

Kenneth 'Ken' Renberg

A German-American Jewish immigrant who bravely fought in WWII to “get back at Hitler”.

Chapter 01 - 1:07

Introduction

Announcer: Born Gunter Renberg on November 30, 1920, to Anna and Herman Renberg in Delmenhorst, a city in Northwest Germany, Kenneth Renberg immigrated to the United States in June 1937, because Jewish males were unsafe under the Nazi regime. He left behind his parents and brother. Invited by his father’s sister, Ina Herzberg, her husband, Abraham and son, Leroy, he came to Enid, where he finished high school in 1939.

Ken’s departure from Nazi Germany came four years after Chancellor Adolf Hitler had taken power and ordered the boycott of stores owned by Jews in 1933, during which Kenneth witnessed his father being forced to close his bicycle and sewing machine store.

Kenneth enlisted in the Oklahoma National Guard’s 45th Division to “get back at Hitler”.

He settled in Tulsa, attended the University of Tulsa for a degree in petroleum engineering and eventually formed Lee Keeling and Associates in 1957.

Kenneth Renberg was nearly 98 when he died November 3, 2018.

Listen to Ken tell his story on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com

Chapter 02 - 7:38

Hitler

John Erling: This is John Erling. Today’s date is January 19, 2010. Kenneth, if you’ll state your full name, your date of birth, and your age as of today.

Kenneth Renberg: My name is Kenneth Renberg. I was born November 30, 1920. I’m eighty-nine.

JE: Where were you born?

KR: I was born in a small town called Delmenhorst, D-e-l-m-e-n-h-o-r-s-t, it’s near Bremen,

about thirty miles from the North Sea. In the country of Germany.

JE: Your mother's name?

KR: My mother was Anna, her maiden name was Sommerfeldt, S-o-m-m-e-r-f-e-l-d-t.

JE: And your father?

KR: My father was Herman Renberg.

JE: What did your father do? What his profession?

KR: My father was a merchant. He had a store and sold sewing machines and bicycles.

JE: And your mother?

KR: My mother was a housewife.

JE: Did you have brothers and sisters?

KR: Yeah, I have a younger brother who was born in 1928, by the name of Werner, W-e-r-n-e-r, he now lives in Chappaqua, New York.

JE: What are your earliest childhood memories of growing up in Germany?

KR: Well, I had a good childhood. As a small child, we played. We spent an awful lot of time outdoors, I think more so than in this country. Elementary school went through the tenth year and then you started high school. About 10 percent of the students attended high school because attendance was based upon tuition.

I joined various organizations including the German Athletic Association and the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts were a little different than this country; they were paramilitary organization. We all had regular basic training, and we didn't have den mothers, we had leaders. And you sit at attention when you talk to them. The basic training came in good later on when I joined the Oklahoma National Guard.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). How old were you when you were in the Boy Scouts in Germany?

KR: About ten. I'm Jewish and I had to leave high school, I think, in 1935, after the Nuremberg Laws. At the time, you couldn't get a job, you could not take advance training, and you basically had only two options. One. was to come to this country, but somebody had to vouch for you and give you an affidavit. The other option was to go to Palestine. In order to go to Palestine you needed two years of agricultural training. These training centers were called Hachara, H-a-c-h-a-r-a. This center was located about thirty-five miles south of Berlin.

The irony of the fact is that at the end of combat, I wound up fifty miles from this little village, in charge of thirty-five thousand German prisoners.

Anyway, in 1936, I got an invitation from an aunt in Enid to come to this country.

JE: How old then?

KR: I was sixteen.

JE: So you received an invitation from an aunt—

KR: From aunt.

JE: In Enid?

KR: Yes. My father had several siblings who had immigrated to the US in the late 1800s.

Another uncle lived in Tulsa. I decided I preferred coming to the States to go into Palestine. I came over in July 1937. I lived with an aunt in Enid, Oklahoma, an aunt and uncle. And finished the last two years of high school at Enid High School.

JE: Let me come back to you're living in Germany. The first sixteen years of your life there, I believe about 1921 or so, Adolf Hitler is beginning to make his presence known in the country. What did you hear, as a young Jewish boy, about Adolf Hitler?

KR: Well, really Hitler didn't become prominent until the late 1920s. What people don't understand, Germany had been a monarchy until the end of World War I. And they really were not too familiar with the democratic government. We had close to about twenty different political parties, each one with a different program.

The government suffered under it. We had some good chancellors, most theological sent from the Catholic Center Party. And Germany was doing pretty well in the late '20s. Hitler really was not that prominent.

Then came the Depression. The major parties at the time were the Nazis, under Hitler, and the Communist. The Communist certainly were not liked. We were raised kind of in a military manner, so to speak. We wanted revenge for World War I, and we hated particularly the French. This had nothing to do with if you were Jewish or Catholic or Protestant. Our children through the church dealt with war, of course, they memorized it. And that was one reason we had military training in the Boy Scouts. Germany was restricted to 100,000 soldiers. We all figured one of these days the army was going to expand and we would march back into France.

National pride was one problem, which Hitler addressed. The other was, his economic program, which gave people confidence. And the third thing was, that he had soup kitchens and provided for people that needed food. There was really no other party that presented a program like that. As I say, these further main considerations of the Germans.

Personally, I think if he wouldn't have been against the Jews, the Jews would have been for him. And once he seized power he had total control that was well prepared. They arrested the opposition leaders within days, but he also got the young people off the street. He started a program called the Labor Service, similar to the WPA, or the CCC in this country.

Then, of course, he fought the Treaty of Versailles and increased the army. And everybody was for that. Basically, as far as the Jews were concerned, there was anti-Semitism in Germany, but it was not any worse than anywhere else. The persecution of the Jews, of course, started after he seized power.

JE: That would have been?

KR: Nineteen thirty-three.

JE: You then, were in fear of your life?

KR: No. I never feared for my life. That all came later.

Chapter 03 - 9:07

Heil Hitler

Kenneth Renberg: When I left in '37, there were restrictions but we just were hurt economically and socially. At the time, yeah, there concentration camps, we had political prisoners who were probably executed. It really started with Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht was November 8, 1938. The cause was a young Jew had killed a German diplomat in Paris. This gave the Stormtroopers and excuse to riot and to burn the synagogues and to arrest Jews, Jewish men, and boys.

My father was arrested and sent to a concentration camp, but he was lucky. My mother went to the Gestapo to find out where he was so she could send him clothing. She opened her purse and the Gestapo officer saw the steam ship ticket.

He took a look at it and he said, "In this case, we release your husband right away."

Two weeks later he was on the ship coming to the US.

We had already gotten visas to come to this country and it just happened that Kristallnacht happened before the date of departure.

John Erling: So that German officer showed some empathy, some feeling?

KR: Well, at the time, they were trying to get Jews out of Germany. That was their main objective at the time, it was not killing them.

JE: The killing of the Jews started?

