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Interview with
Dr. Jack B. Scroggs
October 25, 1973

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Mr. Richard P. Walker

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Oral History Collection

Dr. Jack Scroggs

Interviewer: Mr. Richard P. Walker

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Mr. Walker: This is an interview being made with Dr. Jack Scroggs, Chairman of the Department of History, North Texas State University. The purpose of the interview is to record the experiences and impressions of Dr. Scroggs while he was a guard of Axis prisoners-of-war during World War II.

Well, Dr. Scroggs, as you know, what I would like to talk to you about deals really with two things: one, your experiences as a guard and secondly, your observations of the prisoners-of-war because, this is one thing that is absolutely lacking in the records that I have been able to look at. I'm interested in the prisoners-of-war; particularly I'm interested in their daily habitat and what they did, their duties and so forth. If we could start and kind of introduce it, would you give me a little bit of biographical background up to your entrance into the Army, so we can go from there to your assignment as guard.

Dr. Scroggs: Well, my experience up to the time that I was drafted into the service had been largely as a student. I completed high school at Jacksonville,

Arkansas, and spent one year in the CCC camp and subsequently two years at the University of Arkansas. At the end of that two years, I didn't have enough money to continue, and as a consequence, I took a full-time job at Ford Motor Company in Detroit for one year. I was in that position trying to save money to go back to college when the peacetime draft act, the Burke-Wadsworth Bill, was passed in 1940. Realizing full well that as a twenty-one year old guy in good health I was going to be drafted (chuckle); I didn't worry anymore about saving money to go to the University but simply bided my time until the draft, and I was drafted from the quota in Wayne County in Detroit. I was taken into the service at Little Rock, Arkansas, however, just as a convenience to me.

When I was drafted, I was sent to Fort Warren, Wyoming, for basic training. This was still during peacetime--one year enlistment--and had completed my basic training at Fort Warren shortly before Pearl Harbor. Of course, when Pearl Harbor came, everybody's service extended to duration plus six months.

I then was shipped out with a contingent to open up a new camp at Camp Crowder, Missouri, about

a week after Pearl Harbor, I guess. We opened Camp Crowder with about 150 cadre, I suppose, and we set up all the post headquarters, quartermaster facilities, and so forth. Being on the ground floor, I got a pretty good deal out of that (chuckle) because I had completed my basic. I did type. I had some clerical experience and some personnel experience, and as a consequence, I was taken into post headquarters at Camp Crowder and stayed at Camp Crowder, oh, for roughly three years in personnel work at post headquarters, and I worked up to staff sergeant in that position.

From there I applied for OCS and went to Camp Lee, Virginia, near Petersburg, and got my commission as second lieutenant at Camp Lee.

After being commissioned, I spent a very brief period of time with the troops in training at Camp Hill in Virginia, and then suddenly I received orders to report to the quartermaster general's office, for what reason I did not know, on special duty, and I found myself assigned at the quartermaster general's office to figuring out spare parts requirements for all quartermaster items for overseas shipment, something for which I had

absolutely no training whatever (chuckle). But the only way I could logically figure to pursue this task was to go out to a 5th echelon repair depot and try to determine from their repair experience what the mortality of various and sundry parts, nuts and bolts and what-not, would be. As a consequence, I did go out to Jeffersonville, Indiana, where there was a 5th echelon quartermaster depot, a quite large one, and spent a good deal of the time trying to determine spare part's mortality, periodically going back to Washington, putting the stuff together.

In the process I apparently caught the eye of the commander of the depot, and he subsequently asked that I be transferred out to Jeffersonville, Indiana, as his property officer in this 5th echelon depot, and this is where I gained what experience I did have with German prisoners-of-war. I might point out that it was not as a guard, as your initial statement indicated, but rather just as being a supervisor of their work in this depot.

Walker: Well, were the prisoners-of-war already there when you arrived at this camp or had they. . .

Scroggs: As I recall, they were. It was quite some time in the past, of course, but I can't recall their being

brought in, so they must have been there when I arrived (chuckle).

Walker: When you say that you were supervisor of the POW's and their work, what were essentially your duties?

