look back. I just couldn't look back. So, I walked to the draft board, was maybe one or two blocks away, and I told them, "I'm here." I just had a little bag of what little belongings [I had]. They gave me a token, I remember, to ride the #9 Trolley Car to 32nd and Lancaster Avenue, was the US Army induction center there. I reported. They swore me in, with a number of other men. I remember one of the drill sergeants came over to me and he asked me, after I was given this oath of allegiance to the Constitution, what service I would like to be drafted into. I told him, "I'd like to go into the Navy," but he says, "Buddy, you're in the Army now." From there, we walked to 32nd Street and Market Street, where they had the Thirtieth Street Pennsylvania Train Station, and that took me to [Fort] Indiantown Gap, where they gave me clothes and processed me. I stayed there, I think, for a couple of weeks until we got indoctrinated. From there, we were taken by train to Macon, Georgia, Camp Wheeler, Georgia, sometime in June, I don't remember the date, or early July, yes.

SI: How much of a shock was it to go from civilian life, with all of its freedoms, to the regimentation of the service, particularly when you went to Indiantown Gap, with so many people going through the same thing?

AF: Yes, I had anxiety. I didn't know. Look, as a boy of seventeen, our feelings are limited to experiences that we had in life. I didn't know what was coming, but I knew that a war was going on and I accepted whatever would come. I really was almost insensitive to any pain I had, anxiety more than pain, or fear, anxiety, yes.

SI: Did anything strike you right away about now being under orders? Was that something you took to well? What about the food, the bedding and other things?

AF: Well, it was a different environment, a different culture, but I was used to taking orders. My father was very strict and authoritarian. So, I had no trouble with the discipline. I had to get used to the new bedding, how to make a bed. I had to get used to the new regimentation. It took time, but I was amenable to it. I handled it, yes.

SI: Tell me about the trip down to Macon, Georgia.

AF: That's another good question, yes. We went by train, I remember. They picked up a lot of people as we went down and made stops from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, where it changed. We went from the Pennsylvania to the Southern Railroad. We picked up the Southern Railroad. My memory is excellent. I remember, they brought over new inductees at that time. Many of them were poor and many of them had colds, and so, when I got to Macon, Georgia, Camp Wheeler, we got off the train, I was sick already. I had, I don't know, pneumonia or something. As soon as I got there, they sent me to a barracks and I had to go to sick call, because I had a terrible fever. So, they sent me to the base hospital. There, they started to give me--they didn't have penicillin, they had sulfa drugs at that time. I remember, the nurse--we didn't have nurses, they had Army WACs there, Women's Army Corps, that were corpsmen, or not corpsmen, but medics--they gave me a shot of sulfa. [Editor's Note: Sulfonamides are a group of drugs used to kill bacteria. Powdered sulfa drugs were included in US Armed Forces first aid kits during World War II for use in preventing the infection of wounds.] In a couple of days, I came back to health. When I got back to my outfit at Camp Wheeler, I was no longer in that group. They put me into another barracks and I stayed with that group for another sixteen weeks of basic training.

SI: What stands out about your basic training in Camp Wheeler?

AF: It was hard. We were up at five in the morning at reveille. I had to learn to use the bathroom with other people, without privacy. I had to get used to that. Everything was authoritarian, breakfast. We had to attend classes in helmets. We had to learn how to use the gun, the M-1. [Editor's Note: The M-1 Garand was the standard American infantry rifle during the Second World War.] I had to learn how to take it apart and put it together blindfolded. It was sixteen weeks of arduous basic training, going under machine-gun fire, under barbed-wire, to train us for the war that we were about to enter, yes. It was hard. During those summer months in Georgia, it was ninety degrees in the shade, but there was no shade. When it rained, the rivers would just run brown. It was a tough physical environment, but it strengthened us and prepared us for the hardships to come.

SI: Does anything stand out in your memory about your drill instructors?

AF: No, nothing in particular. They were tough and, when we would doze a little bit, they would hit us. They were the staff--they would hit us with their staff sticks on our helmet liners. That would wake us up. We were not allowed to fall asleep, because we would wake at five in the morning and we had to be in bed at sundown. It was a hard sixteen weeks of basic training, but nothing stood out. They were tough drill instructors that prepared us for overseas duty.

SI: How did you get along with the other men in your training platoon?

AF: We got along very well. There was no problem there. I remember, during the High Holidays, I was in Georgia at that time, during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We did have a Jewish community, small as it was, in Macon. It was a Southern Jewish community and they welcomed us. I went to pray.

SI: Did anything strike you about the men that you served with there? They must have been from all over the country. How did their lives differ from yours?

AF: Well, they knew I was Jewish, but we didn't have any anti-Semitism. We were all in the same boat together there and there was a certain amount of camaraderie that kept us together. I would say there was more tolerance than intolerance, yes.

SI: After your training was complete at Camp Wheeler, where were you sent to next?

AF: I was given, I think, a seven or ten-day furlough and I remember taking the train. I did get paid twenty-one dollars a month, I think, and I did have money to buy a train ticket. I used to write home that I was coming home and I had a ten-day furlough, or seven days, I forget. I went from Macon, Georgia, at the train station, up to Washington, on the Southern and transferred to the Pennsylvania at the Union Station in Washington and came to Philadelphia. There, my brother-in-law met me to take me to my home. I stayed with my mother and father for seven days. The time went very fast and that was it. Nothing stood out in those seven days of furlough, but I knew when it was over that I had to catch a bus. My brother-in-law took me down to the Greyhound bus station in Philadelphia and I took the bus to Washington. There, there was an Army bus waiting for me, to take me to Camp Pickett in Petersburg, Virginia. There, I was there for about two or three weeks, waiting for orders to come, for a boat to come in to take us to Europe, yes. Those two, three weeks were tough weeks of just drilling and waiting for the inevitable, yes.

SI: What was your brother doing at this point? Did you know?