KR: Later. It must have been in the early '40s, '40, '41. There was a conference, the Wannsee Conference in Berlin. Hitler and Eichmann and some others made a decision to establish these concentration camps. And to kill the Jews.

JE: As you grew up, you had friends that were both Jews—

KR: I had mostly Gentile friends.

JE: So they were mostly Germans?

KR: Yeah, well, we were German.

JE: Right.

KR: I mean, we were the Nationalistic Germans.

JE: It was your country.

KR: Yeah, that's why I joined the National Guard in '39. I didn't join it as an American, I joined it to get even with Hitler. I mean, I became Americanized but my original purpose was to get even with him.

JE: Yeah.

KR: For saying that we were not Germans.

JE: He was against everything, wasn't he? He was obviously against Jews, Socialists.

KR: Catholics.

JE: Liberals?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Capitalists?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Communists?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Did you ever hear him or see him?

KR: Well, we heard him a lot. He came to our town one time but I didn't see him. Whenever there was some event, we would march to the city square. They had these loudspeakers and we listened to him. You stood there with your hands stretched out and sang the [German, indecipherable].

JE: You did? Everybody who stood there in the square?

KR: Everybody. Well, in school, when the teacher came in, you stood up, "Heil Hitler," every class.

JE: And you felt good at that time?

KR: No, I mean, because I knew that he was against the Jews and he was going to do something. It was a matter of uncertainty what he was going to do. You knew right then there was no future in Germany.

JE: It was his speaking ability that really brought him to prominence.

KR: Yes. He was an astute politician. And let's say, the overthrow of the Treaty of Versailles, jobs, food, and national pride. Those were the things that he emphasized and, of course, he needed a scapegoat and the Jews were the scapegoat.

JE: Why did he need a scapegoat?

KR: He needed a scapegoat after World War I. He had to blame the problems on somebody, also the economic problems.

JE: He said that, "Races without homelands were parasitic races."

KR: Oh, yeah, he tried to develop a whole culture of social science about race.

JE: He wanted the master race.

KR: Yeah. He sent people to the Himalayas to investigate where these people came from. They had some odd ideas.

JE: Also he was for the elimination of gypsies.

KR: Yeah, homosexuals.

JE: Czechs and Poles, mentally, physically handicapped people.

KR: Yeah, the under race. These were not up to normal standards and did not deserve to live, so to speak.

JE: What did you hear about his own upbringing that would have brought on some of these thoughts?

KR: Oh, he could not really find a normal life. He was an itinerant painter.

JE: An itinerant painter?

KR: Yeah, he made postcards, pictures. I think it was an inferiority complex, to a large extent. But he had this magnetic speaking ability and he got a few people that backed him. But the Nationalistic emphasis was a big thing. We were superior.

JE: Naturally people living in that country would buy into that.

KR: Yeah, but I mean, not everybody went crazy over that. Germans, I guess, were arrogant. Because you've got to remember, after the Thirty-Year War, which ended in 1648, it was split up into small principalities and it didn't become a nation again until 1871.

JE: The pride of Germany was not there for a long, long time.

KR: No.

JE: So when Hitler comes along and says, "You have a reason to be proud of something"—

KR: Yeah.

JE: That was a message—

KR: Yeah.

JE: ... that hadn't really been preached before.

KR: Yeah. Of course, the thing is, let's face it, technically, the arts, music and so, Germans did accomplish a lot of science.

JE: I'm thinking about you as a young lad in that square and Hitler speaking and through your parents talking about it, you know at thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old, that you're not going to be staying there very long.

KR: Well, at the time, things were just kind of beginning to get bad. And you really didn't know, it was an unknown. They let us live, but you knew there was no future, but you didn't know what the future was. There was this uncertainty, because really, unless you had relatives outside the country, you really didn't have any help.

There were some organizations, of course, this was ready-made for the Zionists. See, most German Jews were not Zionists. All of a sudden, that is one of the few places where you can go. So for them, it was ready-made.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

KR: But you really didn't have an idea what was going to happen. And the thing was that people in this country, I mean, the Jews in this country, didn't realize how bad it was.

JE: As Hitler was beginning to preach anti-Semitism, were there other Germans around you that kind of bought into that and would treat you different because of it?

KR: We'll say that I was never mistreated. No, let's face it, I don't look Jewish.

JE: Right.

KR: Neither did my dad. My dad lost his store, he started out as a traveling salesman. He couldn't have done it if he would have looked Jewish.

JE: What kind of restrictions did you have, being a Jew?

KR: You couldn't go to the public swimming pool. You were prohibited from going certain places.

JE: Did they have signs? Was that a state thing that you—

KR: Yeah, [German language]

JE: So it was kind of like blacks here in America?

KR: Yeah, yeah.

JE: But you just accepted that.

KR: Well, it kind of developed slowly. It wasn't from one day to the next, it was kind of a creeping thing.

JE: Do you remember as a young boy the places you could go at one time, and then all of a sudden, you realized you couldn't go to the swimming pool and—

KR: Yeah.

JE: How you felt about that?

KR: Well, I didn't like it but there was nothing I could do about it.

JE: Yeah.

KR: Hitler came to power in '33, January. I left my hometown in late '35, early '36, I don't remember exactly. Obviously, my Gentile friends couldn't play with me anymore. We couldn't be together because they had to join the Hitler Youth. I mean, this was all compulsory, none of the parents of my friends really were Nazis. I mean, they had to join the party, don't misunderstand me, because they were judges, lawyers, company managers, so they did have to join.

JE: But they didn't embrace the philosophy?

KR: No. Maybe certain parts like the Nationalistic part they may have.

JE: Right.

Chapter 04 - 6:45

Palestinian Training

John Erling: You left your hometown, where did you go?

Kenneth Renberg: Well, I went to this training center for Palestine.

JE: So you were then fourteen, fifteen years old?

KR: For—yeah.

JE: And you went to a training center?

KR: Yeah, Agricultural Training Center. See, what they wanted in Palestine were people to work the land, farmers.

JE: Was that your intention?

KR: No, but that was only option.

JE: Did you think you were going to go to Palestine at one time?

KR: At the time, I felt yeah, because that was the only way out.

JE: Yeah. Your parents, in this time then, that you're at the Palestine training camp, what are they doing? Are they encouraging you, "You have to move on, you have to go there"? They knew it was time—

KR: No, this was just a matter of fact, you accept it.

JE: Okay. So all the Jewish boys and girls?

KR: Those that could, not everybody. You kind of lost track of a lot of them. Some of them were able to leave the country. See, I came from a small town and there were not that many there. You had to be a teenager or early twenties.

JE: You left your family then, and went on to—

KR: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Was that okay with you? Was that tough to do that?

KR: No. We were more independent than kids here were. Like when we were ten years old, a few of us would go on an all-day bicycle ride. Well, hell, you wouldn't do that in this country. I'd take my bicycle into Bremen, which was about ten miles. Nobody thought anything about it because there was no crime. So we were more independent.