Scroggs: Well, as property officer I was responsible for all incoming and outgoing shipments into the depot and, of course, items that are sent into the 5th echelon repair depot are non-accountable. They are things that are simply written off by units as being wasted as far as they are concerned, and they ship them into a 5th echelon depot, and if we could repair them, we did so; if we didn't, we junked them. So my duties were to be accountable for all property, for all parts, and for all incoming and outgoing shipments, which was a relatively easy thing in this particular circumstance because of the lack of accountability. You didn't become accountable for anything until it was repaired and ready to be sent back out for use. It was in that capacity primarily that my supervisory work was centered.

Walker: When you took this assignment and worked with prisoners, can you recall what your initial impression was of working with German POW's or supervising them?

Scroggs: My initial impression?

Walker: That is, besides being probably a strange situation in that you have a language problem and these are the "enemies" of the United States.

Scroggs: Yes, of course, from my point of view, I wasn't concerned particularly about them being enemies of the United States. They were simply people as far as I was concerned, and they were simply people working for me, and this is the way I viewed them. Although, there were some characteristics in their work and the people themselves, of course, which set them aside from the normal civil service workers that I also had under my supervision. The language barrier was not a particularly difficult thing to get around largely because I organized their work in such a fashion that I didn't deal with them directly to a great extent. Rather, I had a civilian civil service man who was shop foreman, so to speak, who was actually in charge of most of their routine work. Then he and I also established a pretty close rapport with one particular prisoner who spoke rather good English and was thus able to translate and relay information that we wanted relayed to the prisoners. There was, of course, one difficulty as far as the language barrier was concerned, and that was, having

no understanding of German myself, I didn't know what the boys were talking about (chuckle), and I sometimes wondered what their conversation was. But my impression was that the conversations they had around me were not derogatory at any rate. They had great respect for brass.

Walker: Were these prisoners under your supervision in uniform with insignia, or what kind of uniform did they have?

Scroggs: No, as I recall, they wore fatigues.

Walker: U. S. Army issue?

Scroggs: Yes, yes, Army fatigues, which I am sure were simply issued to them at prison camp. The camp itself was located on the property of the 5th echelon depot.

Walker: I see. And they were housed and fed. . .

Scroggs: In barracks.

Walker: In that one camp?

Scroggs: In a fenced-in enclosure, but regular Army barracks such as we had.

Walker: How many POW's were under your immediate supervision?

Scroggs: I don't recall exactly, but it occurs to me that it was somewhere between 125 and 150. They were a pretty good-sized labor force, and, of course, that's all they were used for. They weren't used for any

technical work on the repair lines or anything of that sort. Virtually all of our material coming into the depot came by boxcar, by train, and as a consequence, most of the work done by these POW's was in loading and unloading materials from boxcars on the docks.

Walker: Do you recall in your experience. . . you did not mention it, but was there any particular orientation given to those soldiers immediately associated with the POW's in terms of how to handle them? Was there any type of even an Army pamphlet that was devised for handling the POW's?

Scroggs: Well, in our particular situation, the only contact that we had with any Army personnel handling the POW's were the guards who brought them from the camp and simply turned them over to us, for use at the depot, and I would doubt if they had any orientation. I don't know.

Walker: Well, when they were carrying out their duties, the POW's, were there U.S. Army guards present, or were they just turned over to you and your outfit and then the guards left?

Scroggs: I do not recall any guards being present. The camp itself was an enclosed thing, and I don't recall any guards being present to physically guard these fellows.

They were brought down by guards, and they were picked up by guards. There were occasional escapes, but normally the escapes were not simply by walking off the job but rather by hiding in boxcars and getting out of camp in that fashion. We had several escapes of that sort. This, of course, was no business of mine, so I was not involved in one way or another.

Walker: Do you recall that the fear of escape or the problem of escape being of a particular problem in your camp?

Scroggs: No, I don't think that many of the prisoners even tried or anticipated escaping, and I suppose this would be largely due to their geographic location. They were, of course, here west of the mountains, out in the boondocks, and there wouldn't really be any place for them to go. Generally, as I recall it, those who did manage to get out of there were captured, and they didn't stand much of a chance of hiding out because where we were located, about the only possibility of getting to a city of any size, of course, was Louisville, which was across the river, and it was not much of a city, particularly for a foreign element because there was a very small foreign element in Louisville.