AF: Yes, I knew. I didn't see my brother during the war for about four or five years, but he was in the Air Corps. He took his Air Corps training in Dayton, Ohio, in which he became an engine mechanic. So, he went overseas, I forget, 1942, and was stationed [at] one of the US airbases to repair American B-49s or B-57s or PT-47s, to repair them. They're going bombing and strafing in Europe, yes, but I did communicate with him for about four years, yes.

SI: You were in Camp Pickett and Macon, Georgia, for a little bit. Did you ever get a chance to go off the base and see what the country was like?

AF: Yes, only once. While I was in basic training, they gave me a weekend pass to go to Atlanta. I was interested in seeing the capitol of Georgia and they talk so much about Peachtree Street--that was a famous street in Atlanta. So, I took the bus from Macon, Georgia, to Atlanta, by myself. I just stood on the corner, walked around and maybe found a place to get a sandwich or a cup of coffee, smoke a cigarette--I was smoking cigarettes at the time--and I couldn't wait for the bus to come back to take me back to camp. Yes, I had a lonely day in Atlanta, but at least I saw Atlanta and Peachtree Street. They told me all the girls were pretty on Peachtree Street, so, I was waiting for it, but did not see any, on a Sunday, yes. [laughter]

SI: Did you see any of the signs of segregation there? Were you aware of that at the time?

AF: No. I didn't even think about segregation or Civil Rights. I was thinking more about the war.

SI: From Camp Pickett, tell me about getting on the ship.

AF: Good question there. You're bringing back really good memories that are very clear in my memory. We were taken to Newport News, Virginia, where a boat was waiting for us called the SS *West Point*. It was the former luxury-liner called the SS *America* that was reconditioned and made into a troopship called the USS *West Point*. [Editor's Note: The USS *West Point* (AP-23) was originally the United States Lines ' flagship *America*.] I remember, I had my duffle bag, my rifle, my helmet and I remember waiting in line, waiting to go up the gangplank. I remember the Red Cross was there, Red Cross ladies were there in their uniforms, not giving us coffee but selling us coffee. I didn't have fifteen cents for a cup of coffee. I'll leave that for you to think about the Red Cross. I went up the gangplank and the Colonel there said, "Last name and middle initial," I remember. He said, "Fagan." I said, "Alvin, that is my baptismal name." We were given quarters all the way down. The nurses and the officers were given higher quarters on the top of the ship, we were down in the engine room, I remember, as new replacements. That's how I remember those times, unless you want more information, what it took to go over to France.

SI: These must have been pretty cramped quarters.

AF: Yes. They were cramped quarters. I remember, there were tiers of bunks and they gave us paper books to read. I remember, the first book I read was *God's Little Acre*. It was supposed to be a lascivious book at that time by, I think his name was John Robert Faulkner [Erskine Caldwell]. I read that book and we would go up to the galley, three or four decks up, for chow, but I was seasick and I couldn't eat. I managed. Then, we had to come up one time to the top to get our shots from the Navy corpsmen on the ship, giving us shots for typhoid, typhus, for all those shots that we would get. We went over in convoy; it took us about seven days in convoy. We were not allowed to smoke, but, sometimes, during the trip, the smoking lamp was lit, they would say. We would smoke a cigarette. I was definitely seasick, going over seven days, until I got to Le Havre, France, which was bombed out at the time, yes.

SI: What month did you get to Le Havre?

AF: I got to Le Havre, I think, in late November or early December. More like early December, we landed. I remember getting off the ship and it was pontoon bridges. The port was completely bombed out, so, we came in on pontoon bridges. We entered what was known [as], they gave us cigarette camps, to receive us and to condition us and to give us clothing and give us new mess kits, new gear. I went in Camp Pall Mall, I remember. You're going back sixty-nine years, but my memory is still very clear. I was there and we had to guard, I remember, German POWs. They gave me--I had--my M-1 and I had to guard German POWs that were captured when we landed in Normandy six months earlier, in June of '44, yes. I don't know how long I was in Camp Pall Mall, but they picked us up. We had to go to the train station in Le Havre and they took us by forty-and-eights up to Paris, where I was conditioned further for the next trip up.

SI: At this point, you were just a replacement.

AF: I was just an infantry replacement, yes.

SI: When you got to Paris, were you allowed out in the city?

AF: No. We were fed in Paris by the French people, and then, we were given warm winter clothing there. From the forty-and-eights, we had to walk; there was no trucks or anything. We had to make the march from north of Paris. We were taken by trucks to north of Paris and there, unloaded, and had to walk for twenty-four hours, with short stops, up to the Belgian border. The news came down that the Germans had broken through at the Battle of the Bulge, yes. [Editor's Note: The Battle of the Bulge, also known as the Von Rundstedt Offensive or Ardennes Offensive, was the failed German attempt to break through the Allied lines in the Ardennes Forest in Luxembourg and Belgium launched on December 16, 1944, and which lasted into late January 1945.]

SI: Before the Bulge, do you have a memory of what you thought would happen in the war? A lot of people said the war would be over by Christmas. Did you have that sense?

AF: No. I didn't hear any of that sense; the war was still going on. There was very much discord and a little disorganization when the news came that the Germans had broken through, yes. We were sent up to relieve the pressure there, yes.

SI: When were you assigned to the Fourth Armored Division?

AF: I went up, we marched, and I didn't get to the outskirts of Bastogne, I don't know, several miles out, that I was assigned to Headquarters of the Fourth Armored Division, Headquarters Company. They called out my name, "Headquarters, Fourth Armored Division," and I left all the other guys and went alone, by myself, to the Headquarters Company. Others were assigned to the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, the 66th Tank Battalion. From there, they were disassembled and we were given special assignments.

SI: What were your first couple of days like with Headquarters?

AF: Well, I was introduced to some of the elder men there. They told me of their experiences. I was a new replacement and they were very good to me. They were glad to see me as replacements. They needed replacements--they had took a beating--but, usually, the Fourth Armored Division was Patton's favorite division. We were the ones that broke the encirclement. The men of the 101st Airborne who were encircled at Bastogne never admitted that we relieved them and saved their lives there. If you saw *Band of Brothers* on the History Channel, they get all the glory. The Fourth didn't get any glory, but we were the ones that were instrumental. Not me alone, I'm not a hero--I was not in the front lines. I was rear echelon, but it was the Fourth, the 66th Tank Battalion and the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, that saved the day, yes, and a few other outfits also.