JE: So you were in the Palestinian training center learning to be a farmer?

KR: That's right. Plant, plow, dig.

JE: How did you enjoy that?

KR: Well, I didn't enjoy it but that was it. It was a pretty rigorous training.

JE: You would have been there in that training ...?

KR: Close to a year and a half.

JE: A year and a half.

KR: Close to that, yeah, not quite, maybe.

JE: So that was a long time then for somebody who thought, "This is my ticket out of here."

KR: Yeah, it was a two-year deal and we lived in barracks, which was a good preparation for the army. Not much comfort. But we were all young. There was a lot of comradery too.

JE: Did you get to go home and visit your family?

KR: Yeah, well, matter of fact, what happened, once during the harvest I got a little wheat chaff in my right eye. It cut the cornea a little, in other words, I can't focus my right eye too well. But I was naturally forward observer too. I had cheated a few times.

JE: All these others that were with you, mostly boys?

KR: Boys and girls.

JE: Boys and girls. I guess you talked amongst each other, "This is our ticket out of here"?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And as far as you knew, you were going to Palestine?

KR: Yeah. Matter of fact, I saw two of them in 1967. I was making a geological study in the Dead Sea area paid for by the government and the UN. And I spent about three weeks over there, so I took that opportunity to visit a couple of people.

JE: What a reunion that was.

KR: Yeah. One of them was a director of schools in [German location]. And the other was a scientist, a research scientist.

JE: You spent then, you said, a year and a half—

KR: Yes.

JE: ... there in the training camp?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And it was a two-year program?

KR: Yeah.

JE: What happened at the end of the year and a half?

KR: I got an invitation from my aunt in Enid to come to this country. I don't know exactly when it was, must have been towards the end of '36. So I accepted, of course. I had no desire to go to Palestine.

JE: So that wasn't a problem with those who were in charge of your training?

KR: Oh, no, no, you made your own decisions.

JE: That was very, very welcome news to you.

KR: Yeah, you're damn right. [laughs]

JE: In your studies in Germany, you were taught about the United States and that was all part of your history?

KR: Well, in our part of the country, a lot of people had relatives in this country. I mean, like my dad, he had two sisters and two brothers in this country. Since 1890s. We corresponded and visited, I mean, we had a lot of Americans come and visit. The thing was, one of their favorite books was *The Last of the Mohicans*. We had a German author who had never been to this country, Karl My. And he wrote a lot of Indian stories. We played cowboys and Indians. I had a feather deal and I had a tomahawk. I mean, that's what we played when we were kids.

JE: So your knowledge of cowboys and Indians came from these books or was it from history classes in school?

KR: No, not history in school, just reading and learning about it from other people.

JE: You were taught history as a youngster?

KR: Oh, yeah.

JE: And so you were taught about the United States? And was there a view of the United States?

KR: It was mostly European history. I guess we would have gotten to America, see, I left high school after I guess four years. It's an eight-year course.

JE: Okay.

KR: See, I had English for about four or five years, and I had French for about two years.

JE: In Germany?

KR: Yeah.

JE: You're sixteen years old when this invitation comes—

KR: Yeah.

JE: ... from your aunt in Enid. Tell us your trek out of there.

KR: I visited my relatives and told them goodbye.

JE: When you took the ship to the United States, your family, your parents were there to send you off?

KR: Oh, yeah, they came to Hamburg with me.

JE: Was that tough to say goodbye and did you think you'd never see them again?

KR: No. Hell, I was young.

JE: You didn't think about those things at that time?

KR: No, I figured I'd see them again sometime.

JE: But at sixteen you were out to see the world.

KR: That's right.

JE: And your brother, how close was he in age?

KR: He is eight years younger.

JE: So he was there to see you off too then, was he?

KR: Yeah, yeah.

JE: He was eight years old.

KR: Yeah. I came on the SS Manhattan in July and had a very enjoyable trip. Of course, there were a large number of Jews on the ship. So more, I couldn't get in with the younger people. I befriended a couple probably in their thirties. I mentioned to them, and they said, "Yeah, they think you are a Nazi spy," since I didn't look Jewish.

The Nazis had spies on some of the ships to see if people would talk against the Nazi regime. Then they would take it out on the family.

Anyway, I was on the ship the 4th of July.

JE: In 1937?

KR: 'Thirty-seven, yeah.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 05 - 4:00

Coming to America

Kenneth Renberg: Then we got to New York, a cousin picked me up, and I spent two weeks on Long Island.

John Erling: Did you come through Ellis Island?

KR: No, no, we came straight to the pier.

JE: And there your cousin was to meet you.

KR: Yeah. Then I spent two weeks on Long Island with some other relatives. Then I took the train to Enid.

JE: Here you are, sixteen years old.

KR: Yeah.

JE: On this train ride. Can you remember what's going through your head as you're riding on this train?

KR: Well, it's just a big country.

JE: Your father had relatives over here.

KR: Yes.

JE: The Renberg name in Tulsa is known through the department store.

KR: Yeah.

JE: How is that Renberg related?

KR: Well, Sam Renberg, who founded the store, was my father's brother. My aunt in Enid was the oldest one. She and her husband established the store in Enid, summer of 1900.

JE: And what was her name?

KR: Her name was Ena. Her husband's name was Herzberg, H-e-r-z-b-e-r-g. They opened a store in Enid, and my Uncle Sam was a partner. Then he moved to Ponca City and then he moved to Tulsa, summer of 1910, and opened up a store here.

Sam had two sons, George and Herbert, both of whom are gone.

JE: And they're your cousins?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Why didn't your parents come to the United States?

KR: They didn't have an affidavit. In other words, somebody had to furnish an affidavit that you wouldn't be a burden to the state.

JE: So they didn't have an invitation?

KR: No, no.

JE: On behalf of someone?

KR: No, no, and people here didn't think it was as bad as it was. But then, in '38, when it got bad, they got an affidavit.

JE: Your parents did?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And they did come to the United States?

KR: They did come here.

JE: Did they get that through his brother?

KR: Through, yeah, through Sam and my aunt in Enid.

JE: Okay. You're taken this long train ride, which was several days from New York to Enid?

KR: No. I forgot, two days maybe.

JE: You come here and you meet her for the first time?

KR: Yeah, well, I spent a week or so in Tulsa before I went to Enid.

JE: You were with your uncle then, Sam?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And your cousins too?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Because they were close to you in age?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Then you went to Enid. How did you fit in there and how did that work?

KR: I enrolled in Enid High School as a junior.

JE: In 1937.

KR: Yeah. One of the English teachers gave me private lessons during the month of August to improve my English. Let's see, I attended Enid High and I graduated in '39. You know, at the time, this area was quite provincial, I mean, hell, Enid didn't even have a fully paved highway to Oklahoma City. So very few people had been to Tulsa. I mean, these people were really provincial and here you come from Germany, you're like a man from Mars.