You might be interested in the composition of these, that is, the background of prisoners, because through this young fellow who served more or less as my right hand and interpreter and so forth in dealing directly with the prisoners, I learned a good deal about the fellows who were working for me, and by and large they were in two very distinct groups. This young fellow was Czechoslovakian, and I might mention, by the way, that as far as I know, all of these prisoners had been captured in North Africa. They had been part of Rommel's group in North Africa. This young Czech, however, as he described the situation to me, said they were divided rather clearly. You could see this. They hung together. The two groups would hang as two separate groups. One was composed of the Wehrmacht, the common soldier, and that is what this Czech boy was, and then he alleged that he had no heart in the matter from the beginning. He was simply drafted by Hitler, and he did not believe in Nazism and so forth. That was indicative however, of one group who were just common soldiers.

But there was a fairly sizable group included in the ones who worked for me who were of the elite, the SS troops, and they very carefully kept their distance from the Wehrmacht. They maintained their elite position, even as prisoners-of-war. The Czech boy who served as sort of my interpreter was somewhat fearful of them because he continued to recognize their prestige and was quite frank in admitting this to me. There was some evidences, indeed, of the SS group even continuing some direction of the Wehrmacht element. They did not do it when I was present because, as I said a little bit earlier, they did have a very deep respect for an officer, and when I came around everything quieted down.

Walker: Concerning this matter, I know that the Army in Washington was concerned about this problem, the SS in the camps, because they often had trouble with their taking control of their German prisoners in the camps among themselves. On the base you were associated with, were you aware of any problems that resulted from the SS men?

Scroggs: I don't think there was any evidence of an overt problem as such, but I gathered the impression from talking with this young fellow that there was clear-cut distinction within the camp enclosure, within the prisoner-of-war camp enclosure itself. I never visited the camp enclosure myself. In fact, this was discouraged, but my impression was that the prisoners were treated rather well as far as furnishing them with things for their hobbies and so forth. In fact, this little Czech boy even made my wife a stainless steel bracelet while we were there, a sign of his friendship for me. And as a consequence, I don't think there was a great deal of tension, but I am quite sure that the distinction was clear-cut from what he said.

Walker: In your conversations with this prisoner, was his attitude generally one of acceptance of his fate, that is, of being a prisoner, or did he feel that he still had a duty to perform for Germany?

Scroggs: I don't think he had any of the latter feeling at all, as I noted. He intimated to me, whether true or not, that he had no heart in

the fatherland's fight and that he had been simply taken in by Hitler against his will, fought much like all soldiers fight--because they had to. I would suspect from my observations of what he said that there was more of something of a continued dedication to the cause on the part of the SS troops than the Wehrmacht.

Walker: When these men were assigned to you, was there on their part a general acceptance of their duties, or was there this reluctance to do the work assigned to them?

Scroggs: In general, I don't think there was any great problem as far as their acceptance of the fact they were prisoners and they had to work. There was some malingering, of course, as there would be in any troops, U.S. or German. The only difficulty that I had in getting them to work was during the period when there was rather extreme pressure in the country to cut down on the "easy treatment" which was being quoted as what the prisoners had. I don't know whether you have run across it or not, but there was a considerable move on the part of certain congressional reactionaries and certain newspapers

and columnists and so forth to make life a little more difficult for the German prisoners, the contention being that our American prisoners were not being fed properly and not being taken care of properly in Germany, and as a consequence, these fellows should not be given the same rations as an American soldier and so forth.

This had its effect because I could observe one meal that these fellows had, and that was the noon meal, which was brought down on a truck and served to them on the docks. And in the course of this rather persistent public drive, they did cut down on the rations, and they cut down appreciably to the extent that many, many times all they would do would be to bring a big GI can full of rather watery soup and some bread, and this would be their noon meal. Well, this was a rather difficult thing for boys who were loading and unloading boxcars because that was pretty heavy work. This did bring complaints, and rather persistent complaints from the prisoners, and even threats, not to me but threats to my civilian foreman.

Walker: Physical threats?

Scroggs: No. Threats that they wouldn't work. They demanded food or they wouldn't work. I had to step in on them on several occasions when this occurred and simply go down to the docks and tell them to get back to work, which they would do when I told them to, but they would not obey the civilians.