SI: When you joined Headquarters, were they still pressing towards Bastogne or had they already broken through?

AF: Well, the news came, when I got there, that the replacements were up and that we reorganized and were throwing them back. The Germans wanted to get their armored *Blitzkrieg*, they had the *Blitzkrieg,* and their tanks wanted to get to the Meuse River, but, somehow, they broke down. We stalled them, two or three days, where they couldn't get to the Meuse River, and they were running out of supplies, out of petrol for their tanks, and they had to abandon their tanks. We drove them back. The Fourth Armored Division and other Americans regrouped and drove them back, around Christmastime or thereafter. They broke through around the 14th of December, but the troops of the Fourth, of the Tenth and other outfits drove them back, and some of the British came down. General, the British general …

SI: Montgomery?

AF: Montgomery, yes, General Montgomery, some of his outfit came down to relieve the pressure, yes. There was a certain amount of antagonism and competitiveness between Patton and Montgomery. It was not a sweet relationship. Patton didn't want any relief--he could do it himself, with his Fourth--but we needed help, sure. We had to drive the Germans back and we captured a number of Germans. Since I speak Yiddish, which is similar to German, I was able to interrogate some of the German prisoners that we took when they were driven back, yes.

SI: Was that what your job was?

AF: Not specifically. It's just to carry messages, to do clerical work, between the Headquarters and the command post. There were a lot of outfit units out there that I had to communicate with by telephone. I learned, when I was in the Signal Corps as a civilian, to communicate over the phone there, yes, "Roger," "Mayday." Those were some of the codes we used, yes.

SI: Did you ever learn Morse Code?

AF: No, I never learned Morse Code, no. I never used a telegraph, strictly hand-to-hand combat, yes, hand-to-hand verbal.

SI: Tell me what you remember about your first few days with the unit. Was it hectic in the Headquarters?

AF: Yes, it was, sure. There was a lot of confusion. We weren't prepared for this breakthrough, that this was Hitler's last thrust, to drive a wedge between the Americans and the British, to cross the Meuse River, which was really a barrier, which we kept there as our last fortification to drive them back. He wanted to get to Antwerp, which was our major port of supplies. Well, if we lost Antwerp, we would've lost all our supplies and reinforcements. So, it was important. It was hectic, but we regrouped. Eisenhower was still the man of the day. In fact, some of the German outfits, during the Battle of the Bulge, were dressed as Americans. They were given orders to break through and assassinate Eisenhower. So, he was kept under wraps during that time. They were afraid that he would be taken out. Those were hectic times. They were difficult times, until we knew that we [would turn them back]. The Germans took a number of American prisoners, maybe twenty or thirty thousand, yes.

SI: Do you remember hearing about the Massacre at Malmedy? [Editor's Note: Soldiers of the First *Panzer* SS Division summarily executed eighty-four American prisoners of war on December 17, 1944, near the Belgian village of Malmedy.]

AF: Yes.

SI: What kind of an impact did that have on you?

AF: That is one that made us more bitter and more determined to win the war, if not to kill them, if I had to say that, to win the war. It was an atrocity. See, under the League of Nations, the treaty, there was supposed to be a certain humaneness toward prisoners, but the Germans were so intent. They had some of their best units. They had Hitler's own corps, his own division there, in the forefront. If I remember the name of his tank commander--it'll come to me, I hope. [Editor's Note: The First SS Panzer Division *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*, an elite unit originally formed with the intention of serving as Adolf Hitler's last protection, later increased to the size of a normal division. The division, under the command of *Brigadefuhrer* Wilhelm Mohnke, was known for slaughtering prisoners. The founder of this *Panzer* division later claimed that the order to take no prisoners and have no concern for Belgian civilians was given by SS General Joachim Peiper. He wanted brutality more common on the Eastern Front to be used on Americans to scare them and break their morale.]

SI: We can put it in later.

AF: Yes, his tank commander. They took no prisoners. They were intent to get to the Meuse River and to Antwerp.

SI: You said you interrogated some of the prisoners. How did some of the interrogations go?

AF: Yes. We were kind to them. We were American guys--we were brought up with kindness during the Depression, [in] which we fed the poor and fed the sick, helped the sick. We gave them cigarettes. We tried to get information. They were "*Gefangen*," known as "captive." "*Ich bin Amerikaner*. *Du bist gefangen*," which meant they were captured. So, we asked them, ("*Ve geits*? *Rubints du, vu gates du*?"?) "Where are you from?" They would tell us and they were glad to give up, really. They knew they were losing the war. They had a lot of young people that they inducted, they drafted, or older people. They were running out of enlistees, they were running out of troops, the *Wehrmacht*.

SI: Do you remember what kind of questions you were told to ask them?

AF: Not in particular. We'd get as much information as we could, just to guard them, but we were kind to them. We were not brutal. We were kind to them. We had them in a pen there, in a *stalag* [a German prisoner of war camp] or in a barricade, and they had the "POW" written on them. We fed them. We tried to get information, who their unit was, how many were in the unit, how things were back in Germany, how the morale was. Let me tell you, we were bombing

German cities--they were devastated, really. When I got to Germany, across the Rhine, I saw the devastation, the carnage and the wreckage, yes.

SI: What was a typical day like for you in this time, as your unit was cleaning up the Bulge?