So I had to tell my story. But I made friends and I had a hell of a good time at Enid High School. The first thing I did was learn how to drive a car. And I took several English courses, more than normal. I took journalism class and I was a reporter on the black high school. We had a black high school in Enid.

JE: And you reported about them on—

KR: Yeah, yeah. Becoming Americanized was flora, fauna, it was something new.

JE: You spoke English back in Germany. Did you hear much of it around there? Or your family? How were you first exposed to speaking English?

KR: In high school.

JE: They taught it?

KR: Oh, sure.

JE: In high school in Germany.

KR: High school, yeah.

JE: In the '30s.

KR: That was part of general education: English and French. Some schools taught Latin and French, they call those gymnasium, and the others taught French and English.

My dad spoke it, my mother, I don't think knew much English.

Chapter 06 - 6:52

Ft. Sill

John Erling: So in 1939, you're eighteen years old when you graduate from high school?

Kenneth Renberg: Yeah.

JE: You're hearing in the news about Germany, about Hitler?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And what are you hearing at that time?

KR: At the time, you know, Hitler had taken over Czechoslovakia, he was threatening the Poles, so you knew there was going to be a war. Then September 1st, he marched into Poland.

JE: Which was then the beginning of World War II.

KR: Yeah. Which really didn't surprise anybody in Germany. Then I decided if there's going to be a war we're going to get into it eventually, so I decided to join the National Guard.

JE: Was it in '38 that your parents finally came over here?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Where did they settle?

KR: In Tulsa.

JE: So you're still in Enid—

KR: Yeah.

JE: And they came here because your father's brother was here?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And they lived here.

KR: Yeah.

JE: You didn't come here to live with them?

KR: Actually, I had intended to go to A&M or OSU. Then I had a death in the family in Enid, their son had died, and that delayed that.

So I stayed in Enid with my aunt and uncle. At the time, I joined the National Guard and we had our first camp in November at Ft. Sill, which was quite an education.

JE: You knew that quite possibly the United States was going to be drawn into the war?

KR: Yeah, I—

JE: But this, as you indicated earlier, was your opportunity to get back at Hitler?

KR: Yeah. That's the only reason I joined.

JE: So you're in this, in the winter at Ft. Sill.

KR: Yeah, this was a winter camp, intense.

JE: Did you ever wonder, "Why did I do this?" Because you didn't have to, at that time.

KR: No, but I was determined. I had a pretty interesting experience, that's the first time I passed out.

JE: What happened?

KR: Well, some of the big boys were going into Lawton. They invited me to go along. They were drinking pretty heavy and because I wasn't used to that stuff, and the next thing I know, it's five o'clock in the morning, I'm on my cot, in this tent, you're on KP. That was a little education. I could write a book about that.

JE: But you were sicker than a dog?

KR: Yeah, but that didn't matter. These were old World War I kitchens at Ft. Sill. They're still standing, they're using as classrooms. I taught in them as a gunnery instructor.

Anyway, we had these big pots, there was very little hot water and you had to clean them after every meal. And then in the evening, the drain in the kitchens was bad so you had to get on your knees with a big GI brush and scrub the floor. And then after that, you got the proverbial sack of potatoes to peel.

So anyway, I made every effort to become a corporal. Mind you, this was World War I equipment and uniforms and training. I mean, it was medieval. This was one of my big beefs, and every time I had somebody that has some influence I tell them what sad shape we were in.

Then I worked in the store, my uncle's store in Enid, and the National Guard was mobilized September 16, '40.

JE: How long was your basic training?

KR: We were the 45th Division, organized unit. So we had training all along. We were mobilized, we went back to Sill. We took a regular basic training from scratch that lasted about twelve, thirteen weeks. And mind you, most of us were school boys, guys I'd gone to high school with. We had a few that were a little older.

Then in February, I think, of '41, we got our first draftees, who were about ten year older than we were. And we gave them basic training. When we were mobilized, we were about thirty, forty men short in our firing battery. We were a natural unit. We pulled up a gun to that square in Enid with a table and we pulled the guys that we knew and signed them up. We didn't even have new uniforms for them, we put them in World War I solid color uniforms. We didn't have boots for them for months.

We had the light artillery had French 75s, which you laid entirely different from the modern methods. And we were 155 medium artillery unit.

The American Army had 168 thousand men when we were mobilized. And I think only fifty-eight were in organized units. The others were scattered all over. In September, they mobilized four National Guard divisions. September 16, forty.

JE: And forty.

KR: So that was the first time we had an increase in the size of the army. But we were National Guard versions, we were not as well trained. But the 45th, I mean, we did quite well, so as I say, we were trained draftees. And after each training course, we would send all the cadets to form new divisions. That took some of our older men that we had. We took officers and we took noncoms.

After a few months, we were not to one officer per firing battery, instead of four. I was a sergeant by the time of Pearl Harbor. I had just turned twenty. And when you had three stripes you usually filled an officer's position. I was reconnaissance officer for firing battery. And I had to train the men in serving the guns and what fire direction.

And as I say, I'd just been led for a year and a half. Of course, I always wanted to go to OCS. I wanted to be an officer. And I had to wait until I had my citizenship. I went to OCS in November '42. By that time, I had five stripes and I was up for master sergeant, as battalion fire direction chief.

JE: Wow.

KR: And I was twenty-one year old. I mean, that's the shape the army was in.

JE: But you were showing leadership capabilities.

KR: Well, yeah, because you either did it or you didn't do it. But I'm trying to point out the sad shape the army was.

JE: Right, right. And you were much younger than a lot of these men that you were leading.

KR: Yeah. When I went to OCS, I knew more than the gunnery instructor.

Chapter 07 - 5:08

U.S. Citizen

John Erling: When did you become a United States citizen?

Kenneth Renberg: I think it was October '42, in Muskogee, Oklahoma. We had moved from Camp Barkley in Texas to Camp Gruber. That was the first time in over two years that we lived inside barracks.

JE: That you lived inside barracks?

KR: We'd been living in tents.

JE: This was like going to a big hotel.

KR: Yeah, and since I had five stripes I had my own room.

JE: In Muskogee?

KR: In Muskogee.

JE: How long were you there?

KR: Just a few months because I went to OCS.

JE: But that's where you became a citizen, in Muskogee?

KR: Yeah.

JE: That had to be quite an experience.

KR: Oh, yeah.

JE: Then you went to OCS where?

KR: At Ft. Sill. Yeah, I was an artillery officer.

JE: That was a course of how long before you were commissioned?

KR: I was commissioned in February '43.

JE: By that time, in 1941, the war is on.

KR: Yeah.

JE: When, then, do you, after you were commissioned, then where are you sent?

KR: I was sent to school troops at Ft. Sill. We fired for the school, in other words, we would bring our guns in position for the students to learn adjustment of firearms. I would take out a set of four guns in the morning and another set in the afternoon. The students had their instructors and we did the firing for them.

Then we moved to Ft. Jackson in South Carolina. There we became an armored artillery battalion. I got a letter from Washington, since I spoke German they wanted me to transfer to Intelligence. And, hell, I was a forward observer in an armored unit with my own tank, I didn't want any part of it.