Walker: Do you know whether or not this restricted diet was typical of all the three meals or. . .

Scroggs: No, I don't. I gather from what my Czech friend told me that it was typical, but, of course, I could observe only one meal, and I do know that they cut down appreciably on rations under this public pressure.

Walker: Of course, your immediate experience was just with the men working under you, but in talking to your people you were associated with in the Army, did they feel this was typical of the entire camp, of all the prisoners, that is, this resentment or anger at having their rations cut?

Scroggs: Frankly, I don't know. I didn't know any other users of the prisoners' labor. We used more labor than anybody else, probably, in our particular section of the installation.

Walker: Were the prisoners allowed, as far as you know, any knowledge of the war itself, progress of the

war, in terms of radios, newspapers, magazines?

Scroggs: Frankly, I don't know. I presume that they did have access to such information. The young fellow that I knew talked rather knowledgeably about what was going on, and I would doubt very much if there would have been a concerted effort to keep such information from them. In fact, if I am not mistaken, I think that he even referred to their having radios and this sort of thing in the camp. This, of course, would give them unlimited access to the news.

Walker: Do you know whether or not, through this person that you knew well, whether they were allowed packages and mail from home, that is, could he keep in touch with his family and friends?

Scroggs: He did receive mail, but I don't know whether he received any packages or not. But he told me on occasion about receiving mail, news from his family back home in Czechoslovakia.

Walker: Many times in the camps, I have run across records of commanders of the camps being concerned with what is usually called "trouble makers" in the camp. To your knowledge, did you ever have any relationship to an individual or three or four individuals that particularly caused problems?

Scroggs: Not to my recollection, I don't recall any individuals. The only resistance that I ever encountered was due to their food being cut.

Walker: I know that in the inspection reports that were often made, the German complaints were sometimes noted, and one thing that keeps occurring is their lack of shoes. Did you ever observe shoes that they had?

Scroggs: I don't think any of these fellows had difficulty with shoes. Of course, in the type of work they were doing, they weren't out in outdoor labors, so to speak, in farm labor or anything of that sort. My recollection is that they had precisely the same sort of fatigue clothing that the American soldier had, including GI shoes. I certainly didn't have any complaints from anybody.

Walker: What were, more specifically, the duties of these men? Were they basically loading and unloading?

Scroggs: Yes, they worked generally as a group in a work gang type thing. Their duties were almost exclusively simply unloading the incoming boxcars and sorting the material under our direction. As I said, I had Civil Service people working for me, too. Then, of course, when we repaired things, we

boxed the repaired items and sent them back to the quartermaster for general distribution. They had to load these back in the boxcars, and I don't recall them doing any other type work than that. They were never used specifically in repair work.

Walker: Did they work a general eight to ten-hour day, that is, a regular hourly shift or daily shift?

Scroggs: Yes, they were brought down from the compound itself very shortly after I arrived in the morning, and my job was an eight-to-five job which coincided, of course, with the civilian labor which was the major part of our labor at the camp. We didn't have many soldiers around except officer personnel. But they were brought down shortly after we came to work, and they worked until around five and were taken back to camp. They did not go back at noon, as I said. They had their lunch on the job.

Walker: Then, as far as you know, their duty ended then, that is, there were no additional duties that they had besides probably policing barracks.

Scroggs: Yes, I suppose they had the same duties as a soldier would have--policing, fatigue duty, and that sort of thing--but they had no other duties. They were eight-to-five employees, too.

Walker: I notice that in the Army reports that, in addition to there being periodical Army inspections of the prison camps, there were also inspections made by the YMCA and the Red Cross, State Department, and so forth. Do you recall any of those kinds of inspections being held?

Scroggs: No, but I wouldn't have had any contact with that because as far as the living quarters of the prisoners were concerned, we just didn't have any contact. We used them as labor.

Walker: Did you have to fill out any forms for the prisoners, that is, personnel records or anything on the prisoners that you used in your work?

Scroggs: No, not that I recall. They were simply brought down and delivered as so many prisoners and taken back the same way.

Walker: And as far as you know, they were essentially the same group.

Scroggs: Yes, they were essentially the same group. I would judge the same group, really.