AF: We were mopping up a little bit. We were cleaning up. New orders came down, that I was transferred from Headquarters to the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion when we crossed the Rhine. We crossed the Rhine at the end of December. There was one bridge left at Remagen, called the Eric Ludendorff Bridge, who was the German commander during the First World War, and the Germans forgot to blow that bridge. [Editor's Note: The capture of the Ludendorff Bridge on March 7, 1945, allowed the Allies to form a bridgehead across the Rhine at Remagen.] We crossed it and I was assigned to the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion. I went overseas as a BAR man, because I failed the M-1 test. I'm not a good rifleman and I'm not a good marksman. So, I went over as a BAR man, a Browning Automatic Rifleman, when I went overseas, which was a three-man team of a gunner, an ammunition carrier and a tripod carrier. When I ended up with the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, I was back to the M-1 again. We followed them and I was really not in the front lines. I was just following up there and orders came down that we were supposed to go southeast. The Russians were going to take Berlin and that pissed off Patton, because he wanted to get to Berlin before the Russians. [Editor's Note: The Russians captured Berlin on May 2, 1945.] At that time, news came down--I may have lost some of my chronology, the timing--but Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill met at Potsdam. [Editor's Note: The Potsdam Conference did not start until July 1945, more than two months after Victory in Europe Day. The last meeting held by the Big Three before Roosevelt's death and Churchill's electoral defeat was the Yalta Conference in early February 1945.] They decided that the Russians were going to get revenge on the Germans, because the Russians lost more people, civilians, lost fifty million people during the Second World War. So, Eisenhower had to agree to go to Bavaria, to Southeast Germany, rather [than] to Eastern Germany, which was given over to the Russians to take over, to rape and to destroy, and they did. They did a good job. So, we went differently. We were liberators. I was one of the liberators at Dachau Concentration Camp in May of 1945. I saw the depravity there, the carnage and man's inhumanity to man. It seems that man has an innate capacity to kill weaker or people they don't care for, yes. [Editor's Note: The Dachau Concentration Camp was liberated by American forces on April 29, 1945.]

SI: Before we get to Dachau, I wanted to go back to the Remagen Bridgehead. Did you go over on the actual bridge?

AF: After the bridge--it was still standing--but I don't remember [if] I went over the bridge or we went over on pontoon bridges. We had a great Corps of Engineers. They built bridges all over, sure.

SI: Do you remember being under heavy attack at the time?

AF: No, I don't remember being under any heavy attack. I have no medals to prove anything. I was lucky, yes.

SI: I know there was a lot of shelling.

AF: There was shelling, yes, there was shelling. There was a lot of fragmentation and ricochets, yes.

SI: That was in March of 1945.

AF: We crossed it, I think, in January or early February, we crossed at Remagen, sure. The Germans forgot to blow it. They were driven back after Christmas. The tide had turned after Christmas, toward the end of December and into early January. It was bitter cold, let me tell you, it was bitter cold. My feet freeze up every winter. It was bitter cold, but we were dressed warm. When we came up as replacements, we were given winter clothing, and many of the guys that were there had suffered from trench foot, from the foxholes. We were given spare socks and clothing. When I was in Headquarters, they fed me well. I was very fortunate, yes.

SI: Would you sleep in a tent or would you have to dig a foxhole to sleep in?

AF: We had foxholes, yes. We had no tents, we had foxholes. What buildings were standing were pretty well destroyed. They were just shells of what they were.

SI: Tell me about when you went into this combat unit. What were the first few days like, getting acclimated to the new people you were serving with?

AF: They welcomed us, as replacements. They were glad to see us. I had good luck that they kept me far in the rear, to interrogate some of the German prisoners and to bring up supplies. They knew I was not a good gunner, but I carried that M-1, yes, sir.

SI: When you were going back and forth with the supplies, did you ever run into anything, like snipers?

AF: There were snipers, yes, but they were driven back. We had more shelling than we had snipers. We had a pretty clear path. They were falling back; they were surrendering. They knew the war was over, but the Germans fought to the last. They did not give up easily. They fought there. We were in their homeland. We're heading toward--Bavaria was the birthplace of Nazism. Hitler had his *Putsch* there in 1921 [1923], after the First World War, at the Bürgerbräukeller and they had the beer cellars there. I ended up in Munich, eventually.

SI: In those last couple months, when you were taking prisoners, was it mostly the old men and young boys, like you said before?

AF: A few of all demographics.

SI: Did you happen to interrogate anybody who was a die-hard?

AF: Yes, we had some of them. Since I'm of the Jewish faith, I told them, "Ich bin Jude," "I am Jewish," just to get some kind of pain into them, that we [they] had perpetrated on the human beings, "Ich bin Jude," "I'm Jewish," in German, "Ich bin Jude."

SI: Did they react to it with anger or fear?

AF: I also gave them a cigarette, also. [laughter] Look, I'm a soft-hearted guy, what do you want? I can soften pain with a little bit of kindness, yes. Those guys suffered, also. They were hungry, tired and beaten. I had a little bit of compassion.

SI: When you were with the infantry unit, would you still get meals with some regularity?

AF: We had K rations, sure, soup kitchens along the way. We had cooks along the way, but they carried guns, also. We didn't have the best meals, but, at least, if we didn't have a hot meal, we had K rations. Once in a while, we would get a package, if we had mail call, going down and we'd stop someplace. We would get a package from home. We still had mail call, maybe a month or two behind, but we still got it, eventually.

SI: Did that really bolster your morale, when you got mail from home?

AF: You'd better believe it. If I got a moldy salami from home--my mother knew I liked salami--we tore off the mold and I would share it with the guys there.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where you had to fire your rifle?

AF: We had to, but I don't remember I aimed at anything. We had to stand and look ahead, because we were afraid that the Germans would regroup and come at us as we went southeast. I don't remember hitting anything or killing anybody. I don't believe I killed anybody.

SI: At Dachau, was your unit one of the first ones in or had it already been liberated?

AF: Yes, we were about a month behind. It was in May. I don't know what time in May, but it was liberated about three or four weeks before we got there. Some of the guys there told me of the atrocities. I saw everything and I saw some of the people there that were still there, that we were feeding them, giving them medical care. I remember, I was told by some of the earlier arrivals there, troops from the 51st--by that time, I was with the 66th Tank Battalion--and they told me that the colonel or the general ordered all the people from Dachau, which is a town near the concentration camp, to come down to the concentration camp to see what happened. Of course, they professed that they didn't know, but it was a gory site, yes. You could smell the stench of death.

SI: Even weeks later?

AF: Even a month later, yes.

SI: Did you speak to any of the former inmates?