Two weeks later, I get another letter ordering me to report to Intelligence out at Camp Richie, Maryland. So I became a trainer of prisoner of war interrogators.

JE: Prisoner of war interrogators.

KR: After that, I got orders to go overseas, and I left and landed in Scotland, I think it was Christmas Eve '43.

From there I went to a training, to another center, and then to the 1st Infantry Division that had just come back from Sicily. And I was assigned together with another officer to the 18th Infantry Regiment.

Then we trained for the landing, the Normandy landing. We were lucky and got Omaha Beach.

JE: Wow.

KR: To prepare for the landing, of course, we had to learn the lay of the land. We had maps, of course, and everything and we had a war room. And to have access you needed top secret

clearance, and you needed a pass. Somewhere among my souvenirs, we were supposed to destroy those, somewhere I found that.

JE: Here's the pass you've just handed to me. "Headquarters First U.S. Infantry Division." You're number A-361, 13th of May, 1944. The bearer's second lieutenant.

KR: Yeah, that was my name, Gunther, my German name, I hadn't changed it yet.

JE: It says G. Renberg, and this is your serial number.

KR: Yeah.

JE: Has been classified as big—

KR: Bigot. I'll explain that. The officers had to choose a code name for these passes. When the division went to North Africa the orders read, "To Gibraltar," "To GIB." So you had to read it backwards, and that's how they got Bigot.

JE: Okay. So this pass that I'm holding in my hand, got you into ...

KR: The war room.

JE: The war room?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Of where?

KR: Of the 1st Infantry Division.

JE: And that was in?

KR: Southern England.

JE: All this time, you had to be thinking, "I need to get into Germany." Was that your thinking?

KR: No, by that time, the army took up all your thoughts. We were busy, we worked long hours. We were training these people, basic training. I had to train my men for fire direction. We worked day and night. See, the people that I trained all wanted to go to OCS, so I had a continuous movement there.

One time, we had annual tests by CORE and I got a warning, "We'll have a CORE test within four weeks," and I had to train people from scratch. But you don't say you can't do it, you'd better do it. And there are no excuses.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). So you're in the war room.

KR: Yeah.

JE: And what's going on there?

KR: Well, we look at the maps, we look at the information about the villages, the landscape, the German units that are in that area, and try to familiarize yourself because when you get off that boat you've got to know where to go. Of course, it always turns out different than you think.

Chapter 08 - 3:42**Omaha Beach**

John Erling: Tell us then, you landed in Omaha Beach.

Kenneth Renberg: Yeah.

JE: What day?

KR: Well, that's another story. We trained on a landing craft called LCI, Landing Craft Infantry, which is a small ship with a gangplank on each side. So you walked on those gangplanks. When it came to the real thing, we went on a troop ship. We were going in by these Higgins boats. But to get into it you climbed over the side down a cargo net. And we had waves going up and down three or four feet. So we were not prepared, I mean, we were not trained going down cargo nets.

Then the equipment that you had, we had special gas masks that were in a double-glazed container. They were supposed to help you as a lifesaver. Then we had map cases and other things. Then I had a tommy gun across my arms, trying to keep it out of the water. And then you'd go down your cargo net like that.

So anyway, we got into the boat, I think it held about thirty men. We get closer and, of course, people always say they got sick in what they saw, I was focused on the beach as we got closer. And I know I wasn't seasick, but you see these ducks, the amphibious two and a half tons, they were low in the water and they usually would be swamped by these waves, and they go down and the guys were swimming. That's about all that I remember.

Anyway, we get fairly close and we have a shell land right in front of us. The sailor had presence of mind and reversed the boat. So the second shot missed us. So then the beach master waved us off, I don't know why. But we were going back and forth in front of the beach all day and all night. So I landed on D plus 1.

JE: D plus 1?

KR: Yeah, on the second day.

JE: And kept going toward shore back and forth, back and forth until it was safe enough?

KR: No, we were going parallel to the shore. In other words, the beach master apparently had a certain sequence in which these boats landed. Because he had equipment and all that. But at sea, he just waved us off and they didn't call us up until the next morning. And that night we were bombed and strafed by German planes.

JE: While you were out in the water?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Are your thoughts, you're not going to make this? You're not going to live? You think about—

KR: No.

JE: No?

KR: There were two things: One, the air force was supposed to have taken care of the emplacements and they also were supposed to bomb the beaches to dig craters. Craters to protect you instead of a foxhole. Well, what happened, they did it at night and they overshot the beach so no damage was done. And I didn't see what was supposed to.

I was there in 2001, and I was at Utah Beach, I saw what they did.

JE: So when you made the landing, when you finally got there, what's happening? What's going on?

KR: Well, we set up in a house and immediately started interrogating German prisoners. Everything about the unit. They didn't know much but we tried to find out where their machine gun placements were, what units they were, where they came from, anything that would affect—

JE: You got very little information?

KR: Well, no, we got information, the thing was, you kind of built on it. In other words, you'd get somebody, "What's the name of your company commander?"

"Hoffman So-and-So."

Well, the next guy comes, so you say, "Well, how is Hoffman So-and-So?"

So this guy, he doesn't know what you know and what you don't know. We got quite a bit of information.

Chapter 09 - 6:00

Wounded in Battle

John Erling: How did you feel, because Hitler then by that time was full-bore rounding up Jews—

Kenneth Renberg: We didn't know that at that time.

JE: Yeah.

KR: I mean, we knew there were problems but the knowledge of these concentration camps, there are arguments about that, when it became known, '41 or '42.

JE: What was your attitude toward the prisoners of war, the Germans?

KR: I didn't have an attitude, I just wanted to get information. You don't really think a hell of a lot. You're busy, you're trying to protect your ass, so to speak. You just feel like you're part of an army and you want to win.

JE: Yeah. How do you think they viewed you?

KR: First of all, you're in charge. If you're a prisoner just captured you don't a hell of a lot of thinking, you just want to know what's going to happen to me.

JE: They weren't expressing their feelings.

KR: No.

JE: No.

KR: They're just scared.

JE: Yeah. Did you continue on interrogating for how long?

KR: We started the breakout out of Normandy at Saint-Lô, July 26, '44. There was a tremendous bombardment of the German lines, some of it hit some of our people. I got across the Saint-Lô Highway and then I got some prisoners and we were being shelled. One of my men and I got hit by the same shell that killed him immediately and just wounded me. I got a scar clear across.

JE: This again was where?

KR: At Saint-Lô, in Normandy. See, when we broke out, you know, we were tied up there in Normandy quite a while. And then Patton started the breakout and made a big sweep through France. Because we were all keyed up to go on this trip. We knew what the plans were.

JE: Yeah.

KR: We didn't see how we could miss. Of course, you know, when you're young you're an optimist.

JE: How severe was the wound to your shoulder?

KR: It opened up the whole bone like that. I was lucky I kept my arm.