Walker: Do you have any idea of approximately what the total number of prisoners were in that entire camp were, that is, what percentage do you think were working under your supervision?

Scroggs: I really don't. It was a relatively small camp, but how many were in it, I don't know. I would judge, as I say. . . I doubt if there were over 200 or 250 people in the entire group because we used most of the labor in our particular operation.

Walker: Were you ever given any information or orders from your superiors to look for anything in particular in terms of their behavior? Or perhaps possessions. Because, of course, they were denied certain things. Was there any alert on your part to watch for certain things?

Scroggs: No, I was never given any such instructions. Actually, the major under whom I worked very seldom had anything personally to do with the operation. Most of the actual work going on in this depot was done by first and second lieutenants. The major was the most conspicuous by his absence than by his presence (chuckle). Most of the time he was at the officer's club, I think, rather than at the depot.

Walker: Did you live on the base itself?

Scroggs: No, I lived over in Louisville. I was married at the time, and I lived off the post. Well,

actually, I am not even sure there were living quarters available on the depot because it was located right across the river in Jeffersonville, Indiana, right across the river from Louisville. Everybody I knew lived in Louisville. It was just a matter of driving across the bridge.

Walker: This will be a difficult question, I am sure, but do you recall what we might call a prevailing attitude in Louisville concerning having prisoners just across the river, that is, in terms of newspapers, editorials, or perhaps reactions of your friends?

Scroggs: I never encountered any antipathy on the part of the people in Louisville. The fact of the matter is, I doubt that very many people even realized that we had a contingent of prisoners working over at Jeffersonville. Around the local bars and so forth, you never ran to this sort of talk, which would probably have been a normal place to encounter it.

Walker: Well, there was no secrecy involved.

Scroggs: No, there was no secrecy involved, but I never saw any publicity about it.

Walker: Did you feel that most Americans that you came in contact with, either on the base or off the base, do you feel that they were part of this reaction you referred to a moment ago of treating the prisoners too well and so forth.

Scroggs: Yes, I could see that, I think, on the part of some of our civil service employees. I didn't ever encounter that sort of thinking from any of my military colleagues. But, as I say, the greater part of the actual labor used in this 5th echelon depot was civil service labor and generally not of the highest order, as one might suspect. The civil service foreman who was under me directly and over the prisoners in their labor, I think, was quite sympathetic with the idea of cracking down on their food supply. That sort of patriotism, of course, is encountered quite frequently in individuals who are not having to pay the price of being in the service.

Walker: I have run across this quite a bit, both in the official records and press, that there was this reaction, and I wondered if it was fairly widespread or centered in relation to only those areas where there were camps.

Scroggs: I didn't see any of that sort of thinking myself. I do recall very vividly the national move, and, of course, this carried on by radio commentators and columnists and congressional leaders and so forth. And it had its effect, but I was not sympathetic toward it. I tended to be more sympathetic toward these fellows as human beings.

Walker: You mentioned a moment ago that the prisoners under your supervision had chow there while they were working in loading and unloading. Was this brought to them by the guards, or how did it get there?

Scroggs: It was brought down from their compound on a truck, a GI truck, usually, of course, in those huge GI kettles they used to cook food in. And each prisoner, when he came down to work, brought his own mess kit with him, and so he would simply be served his chow on the dock in his mess kit.

Walker: Were they given a certain length of time and then put back to work?

Scroggs: Yes, we normally gave them. . . well, of course, it was pretty much left up to me how much time they had, but we normally gave them forty to fifty minutes because they were engaged in pretty heavy work. They needed a little rest in addition.

Walker: Did you ever allow them breaks during the day in addition to the lunch break?

Scroggs: Yes, we normally let them break to take a smoke and rest, oh, every hour or so.

Walker: Do you by any chance know who prepared that food, whether it was prepared by U. S. Army mess personnel or the Germans themselves?

Scroggs: I don't know definitely, but I have a feeling that it was prepared by German cooks. As I say, I couldn't vouch for that completely because I was never in the compound.

Walker: This person that you referred to a moment ago, that you got to know, did he ever express any feeling of mistreatment as a prisoner-of-war?