AF: Yes. I could speak Yiddish and I spoke to some of them. They told me of the depravity. They were so happy to see us. They got down and kissed our hands and feet. They were still in

their prison shattered clothes, remnants. I saw the tattoos on their [arms], that Hitler wanted to make the Jewish prisoners like cattle. Many didn't want to come to America. They wanted to go to Palestine. That's what they told me. They wanted to go to Palestine, when I spoke to [them] in Yiddish, "(*Evelt gain to Eretz Yisrael*?)," Israel. That was it. My memory serves me well.

SI: When did you join the 66th Tank Battalion?

AF: 66th Tank Battalion, it was after Dachau. Orders came--actually, I was only there for a short time before orders came down, that the war ended in May of 1945, remember, around the 5th of May. [Editor's Note: Victory in Europe Day was May 8, 1945.] Orders came down that the Fourth Armored was going to be deactivated. By that time, I was transferred to the 66th Tank Battalion, because the 51st was already going home, but the Army gave points for service overseas. Two points were given for overseas duty, one point was given for in-States duty. I didn't have enough points because I was a recent replacement. So, after the 66th Tank Battalion, sometime after May, I would say before September of 1945, I was transferred from the 66th to the 19th Finance Disbursing Section in Munich, Germany, as a paymaster. I didn't have enough points to go home, so, I was transferred further. By that time, I was a staff sergeant and transferred to the 19th Finance Disbursing Section in Munich, Germany. I was taken by weapons carrier from Dachau. The boys said good-bye, I said good-bye to them, and they met me in Munich, as a paymaster. I paid the troops. I paid some of the troops that were killed, that were no longer [on the payroll], known as "redlining" them, and sending money home to their next of kin. That was my next job and it was a soft job, really. I had my own apartment. I remember where I lived. We had captured German cars, Mercedes. First time I learned to drive was [with] a German Mercedes staff car that we liberated, so-to-speak. I had my own apartment at #10 (Maulbeerstrasse?), near Prinzregentenstrasse, was part of suburban Munich that was still standing. Most of Munich was devastated. I forgot to tell you that I was also at the Nuremberg Trials as a military observer. [Editor's Note: Beginning in the Fall of 1945, Nazi war criminals were brought to justice in tribunals held by the Allied powers in Nuremburg, beginning with the International Military Tribunal, which tried the surviving leadership of the Third Reich.] Well, that was after I got to Munich. I have to remember my chronology there as I bring back my memory. I was very comfortable. We drank German beer, we had our own mess, we ate venison. We were select people in the Financial Disbursing Section. We were called elite and I was a staff sergeant by then, so, I had a little bit of drag.

SI: What did you think of the Germans as a vanquished foe? Did you interact with them much?

AF: Well, we couldn't persecute them. We had some German civilians working with us at that time. They also brought over British girls that worked with us in the office, did some civilian work, that helped us with the new technology. They taught me how to type. We interacted [with them]. We were told not to fraternize with them. I spoke German to them. We talked to them civilly, but they were a captured nation. We tried to be magnanimous and we fed them, too. There were a lot of displaced persons, that Hitler brought into Germany from the captured territories, like Poland, the Baltic Countries, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Greece and Hungary. He brought in slave labor. I remember them coming to our mess, looking [for food] out of the trashcans, and we fed them. They were DPs [displaced persons] and we fed them. I fed them in Munich. This is an interesting moment of faith, fact of faith, that my present family doctor in

Doylestown, Pennsylvania, who has cared for me for the last twenty-five years, his mother and father were displaced DPs from Poland that I may have fed when I was in Regensburg with the 66th Tank Battalion, before I went to Munich. His name is Martynec, he's of the Polish faith, Bohdan Martynec. He tells me I may have fed his mother and father, and so, I told him, "I've come a long way from Regensburg to Doylestown, Pennsylvania." Life is funny, isn't it, fate?

SI: Yes. It seems like you were very open, even to your former enemies. Did you see any other American troops abusing Germans?

AF: Not that I was aware of, really. I was with many of the new replacements. Most of the older guys were going home. They were deactivated. Many of the new guys that didn't have enough points, like myself, were put into new outfits. The remaining occupation troops [were] there to take care of administering the food and the Americanization after the war in Germany. Berlin became a divided city, but the American Zone was where I was in Bavaria. We got as far as Berchtesgaden, to Hitler's Eagle's Nest.

SI: When did you go from Munich to Nuremburg, to the trials?

AF: Okay. Now, sometime in 1946--I was already in Munich in early '46 and I was doing clerical work. I was a staff sergeant. I was doing a lot of work driving and the Colonel came to me, asked me if I wanted to be a military observer and go up to watch the Nuremberg Trials with the captured Nazis. I said, "Yes, I would love to do that." Hitler had built *autobahns* in which he could move his tanks and troops around very quickly in Germany. So, I remember one--it must have been a fall morning--in September of 1946 that a weapons carrier took me and about three other guys from Munich. We were Army troops and we went by weapons carrier over from Munich to Nuremberg, Germany, on the *autobahn*. When I got to Nuremberg, I couldn't realize the devastation there. Everything was destroyed. The only building standing was the Palace of Justice, where they were holding the Nuremberg Trials. They billeted us in some building nearby and fed us Army chow. We went over, two days, I sat up in the gallery and I had earphones. The Russian prosecutor was talking about the German atrocities to the Russian people and I looked down and I saw Göring, Hess, von Ribbentrop, Keitel, Jodl, Von Papen, Streicher, Albert--I forget his name--I saw them all. Behind each one of them in the dock--oh, Albert Speer, Albert Speer was the economics guy there--and behind each prisoner was an American MP in a white helmet. I remember that vision very vividly in my mind. I was there for two days. We had to break, of course, the court break. There were the judges. There was the British judge, the Russian judge, and I remember that the American judge was Owen J. Roberts, at the time. He was a member of the American Supreme Court. [Editor's note: The American justice was Francis Biddle. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson served as the American prosecutor.] He was chosen by Harry Truman, who was President, who acceded to the Presidency after Roosevelt died April the 12th, 1945, when I was still overseas. We took down FDR's picture and put up Truman's picture. He chose Owen J. Roberts. So, he was the American justice there. That's what transpired for two days that I was at Nuremberg. After two days, I went back to my outfit. Of course, I was asked a lot of things and I related what I did. The Colonel asked me to stay on, if I wanted to re-enlist, because my orders came down to go home. I wanted to go home, to go to college. He asked me if I would stay--he would have given me a promotion. I thanked him very much, but I wanted to go home. My orders came down in