JE: Did you go for a while before you had medical attention?

KR: I got into a foxhole because we were being shelled. Finally I got ahold of one of my men, I mean, everybody hit the foxholes. There were still some German slit trenches full of dead Germans. But these guys jumped right on top of them.

Anyway, I was able to get ahold of one of my men. He got a Jeep and took me back to the medics. From there then I went back to an evac hospital where I spent a day or two. Then they shipped me back to England, that's where they operated.

JE: Well, you just talked a lot here about something that happened that emotionally had to be something that either you didn't think about, or there was too much going on. A man next to you is killed and you take this open wound in your shoulder.

KR: The first thing I tried to tear his shirt open. I tried to see if I could help him. I didn't realize that I'd been hit, it felt like I got hit by a stick over me. And then when I kneeled over I saw all this blood coming out.

JE: And your arm probably was not working as well.

KR: That was the first thing that I checked and I had full use of my hand. And he was dead so there was nothing I could do for him.

JE: But you tried immediately to help him.

KR: Yeah. I didn't get back into combat until November.

JE: Of 19 ...?

KR: Forty-four. Actually, I had a pretty good time. I was in the hospital in England six weeks. Then I went to a replacement center for the Intelligence group and we had brought 150 men. Then I got orders to take these men and take them to the continent. They told me I would have transportation at the beach. It was Omaha Beach again.

I had my orders, so we got on a ship, we landed at the beach and there were no trucks. Mind you, this was September or October.

JE: Of '44?

KR: 'Forty-four. I had to get in touch with the headquarters of this unit in Paris. Because on the beach there were all kinds of units. There was nobody you could turn to. Nobody was about to give you any trucks.

So anyway, I took a French-speaking soldier with me. We hitchhiked, we got on an open semi-trailer on the Red Ball Express into Paris. The Red Ball Express was kind of an express deal that moved supplies. In other words, one-way streets, and they didn't stop for anything.

At nightfall, we were in a little village and I told this guy, "Let's spend the night here." It was drizzly, miserable weather. I asked some people where there was a room available. They showed me a house, so we went in. There was a woman and her daughter. She didn't want any part of us but I insisted. She had a little room up on the second floor, it was just up a few steps.

A few minutes later, a knock at the door, here are two MPs. They wanted to see our papers, which I had. He said, "Lieutenant, you picked the house of the only collaborators in this village."

What happened, the Frenchman I talked to noticed my German accent and that afternoon they had found a campfire, there were some escaped Germans in the area. Well, you put all this together [laughs], so anyway, he said, "You'd better come with us." He said, "We'll be chasing these Germans all night so you can use our place."

So anyway, we got into Paris and had a friend on the staff of this unit. He said, "We'll send the trucks, you don't have to go back."

So I had six weeks in Paris.

Chapter 10 - 3:10

Paris

John Erling: When you were in Paris for six weeks, you worked?

Kenneth Renberg: Well, they had to find a job for me. They made me assistant supply officer for this Intelligence unit. I didn't know anything about supplies, all I had to do was take acquisitions that had to be approved by three different officers. So I had a Jeep and a

driver and I went into Paris every day, and that's all I had to do. Until the supply officer, he wanted a combat star, so he went into Holland and turned his Jeep over and broke his arm. That made me supply officer. And I didn't know a damn thing about supplies. But I had a good sergeant.

The main thing I tried to protect us from people dealing with supplies on the black market. Because you could get four hundred dollars for a pair of boots.

JE: Who was taking from the supply?

KR: There was a lot of looting going on.

JE: So they'd break in?

KR: Break in or wherever they could get it. That was my main concern. Then it was time to go back into combat.

JE: We're getting close to the end of the war.

KR: Yeah.

JE: So you went back into combat where?

KR: On the Dutch border. I was assigned to the 102nd Division. We were right against the British on the Dutch/German border. We were getting new divisions from the States all the time and I was assigned to one of these 102nd, and particularly the 407th Infantry Regiment. The division had advanced to a River Roer, R-o-e-r, which was being defended by the Germans on the German side.

We stayed there until about February. The Bulge occurred I think on December 16.

JE: The Bulge?

KR: The Bulge, Battle of the Bulge.

JE: Battle of the Bulge, right.

KR: That was quite a ways south of us because we were in the northern sector. The army in the Bulge area had to be reinforced by a division from our sector. So our division commander and the neighboring division commander rolled the dice to see who was going to go. The other division went and we stayed and covered a two-division sector.

We were in a rather exposed area, we were right on the river in the cellar of a house that had been shut up. Every time we went outside we were exposed to German fire. The regimental command post was a few hundred yards down the street from us and that's where the kitchen was. Every time we went to eat we were exposed to German fire. We had some close calls but we were lucky.

Then we crossed the river in February when the general advance started again. We had some fairly heavy losses so we did not see too much combat after March of '45.

During the winter, we were pretty well stationary except for the Bulge.

Chapter 11 - 4:53
Combat in Germany

John Erling: Did you see combat in the country of Germany?

Kenneth Renberg: Yeah.

JE: So how did that make you feel? Here you come back to your home country.

KR: You don't think, you got a mission. I'm not a philosopher. You know, one thing could be that I personally didn't have bad experiences. Yeah, if some of my family would have been killed it would have been different. But my beef was with Hitler.

JE: So that was the first time you'd gone back to Germany since you left.

KR: Yeah.

JE: In Germany, you were in combat for how long?

KR: After we got cross the line we were pretty much in reserve. And the German army was pretty well destroyed, so really, there was not much, I mean, there was fighting, yes, but no heavy battles.

And then in April, we wound up on the Elbe River, E-l-b-e, about thirty, forty miles west of Berlin. That's where we waited for the Russians. The Germans were trying to surrender and cross the Elbe River to surrender to us, instead of being captured by the Russians.

In three days, we had about thirty-five thousand German prisoners come over in our regimental sector. They came in boats, rafts, or swam. We had a big thumb, which had barns and stables kind of in a quadrangle. We could hold about two thousand prisoners at a time. We put them in these buildings, then whenever there were trucks available, we would ship these people back.

One thing, the American army was so thinly spread that I forgot how many miles we covered, I mean, our regiment. Whole German units were able to pass through. What we did when they came across the Elbe River we lined them up in columns of a thousand. With their weapons. We had a Jeep in front and a Jeep behind and then we marched them into the stockade.

Once they were there, we had them throw their weapons on a pile. We had fifteen MPs to handle these prisoners. That's how thinly we were spread out. We didn't have the manpower to search them. What we did, we put guards on rooftops of the stables and barns. How many got away? I don't know.

What happened also, I went by the stockade and there was a young second lieutenant who did not have much army experience. He threw up his hands. Well, as the only officer there I took charge. The colonel thought that was a good idea, since I spoke German, anyway.

I organized these prisoners into companies and put officers in charge of them, and that's how I handled them. But we did not sleep for three days because we had continuous traffic and, as I say, a total of thirty-five thousand.