Scroggs: No, the only thing he ever complained about was this general complaint of food. I judged from talking with him, that the treatment of prisoners inside the compound was very good. They did have, according to him, rather extensive recreational facilities, hobbies, and this sort of thing. His feeling was, I suppose you might say, pro-American. He expressed to me several times the wish that he could remain in the United States and become a citizen after the war was over. Of course, I suppose it would have been impossible, but he wanted it.

Walker: Did he have a family? Wife?

Scroggs: No, I don't think he was married. He would refer to his mother and father, but I am pretty sure he was not married.

Walker: Was he a young man?

Scroggs: Yes, he was a young man. I would judge him in his early twenties.

Walker: Which brings another question up. How old were these prisoners, would you guage? Were they very, very young?

Scroggs: Virtually all of them were young. I would doubt that I had anybody working for me who was over thirty, and I would guess that most of them were in their early twenties or even perhaps younger.

Walker: And, of course, these were all enlisted men that were working for you.

Scroggs: Yes.

Walker: As I recall, there were no officers that worked.

Scroggs: Not supposed to be (chuckle).

Walker: Did you ever encounter any medical problems with your internees?

Scroggs: No, as I recall, of course, you would have occasional boys who simply stayed out sick, but, as I recall, all these fellows were in very good health and remained in very good health.

- Walker: Did you ever have any complaints about lack of medical care?
- Scroggs: No, I never encountered any such movement.
- Walker: Do you know whether or not this particular camp had a canteen for the prisoners?
- Scroggs: I am sure it did. I am almost positive that I had heard references from this young chap buying things from the canteen. My impression was they were paid a certain amount.
- Walker: Twenty cents a day, I believe, and they were then allowed to buy those necessities. Did he ever mention anything about the library or educational facilities at this camp?
- Scroggs: I don't recall ever talking to him about that.
- Walker: Many of them did have a small library and so forth. What about the religious facilities. . . did he ever talk about a chapel or. . .
- Scroggs: Not to my recollection. I don't recall anything of this sort.
- Walker: The base was relatively small and may not have had one but I know that some of them often did. Was there ever any indication from your observation of the internees that you worked with of their having American-made items except their cigarettes

and so forth. In other words, what I am getting at, I am trying to determine what selection they had in their canteens in terms of things like luxury items and so forth.

Scroggs: Frankly, I don't know. A number of them smoked. They had cigarettes. Where they came from and what they were, I don't know. I never had an occasion to bum one (chuckle) from the boys. My impression was that American-made items were probably available in the canteen.

Walker: When you mentioned a moment ago that a civil service personnel was immediately superior to the internees at your disposal, was his main function that of supervisor of prisoners per se, or was his main function directly under your command to carry out certain duties?

Scroggs: Well, he was simply assigned by me to this particular job. He held a certain civil service rank, and, as I recall, in the very brief period that I was on this assignment--I was there less than six months--I had at least two different civil service fellows who had this function. But they were simply hired as workers at a certain civil service level in the depot, and then I tried to find an

individual that I thought would best work with the prisoners-of-war. They were not hired specifically or trained specifically for that type of job.

Walker: But their main function was to supervise and see that a certain amount of work was done?

Scroggs: Tell them what to do and when to do it.

Walker: Since their immediate superior was actually a civilian, did they maintain military bearing in their job? In other words, if you came on the scene, were they expected to salute and come to attention, et cetera?

Scroggs: Not normally if they were on the job. You could perceive a noted difference when I did show up, apparently because of this awe of authority. Of course, most of this was related to me by the civilian foreman who worked with them. But they apparently were much more easy-going in their work when just he was around. But you could almost see a marked difference in their attitude when an officer showed up.

Walker: In their work, their daily activities, did they seem to be relaxed in their duties--I am sure their concentration was in lifting those heavy boxes and so forth--or did they seem to reflect

the idea that this is a regimented military operation. In other words, was there singing and talking and so forth while they were working?

Scroggs: Yes, I think they were reasonably relaxed. Yes, they talked, they sang. Just from the general atmosphere, I doubt if you would have noticed any appreciable difference from the way they worked from any similar group of GI's who might have been working on the same thing.

Walker: That was what I was getting at, whether the attitude was more like a "prison" or "any military activity."

Scroggs: I don't think you would have detected any difference.