November of 1946 to go home and the guys were sorry to see me [leave] and I went home alone. Fortunately, I spoke German in Munich and I remember, in Munich, when I walked around, during the summer, early fall, that a lot of the German children were playing. I talked to them. I remember some of the German mothers calling their children, "*Kommen essen*. Hans, *kommen essen*." These are memories I had of sixty-nine years ago, but orders came down and I wanted to go home. I was given my orders and I was alone, a sergeant going home alone. So, I took the train; the (*tieg*?) is the train in German. The Munich station was bombed out, but the trains were still running, the German (*tiegs*?). I picked up some other guys from other outfits that were going home. The train took me and the other guys, that I didn't know, from other outfits, to Frankfurt am Main. From there, I took another train--I stayed overnight--up to Bremerhaven, which was on the North Sea. There must've been about five thousand guys. It was just packed there with guys going home. I remember, I mingled in with the 508th Airborne and all those guys did was drink and gamble, but I stayed and waited. From the end of November to the beginning, it took about two, three weeks for a ship to come in to take me back to the States. I remember, the ship was called the *General Harry Taylor* [(AP-145)]. It was a Liberty ship. America, going to war, had become "the Arsenal of Democracy." They were building Liberty ships one a week, one a month, I don't know. We just outgunned, outmaneuvered and outmanned the Japanese and the Germans. So, I waited for the ship to come in. Going back, in a little retrospect, if I can step back a little bit in time, when the war ended in Germany, in May of '45, the War in the Pacific was still going on. We started to do island-hopping. We were preparing to invade the Japanese homeland. The war was culminating. We raised the flag on Iwo Jima, at Mount Suribachi, but most of the Marines during that time took terrible casualties. From there, we went to Okinawa and the Japs used their *kamikazes* to defend their homeland and we took a terrible beating at Okinawa. By then, we'd perfected the atomic bomb under the Manhattan Project. I remember his name--the head of the Manhattan Project was [Robert] Oppenheimer. Truman, in his infinite wisdom, saved my life and a quarter of a million other Americans, if we had to invade the Japanese homeland, and, by throwing the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, saved our life. [Editor's Note: Hiroshima was the target of the first atomic raid on August 6, 1945. Nagasaki was attacked on August 9, 1945. V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.] When the war ended in August of 1945, I still stayed longer in Germany and I came home in December of 1946, with the 508th Airborne. It was a terrible trip. It was the *General Harry Taylor*. Again, we were at the bottom, because they were taking nurses home, taking diplomats home, taking other officials and officers home. So, we enlisted men were at the bottom. I was seasick for another two weeks, but, when I saw New York, I got down and cried, that I was back home again--[Mr. Fagan becomes emotional] please, forgive me.

SI: Let us pause the tape.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: In the Army of Occupation, I know they had excursions for troops, arranged trips. Were you able to take advantage of any of those?

AF: Yes. I remember, when I was in Munich, that I was given a furlough to go to Berchtesgaden, which was Hitler's Eagle's Nest there. I also went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

They gave me days off in which I'd go down. I went skiing in Garmisch, in which they had the 1936 Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. I had side trips. I remember, I did take a seven-day furlough they gave me. From Munich, I went to Switzerland. I took the train from Munich to, I remember, Strasbourg, France. From France, Strasbourg, I went to the Swiss border, all on Army transports. I cashed in eighty dollars that I had in cash into Swiss Francs. At that time, the dollar was a little stronger--it was two Francs to the dollar. Now, I think it's four francs to the dollar, but I'm not sure of the conversion. We spent seven days, I think, in Basel, Bern, Interlaken, and it was very enjoyable there. We were entertained beautifully and they welcomed the American troops, because Switzerland really was neutral during that time and didn't suffer any of the hardships of war. That's about it. The Army of Occupation was very well organized. We had the UNICEF there, United Nations, and we took care of displaced people. It was very well organized, the occupation in the American Sector. Now, what happened in the British and the Russian Sector is a different story.

SI: While you were overseas, were you able to go to services as often as you wanted?

AF: Yes, I remember, during Yom Kippur, we had a Jewish chaplain and he held services. We had a Jewish meal. No, we had services, yes, and I wanted to go. The Jewish chaplain would always have a service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

SI: Does anything else stand out about your time overseas?

AF: You have Dachau and Munich. That's it. You've got most of the story. You have Dachau, you have Nuremberg, you have my occupation. I had a comfortable year, or months, in Munich in which I had a good job. If anything, my survival is a matter of luck, rather than anything else.

SI: You came back into New York. Were you discharged soon after?

AF: Yes, I came back to New York. It was before the Verrazano Bridge. We landed in Staten Island and the ferry took us to Camp Kilmer, over in New Brunswick. From Camp Kilmer, again, they asked me if I wanted to reenlist, because it seemed like the world was still at war somewhere. I told them, "No, thank you," and they gave all kinds of incentives for reenlistment. From Camp Kilmer, I went to Fort Dix in December of 1946. Again, they tried to persuade me to reenlist. I thanked them very much. I wanted to go to college. So, I was given my discharge pay. I was given 250 dollars, I think, and I got a bus. I got my honorable discharge papers. I said good-bye, I thanked them, and I took the bus from Camp Kilmer to the Greyhound bus terminal again in Philadelphia. My brother-in-law, who's now long gone, he was very good to me. He helped me to get into the Wharton School. He was a graduate of the law school. He was a lawyer and he was a graduate of the law school. Somehow, they give preference to the alumni. So, when I got home, the first thing my mother did was destroy the uniform. She hated the military. My brother was already home already. He had come home and gone to work. I saw him and we reunited and the family was there. My brother and father were planning again to go back into business, into the food business, retail business. So, I applied to the Wharton School and they accepted me. I matriculated in 1947. They had three semesters a year under the GI Bill. I went on the GI Bill. I did the three semesters in three years and I graduated in the honorary society of Beta Gamma Sigma at the Wharton School in 1950. I was given fifty dollars