JE: Were they easy to control?

KR: Yeah, they were glad that they didn't get captured by the Russians. Of course, we took for our personal use all the pistols and stuff that we wanted. This place where I was running this prison camp was about fifty, sixty miles from where I was as a trainee for Palestine. So you talk about an irony of fate.

JE: Well, now, you must have had some feelings about that. That must have been strange to you.

KR: Well, I didn't know this until a few weeks ago, till I looked at a map. I was looking for this village called Halberd and I scrolled over my computer. All of a sudden, here's this little village. I didn't know how close it was.

JE: Till just a few weeks ago?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Wow. That had to be a feeling that came over you.

KR: Yeah, that's where you get satisfaction.

JE: Right.

KR: So basically, combat was over. We moved back when the Russians took over. We wound up in Bavaria in a little town on the Danube. And then, well, we had to release soldiers based on a point system. Since the 45th was one of the first units mobilized, most of us had more points than the rest of the soldiers. So I came home in October of '45.

JE: The war was over in May of 1945.

KR: In Europe, VE Day was what, August, I believe?

JE: Hitler died in '45.

KR: Yeah.

JE: In April.

KR: Yeah.

JE: You remember your feelings about hearing that Hitler was dead?

KR: I don't know. I mean, we had won the war and I knew what would happen to him.

JE: But your motivation for joining that National Guard troop was accomplished.

KR: Yeah.

Chapter 12 - 4:13

Got Even with Hitler

Kenneth Renberg: Then I have another deal. Back in 1996, my hometown celebrated its 750th

anniversary. They had invited former Jews from the city to attend this event, at their cost. By that time, there were quite a few Russian Jews in my hometown. My wife and I went over and we had the first Friday night service since World War II in that town.

Of course, most of the Russian Jews didn't know anything about religion. But there was a young man who was going to be in charge of this congregation that they were going to form. So I said, "Well, you need prayer books."

He said, "Well, we don't have money."

I said, "How many do you need?"

He said, "About fifty."

I said, "I'll buy them."

The next thing was they needed a Torah to have a congregation. They didn't have money for that so I said I'll buy that for you.

Then the city gave them a part of a building and they had to get the furniture and the prayer desk and a cabinet for the Torah. So I paid for that, so that was my final getting even with Hitler.

John Erling: And that had to make you feel really good.

KR: That does, yes.

JE: That was the button on it.

KR: That was the button, yeah.

JE: When you're out of the military, are you married soon after you leave?

KR: No. I was in school two weeks after I got home.

JE: And you got home to where?

KR: Tulsa. I had enough of army life and I'd just as soon eat my mother's cooking. I studied petroleum engineering.

JE: And were your parents here?

KR: Yeah.

JE: In Tulsa?

KR: They were in Tulsa.

JE: So you get to come home and live with them for a while.

KR: Yeah.

JE: And you went to school where?

KR: Here at TU.

JE: At TU.

KR: And I graduated in '49.

JE: With a degree in?

KR: Petroleum engineering.

JE: Then did you go out into your profession?

KR: Yeah, there was a consulting firm here, Kiplinger and Wannamaker. I started working for them during the summer after my junior year. They offered me a job at the beginning of the senior year, so I didn't have to worry about a job. And I was working for them, actually, I was working forty hours a week. I stayed in the Reserves, Army Reserves.

JE: You joined there?

KR: When I was released from the service.

JE: You were part of the Reserves already.

KR: Yeah, oh yeah. Then '51, one afternoon I got a call about three o'clock, "Report for a physical tomorrow morning at eight." Now that was in '51. The Korean War started in '50. I thought we were home safe since they didn't call us. But we were part of the artillery school at Ft. Sill. So we went down there and they asked me, "What do you want to do?"

I said, "I'd like to teach gunnery."

"Fine."

So I taught gunnery. I think that was in May and I think I got out less than a year and a half later.

JE: But didn't your heart sink when you got that call? You had to go back in the military on active duty.

KR: Well, you know, you sign up, you're a big boy.

JE: Yeah.

KR: People would complain, I said, "Hell, you signed up."

JE: So a year and a half then.

KR: But I was lucky also. They sent instructors to Korea based on previous overseas time. And I had more overseas time than most of them, so I never left Ft. Sill.

JE: You taught gunnery for a year and a half?

KR: Yeah.

JE: At Ft. Sill. Then you finally get out?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And that's for good now.

KR: Yeah, that's for good.

JE: Then you're back working again here in Tulsa.

KR: Yeah. Then at same time, Lee Keeling joined that firm. We shared an office. He left in '57 and started the company. And I joined him in '59.

JE: Which is the company you're working for right now.

KR: Yeah.

JE: And you're now a principle—

KR: Yeah.

JE: ... in this company.

KR: Yeah. He and I own most of the company.

JE: We should say we're doing this interview in the Chase Bank building at 5th and Boston, 35th floor—

KR: Yeah.

JE: ... in Tulsa.

KR: They call it First Place Tower.

JE: Yeah. You're married somewhere along the line.

KR: In '57. See, I was traveling an awful lot and I got married in '57.

JE: Your bride's name?

KR: Lillian Bauer, B-a-u-e-r.

JE: She was from Tulsa?

KR: Yeah.

JE: How did you meet her?

KR: At the Harvard Club.

JE: You had children from that marriage?

KR: Yeah, I had a son, and he was killed in motorcycle accident a little over a year ago. It was a year ago in November.

JE: What was his name?

KR: Greg.

JE: And how old was he?

KR: Fifty-one.

JE: Wow. Was that in Tulsa?

KR: They were on vacation in Baja, California.

JE: Were you with him?

KR: No.

JE: He was on vacation out there?

KR: Yeah.

JE: And you were here in Tulsa?

KR: Yeah, he lived in Houston.

JE: Wow, that's tough.

KR: Yeah.

Chapter 13 - 4:13

Life of Coincidences

John Erling: Your work as a petroleum engineer has taken you many places in the world, I suppose.

Kenneth Renberg: Yeah. Colombia, Germany, Israel. The firm has been in a number of other places, but those are mainly the places where I've been.

JE: And here you come back as a citizen to Germany again.

KR: Yeah.

JE: Working probably not far from—

KR: Well, actually what happened, I was about thirty miles from my hometown. I went there the first weekend and I located one of my best friends. So I was there every weekend.

JE: In your hometown?

KR: Yeah. [both laughing] Well, I mean, that's a crazy world.

JE: Yes, yes it is. Wow. Well, here you are, eighty-nine year old, working every day.

KR: Yeah, I don't work too hard. There are certain jobs that I do. I try to get here by ten thirty.

JE: And your wife is still living?

KR: No. She passed away in 2001. And I married again, Marjorie Singer.

JE: So George Singer in town, is that her son?

KR: Yeah, yeah, that's her son.

JE: Your wife's son?

KR: Yeah.

JE: Okay. You're in good health?