Walker: When they were brought to you in the morning and then when they were taken away in the afternoon, were they marched in rank, in and out?

Scroggs: Yes, they were marched down from the compound which wasn't very far away. As I recall, it was just a few blocks, and they were simply marched down by guards and marched back by guards in ranks.

Walker: Within this rather large group that you mentioned, was there an internal organization, either overt or covert, that could be detected? In other words, did the ranking NCO seem to have authority?

Scroggs: I don't recall precisely. Not on the job, no.
On the job itself there was just one group working for our foreman, but, as I recall, when they were brought down, I think they did have some sort of hierarchy deal, such as a sergeant or something of that sort performing the job of keeping them lined up and so forth.

Walker: When they were marched down, as it were, who was doing the ordering? Was it the American or the German?

Scroggs: Do you mean the orders?

Walker: Marching orders.

Scroggs: Such as halting and so forth (chuckle)? I don't recall. I believe that the guards simply went along and that the actual orders for march and so forth were given by the Germans themselves. This would appear to me to be logical because, as I recall, the guards that I ran across didn't speak German. They were just GI's. They had little communication with the prisoners, it appeared.

Walker: When the guards were not present, how far away physically were they, that is, in case of an emergency, how long would it have taken those guards to arrive?

Scroggs: You know, frankly, I don't recall whether any guards stayed down at the warehouse or repair

shop itself or not. I can't recall their being there. But if they were not there, they would have only been a very short distance away by jeep because the compound itself was very close to our place of operation.

Walker: And you yourself or your superiors, as far as you know, did not keep any such special equipment or weapons immediately at hand in case of. . .

Scroggs: No, we had no weapons at all.

Walker: In your experience there, the time you were there, do you ever recall receiving through channels either statements of policy concerning things like the Geneva accords or the Geneva agreements concerning the treatment of prisoners-of-war, or was there ever any orientation that you attended concerning treatment?

Scroggs: Not at all that I recall. Anything of that sort, I judge, would have gone through the compound commander and his people. We got nothing except labor out of these boys.

Walker: You were never given instructions as to what they could and could not do yourself?

Scroggs: No.

- Walker: Apparently you were given a free hand to. . .
- Scroggs: As I recall, yes. We never made any contact, actually, with the compound commander or any of his staff.
- Walker: The Army is often very good at requiring paperwork. Did you ever have to fill out any certain forms describing their use, their work, what they were doing? Did you ever have to sign for these prisoners or anything such as that?
- Scroggs: I don't think so. I don't recall any paperwork at all in connection with them. I had so damn much paperwork that I might not remember it (chuckle). It seems to me that in that particular position I must have signed my name at least 150 times every day.
- Walker: But nothing specifically related to the treatment of the prisoners?
- Scroggs: I don't recall anything specifically.
- Walker: Could you note a change in attitude of the prisoners, that is, the time you were there, in terms of "getting used to prison life?"
- Scroggs: No, I didn't really note any difficulty that they had as far as adjustment to what we were doing. I was there at the time of the end of the war in

Europe, and as I recall, there was a general feeling of elation on their part that it was all over and that they would be going home pretty soon. We were living there in Louisville when V-E Day came. Indeed, shortly after V-E Day, we were all called in, and asked if we would agree to stay on as long as we were needed at this post or if we wanted a discharge as soon as we could. Of course, the war had been going on for over four years at that time. As I recall, me and one other second lieutenant signified honestly that we wanted out as soon as we could get out. Within a week I had shipping orders to go to Japan (chuckle).

Walker: Well, when you mentioned this elation on the part of the German prisoners when they heard, do you know at what time they released the German POW's to go back?

Scroggs: They weren't released before I left. As I say, I left very shortly after this. I didn't really go to Japan because I had too many points. They couldn't ship me overseas. But at the time I was shipped out, they were still there, but this would be a very short time. I am sure it would

take much longer time to make arrangements to ship them home than the time I was there.

Walker: Well, could you see a change of attitude in their behavior? Obviously, they would be elated, but what about their behavior, less reluctance to do their work or. . .

Scroggs: I don't think there was any appreciable difference. And, of course, among some of them I am sure the elation was tinged with some feeling that they had been defeated, too. But generally speaking, I think they were pretty much like any soldier in that they wanted to go home.