a month subsistence under the GI Bill, but I still needed money. I didn't have a car and you had other expenses. So, I worked as a waiter in Houston Hall, which is in the University, as a waiter. I graduated in 1950 and I was interviewed by several corporations, but it seems there was a recession at the time. I couldn't get a job. As fate had it, my brother and father started a little butcher shop and grocery store together in 1947. By 1950, my father had his first big heart attack. My brother and my father asked me to go in with them. So, I worked with them and I stayed with my father and brother and I've been in the business ever since. My father didn't die. From 1950, he didn't die until 1976. He lived another twenty-six years. I've been in the business ever since. I was with my brother for forty-five years in business. He's now retired, but I was so acclimated to the business and loved the business so much--the people, products and the interaction with society. I just loved the business; I'm glad where I'm at. So, I sold the businesses with my brother. He retired. We ran a couple of businesses in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, in Burlington, New Jersey. When we sold all the businesses, I tried to retire, but I couldn't. I'm made for activity and I loved the business. So, I applied to ShopRite in November of 1993. I've been there ever since, for twenty years. That's the story up to the present.

SI: Were the businesses you had with your brother all called Fagan?

AF: Fagan & Fagan. We also owned some real estate. What profits we made in the business, because we were very successful in what we did, we put it into real estate, but, when he retired, we dissolved everything. He went his way and he's still alive at ninety-six. He's not in the best of health, though. How should a guy feel when he's ninety-six? [laughter]

SI: At Wharton, I would imagine most of your classmates were also GIs.

AF: A lot of them were, in fact, many of them were, back from the wars under the GI Bill. We had it three semesters a year. The tuition, at that time, was 450 dollars a semester. It's hard to believe what the tuition was, but my government benefits didn't cover everything, so, what I earned by working as a waiter, I paid for the difference.

SI: One of the things our program has looked at is how veterans have had an impact at the different colleges. Did you get the sense that the veterans were a different force on campus? Were there any conflicts or friction with the other kids who had not been in the war?

AF: No. It was post-war. We were still recovering. We had to retool in this country, going from a wartime economy to a civilian economy. The war ended in Europe and in the Pacific in the end of 1945. It took four years to retool and there was still a lot of displacement. People were being laid off from the war work and it took time to get back into civilian [work]. So, there was a recession at that time. Bread sold for twenty-nine cents a loaf. You still could get into the movies for a quarter. See, the last vestiges of the Depression were still with us when we went from a wartime economy back to a civilian economy. It took, back to 1950, getting ready for the Korean War, that we started to get back to prosperity, under Dwight D. Eisenhower. Those were prosperous years in the '50s.

SI: Do you remember any professors that stand out in your memory from Wharton?

AF: I had a few. I remember, I had a Dr. (Briar?) for retailing. I remember, one Christmas, he sent me down to Gimbels. We had Gimbel Brothers at that time and I went down there as an intern to work at Gimbels during Christmastime as an intern from the Wharton School. I had a professor for insurance, Dr. (Saul?). He taught me insurance. I forget his last name. I had a Dr. Stan (Stanislovski?) that taught me South American geography. I had another Greek professor that taught me European economic and industrial geography. I can remember some of them. I remember, oh, I had a doctor by the name of Dr. (Strauss Oope?), who taught geopolitics. They still use his teachings today to teach geopolitical thinking around the world, that there's a geopolitical influence on the interaction between countries and between societies. I remember his name, Dr. (Strauss Oope?), taught geopolitics. I also took a year of American literature. I had to go over to the women's college. It was called Bennett Hall. I studied Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, many of the great American literary icons. I remember, one of the first books we had to read there was Ernest Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*. We had to read F. Scott Fitzgerald, his famous book.

SI: *The Great Gatsby*.

AF: *The Great Gatsby*. In fact, they're making it into a movie now. I had the good fortune, years later, while I took a cruise on the *Ile-de-France*, in 1958, before Castro took over Cuba, that I met Ernest Hemingway and his last wife, Mary, on the *Ile-de-France,* when he was going to his home in Varadero Beach, Cuba. I met Ernest Hemingway. We drank together.

SI: That must have been something.

AF: They called him "Papa" Ernest Hemingway at that time and he had all his books there. I had the good fortune--I told you I was lucky--I met Ernest Hemingway.

SI: Do you remember anything he told you?

AF: No, we didn't speak. Look, I was just a drinker. I was not one of his--I was just one of the ship's tourists that had the good fortune of meeting the literary icon there--but he had a home in Varadero Beach. I remember, when we got to Cuba--Havana doesn't have a good port of debarkation, so, we had to come in by tender--he came in by tender and sent him down to his home in Varadero Beach.

SI: Going into business with your brother and your father, can you tell me some of the major challenges you faced?

AF: Well, there was a lot of challenges, if you want to hear everything. It was very prosperous. In Philadelphia, where they had their store, their little supermarket, we catered to the black people there and we had a lot of black products. We had a lot of competition from other merchants in the area, butcher shops and supermarkets. During the riots in Philadelphia [August 28-30, 1964], during Lyndon Johnson's Administration, our store was attacked and completely devastated. That was during the riots of the '60s. Later, we rebuilt and went back right into business again. I stayed there until the race--it got too difficult, until I was robbed and beaten. I

was mugged one Friday night when I left the store. I was beaten and sent to the hospital by some thugs. I decided, and my brother decided, to sell the business and open up another business in Bucks County. From there, we went to Bucks County. I survived that melee, that attack, and I'm still alive to this day. We were in business until 1989, when we parted and dissolved the partnership and each went our own way.

SI: Did you close the stores?