KR: Yeah. I've had a stint operation but I try to ride my bicycle twenty-five, thirty minutes.

JE: Well, you appear to be in good health, and you are.

KR: Of course, genes have a lot to do with it but exercise does too. When we got called back during the Korean deal, as instructors we couldn't participate in regular physical training. So we had to pass a fitness test. Some guys almost had a heart attack, been out of shape, and we'd been out of the service only five years. So I figured, you know, that's too young. So I've been exercising ever since.

JE: As you look back on your life—

KR: That's when I have a lot of fun.

JE: ... and you reflect, it's just kind of, I don't know if bizarre is the word, in a way it is.

KR: It is. When you look at the coincidences, it hasn't been dull.

JE: What did you know about, or after, I guess, as you read the history books about Auschwitz and the concentration camps? That you didn't know about until you were out of the military? Or did you know about it?

KR: I don't know. This is the thing that I've been thinking about, when did we know? There were rumors but I really, I really don't know.

Now we came across a barn full of burned bodies at a little town called Godalming, those were political prisoners. In other words, as the Russians and the Allies closed in, the Germans were moving people back and forth. Finally they ran out of space. So they put

these people in a barn full of straw and set fire to the straw. That was about the only thing we saw.

Then, when we moved back, as the Russians came in, we came across a camp called Walldorf, but that had already been mostly cleaned up. Otherwise, we didn't really see anything in our sector.

JE: Those political prisoners, would they have been Jews?

KR: No.

JE: You didn't see any, you just heard rumors?

KR: I don't really recall. I know the 45th Division hit Dachau, which was in Bavaria.

JE: Would you have known anybody that have gone to one of those concentration camps?

KR: Oh, I guess. Actually, there was this displaced persons camp near Degendorf, where we were in Bavaria. And I ran into a man that I knew from my hometown who had been in a concentration camp.

JE: Did he talk about his experience?

KR: At the time, no.

JE: But to read and to hear about what went on in those camps has to really—

KR: Oh, yeah, I mean, it's unbelievable.

JE: And it could have been you.

KR: Certainly.

JE: Yeah.

KR: I mean, you've got to thank your lucky stars.

JE: Yeah. But life has been good to you here.

KR: Yeah, I don't have any complaints.

Chapter 14 - 6:30

Scars of War

John Erling: How would you like to be remembered?

Kenneth Renberg: Oh, as somebody who did his duty.

JE: Well, it sounds like you went beyond your duty. We thank you for your service to the country.

KR: Well, the thing that bothers me, I draw disability pay. I've been given that to these family veterans group in the National Guard. I've been giving that to the units that went overseas. The reason is not the money, the reason is this country is at peace. We're fighting two wars but the country is at peace and since we don't have a draft, most people don't give a damn. And these soldiers, our service people, you know, it affects their morale.

My main purpose was to let them know that somebody is thinking of them.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

KR: That is the thing that bothers me today that we're calling up the Guard several times. I mean, once is fine, but when you go two or three times, then they're sending the 45th to Afghanistan. I mean, these people are not in the shape that somebody in the regular duty is.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

KR: That's the thing that bothers me. I go to an annual dinner in Washington, officers that served in combat with the 1st Infantry Division. There are a lot of those people that are on active duty. Most of us are veterans but I never heard anybody complain. They may, but not in public. I mean, this is the thing, I don't know how in the hell we get out of it. But we can't leave either. So I say it's just unfortunate that a few have to bear the burden.

JE: The young people listening to our conversation and your story, do you have any advice?

KR: Get all the schooling you can and do right. Don't try to get by the easy way. Take interest in what you're doing and your fellow man. That's about all you can do.

JE: Well, I would say by listening to your story, you never questioned, as you said, "I signed up, it was my job, I was supposed to do it," and you weren't complaining.

KR: Yeah.

JE: It doesn't seem like you complained at all, you just, "This is what I'm supposed to do."

KR: Well, I wasn't too happy about it but then, that was it.

JE: Right.

KR: I mean, this is the thing, when you do something you've got to think of the consequences. Of course, nobody would have thought it would have happened that soon, but that's life.

JE: Yeah.

KR: Because, let's face it, I was more fortunate too that I didn't go overseas. Matter of fact, I worked for my company on weekends. I had never applied for a job. I was offered a job before I got out of school. So when I was down at Ft. Sill during the Korean deal I just wanted the experience. I had nothing to do at night, so I thought if I could get some part-time work here, I had thought what I was going to say and I had my spiel all ready.

I go into this place and talk to the chief engineer. He said, "Hang up your coat."

I still had something to do for the firm here in Tulsa so I said, "I can't right now," anyway, delayed. So I tried another firm a few months later. The same thing, so I still don't know what it's like to apply for a job. [both laughing]

JE: Well, this is a remarkable story you told and you did a good job and I appreciate very much your taking time.

KR: Well—

JE: This will be on a website that can be heard by people for many, many years to come, beyond our lifetime, and that's what this is all about. So, thank you.

KR: You're welcome. As I say, most people haven't been this fortunate.

JE: Do you still have problems with your shoulder?

KR: I can't play tennis or golf.

JE: Yeah.

KR: I don't really have a problem. If I hold a book for a while, like a prayer book and you have to stand, then after about ten minutes, my arm gets tired. Or I tried to play tennis when I got home and my arm would tighten up. But, I mean, I don't have anything to complain about.

JE: But many younger people can't relate and so many of you who were in World War II, you walk around with scars, you still feel the effects of a wound. And for some, there are emotional scars.

KR: Oh, yeah.

JE: That they're dealing with. I think vast Americans are unaware of that now.

KR: This post-traumatic stress, I had a cousin, I don't know if you knew him, Marty Clayman. He married the Renberg daughter. He ran the store at Utica and then the store out at Woodland Hills. He'd been a bomber pilot and he showed me his plane once, shot it full of holes. He had this twitching and he didn't have a job running a store but he started out at TU. He just couldn't concentrate.

I know there are others. Well, actually, once in a while, I had nightmares, but, I mean, it didn't bother me. I haven't in quite some time. But, I mean, these guys that were in Vietnam and Afghanistan, these places, Iraq with these IEDs, you know, it makes you kind of nervous.

JE: Yeah.

KR: We had the advantage that, first of all, we were young. We were given a hell of a lot of responsibility. That kept your mind off yourself. When I was in that boat going towards the beach, I was looking around watching the other guys, make sure nobody panicked. That keeps your mind off yourself.

But you've got to look at the bright side of things. [laughs]

JE: Well, it sounds like you're a naturally positive thinking person, so that—

KR: Oh, yeah.

JE: ... helped.

KR: Well, you have to be.

JE: Yeah. A lot of people can't control their minds and so they're prone to be depressed and look on the dark side.

KR: Yeah.

JE: And that doesn't seem like it was your personality.

KR: Well, no, it doesn't get you anywhere.

JE: All right. Thank you.

KR: Okay, you're welcome.

Chapter 15 - 0:33**Conclusion**

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