Walker: You mentioned earlier that occasionally in dealing with the prisoners you would have the usual gold brick, some reluctance to work. What kind of persuasion was used in a case like this?

Scroggs: Normally, the only time that I ran into this sort of thing would be when the civilian who was in charge of them would come and get me and say he had had difficulty in getting so-and-so to work or getting a particular group to work, and all I had to do was to go down there, and they started working. They had that sort of respect for military authority.

- Walker: What sort of authority did you delegate to this civilian to get them to work?
- Scroggs: I simply would tell them. . . of course, once you would establish the guy in this position you were all right, but initially I would simply tell them through this Czech fellow that they were working for Mr. So-and-so, and they were doing his direction, and if they didn't, I would come down and take care of them myself. And that would be all that would be needed. I, of course, tried to select someone that had reasonable judgement about them because they were working under rather different circumstances than a normal foreman's job would be.
- Walker: You mentioned that this Czech made a bracelet. How did he make a bracelet at your camp?
- Scroggs: Apparently, as I said, they were indulged in their hobbies in the compound, and I rather suspect that this boy got this piece of stainless steel from the repair shop, repair depot. He didn't ever tell me where he got the stainless steel (chuckle), and I didn't ask. I simply took it home and gave it to my wife. But he had done all of the work inside the compound at night, and he had shaped the thing out, I am sure, probably by some cutting and some

filing and had then beat out a design of a heart on the front of the bracelet. It was a pretty big chunk of stainless steel.

Walker: Was he able to do this with his own hands, or did he have to have a tool?

Scroggs: No, I am sure that he had tools because I don't think he was doing this secretly. At least he didn't intimate that, but he apparently was allowed to do it inside the compound as part of his hobby.

Walker: Do you still have that bracelet?

Scroggs: No, I asked my wife about it the other day when we were talking about this, and she didn't recall what happened to it. She doesn't have it any more.

Walker: That is very interesting. It is one of the first times that I have run across this close of a personal relationship between an American and one of the POW's. Of course, it has been a long time since your experiences in the army, but you have had time to reflect on the very idea of POW's in the United States and their treatment, et cetera. Have you arrived, as a historian, to any particular appreciation, now that you reflect back, because of your experiences with the POW's?

Scroggs: Well, I suppose that about the only thing that I could say in regard to that is that it probably, that is, my experience with them, probably simply reinforced my own attitude toward other people which was pretty strong already. I might explain that a bit by stating that I was a pretty strong pacifist in the 1930's. I participated, as many college youths did at this time, in signing the petition stating that we would not be drafted and that we would not go if we were and this sort of thing. I was very strongly anti-Roosevelt in his foreign policy in the late 30's and in 1940, and this undoubtedly conditioned my thinking, I am quite sure, but my association with these POW's simply reinforced my own thinking that these were just people, too, no different essentially from other young fellows my age.

Walker: Did you get the feeling of the Americans that you were associated with that they had in their minds stereotyped the German soldier?

Scroggs: The civilians?

Walker: Yes.

Scroggs: Yes, I think this was very definitely true, and I sort of had the feeling, as I recall, that the

general atmosphere was that there was probably more community of feeling between me and the prisoners-of-war than between me and the civil service workers.

Walker: I think that is very interesting. Did they often express this stereotyped feeling, say, the men who worked directly under you?

Scroggs: Yes, very definitely. They reflected in general, I think, the national criticism of the "easy treatment" that was being accorded the prisoners-of-war.

Walker: Do you feel that that attitude they had was ever reflected in the way they treated the internees?

Scroggs: It probably was not because the only real contact that these POW's had was with me and the guy who worked directly under me, and, of course, I would try to get someone who didn't have that feeling because they wouldn't have been very successful in working with them if they did have. There was considerable friendship built up between this young Czech fellow that I was talking about and the immediate foreman that I had working for me.

Walker: That is what I was going to ask you--if the people you associated with, both army and civilian, if there was raised any additional relationship you were aware of.

Scroggs: Yes, this civilian that was directly over them most of the time that I had anything to do with it had a good deal of sympathy for them, and he did not work them too hard. We never over-worked the boys.