AF: Sold them, sold the stores and sold the real estate. We sold the stores immediately. There were people [who] always wanted to come to buy a successful business. Fortunately, I always ran a successful business and I like to think that I'm a successful merchant. The real estate took a little time to sell, took maybe four or five years. He lives down the Shore now and they tell me he's suffering from dementia right now. So, that's life for you.

SI: What were the biggest changes that you saw from the 1950s to 1989 in your business?

AF: Oh, my god, you have quite [a few] changes. During the '50s, I didn't have a television or, if I did have it, it was maybe a little postage stamp. I remember, if I flew, you didn't have airports. In New York, you had Idlewild, not Kennedy. Keep in mind that I lived through assassinations, Kennedy's assassination--I was running the store in Philadelphia. Those were traumatic days. When they assassinated Bobby Kennedy in California, in 1969 [1968], and Martin Luther King, I was in business during that time, those were traumatic times. We saw a lot of changes and the Civil Rights Movement grew. Now, you have a tremendous change in civil liberties. Under Lyndon Johnson, the Civil Rights Act was passed, in which colleges [businesses] are no longer permitted to put your religion on your application for a job. That's one of the headwinds I had when I applied for a job in 1950. So, a lot of things have happened, in our civil rights, businesses, now. You have businesses that are now megastores. I mean, mom-and-pop shops are gone. Now, you have Walmart, you have Kmart, you have ShopRite. My boss is building his fourth store now. You have tremendous economic and social changes. We have the advance of technology, where Apple is now the number one corporation in the world based on capitalization, based on stock market evaluations. When I entered the stock market in 1952, after I got out of college, there was only two million people trading on the New York Stock Exchange. Now, you have in the billions. You have three or four billion, up to six billion. A poor day is three or four billion. So, you have a going away from the mom-and-pop investors to the banks and hedge fund investors. So, the whole business environment, the whole financial environment--we've gone through the Crash of 1987 to the Crash of 2000 to the credit meltdown of 2008, and this country is still coming back. We have many problems in this country that need to be solved, but, in all my life, I love this country. I'm proud of it, to be an American. I say that we will recover, we will solve our problems and come to a bigger and better United States. If I had to amend this interview, I would say, "God bless America. Thank you, God, for taking my parents, as poor immigrants, and give me a life of my own. God bless America."

SI: When did you get married after the war? Did you have children?

AF: Yes, I married after the war in 1959 to my first wife, Joyce. I had two sons with Joyce. Richard was born 1960 and Lawrence was born 1966. I educated them. Richard is now a college professor at the University of Florida, teaching Latin. Lawrence is a lawyer in Boca Raton, Florida. They live in Florida. I was divorced from Joyce in 1976. I remarried Ellen in 1981, when I was running a store by myself in Doylestown. Judge (Bean?) married us, my second marriage, in 1981 to Ellen. I have two children by Ellen by inheritance; they're not my biological children. They were with Ellen when I married her. I assumed their raising and education. One daughter is Tracy and I put her into business. She's self-employed as a skin specialist. I've lost track of Michael, who went his own way and, hopefully, is living a good life in North Carolina. I'm still living with Ellen. She's not in the best of health. She's going in for surgery tomorrow at the U of P [University of Pennsylvania] under a gastroenterologist by the name of Dr. Ginsberg. I pray to God everything works out well.

SI: Are there any community activities, maybe activities with the synagogue here, that you have been active with over the last few years?

AF: No. When I have a vacation, a Saturday off, it's my habit to celebrate the Sabbath and I come here to pray with Rabbi Jaffe. He's very kind to me. He gives me the honor of going to the *bimah* and read from the *Torah*. I just attend the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur here. I keep in touch with some of the Jewish congregants here who've been very kind to me. We have a very good relationship that I have engendered and enlarged with my relationship with them as customers at ShopRite, where I'm still now employed.

SI: What drew you to Flemington? You live in Pennsylvania.

AF: Another good question. You're very astute with your questions; you have much foresight, Shaun. It so happened that I had a piece of property, that I took when I separated with my brother, on Route 31 in Flemington, New Jersey. I had a little strip center there. One day, in November of 1993, I came up 202, 31, and, as fate had it, I stopped at an Amoco station, which is now the Exxon station at Commerce Street. I looked to the right and there was a ShopRite store there. My heart was still in the business. I was retired for a few years, not happy with what I was doing. So, I walked into the store, parked the car, talked to the manager there and asked him if he could use some part-time help. He asked me if I had any experience. I said, modestly, that I did. So, he gave me a part-time job, twelve hours a week, at night. I had to come at night, at six dollars an hour. I asked him if he could do a little bit better, so, he went to six-fifty. He said, if I stayed a year, I would make it to seven dollars. Well, so far, I've been there twenty years and I make a little bit more than seven dollars. I eventually sold that property on Route 31 and it was very profitable. I fell in love with this area, with the people, with the store, and I'm still here. I made a living in Pennsylvania, but my heart--in fact, my medical care is given by the Hunterdon Medical Center here in Flemington. Yes, I have my cardiologist there and, now, I'm seeing a pulmonary doctor there. They think I may have sleep apnea, so, that, they'll find out.

SI: Is there anything else that you would like to add to the record today?

AF: I can only say that I'm glad I have the opportunity for you having me here to recount some of the highlights of my life that I hope will live after me. All our days are numbered. I thank

God for the years he has given me. I am happy [with] what I do, where I'm at and who I am. I wish, if you want to give this to your historical archives, I give it of my own volition, full free will. I love this country, I'm proud of this country. I've already given my will to the store, in which I have contributed money to the food pantry here in Flemington and, also, to the Sunshine Fund, to take care of some of the poor workers in our store there. I thank God for the years he has given me. I'm grateful for what I have and I'm not afraid to die; thank you for having me.

SI: Thank you very much. I think you will be around for a few more years.

AF: God willing.

SI: Thank you for your service. I really appreciate it.

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

Reviewed by Albany Stafford 8/9/2014
Reviewed by Mohammad Athar 3/25/2015
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/31/2015
Reviewed by Alvin Fagan 4/13/2015