

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview With
Mr. Eli Escobar
CO.K, 242nd I.R. 42nd I.D
P.O.W. Stalag7A
March 9, 2004**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is March 9, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Eli Escobar at his home at 4001 Tripoli Drive Corpus Christi, Texas 78411. His phone number is (361) 853-0207. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars, Center of Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Do you have a middle initial, Eli?

Mr. Escobar

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. Let me ask you first, what is your birth date?

Mr. Escobar

My birth date is February 12, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer

And where were you born?

Mr. Escobar

I was born in Starr County, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's near what town?

Mr. Escobar

Near Roma, Roma Los Saenz is what it's called now, in Los Saenz.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Escobar

I went to high school in Roma.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Escobar

Well, I actually quit school in '43 before I went in the Service, and I didn't graduate until I got out of the Service with the help of my uncle, Uncle Sam.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, '41, as you know, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where you were when you heard about that?

Mr. Escobar

I was in Roma High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was on a Sunday.

Mr. Escobar

Well, when I heard about it anyway, I was at school. It might have been a Monday probably when we were talking about it when I recall that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your reaction to it?

Mr. Escobar

Well, we didn't know what was going on. Of course, it seemed so far away at that time. You know, communications were quite different than they are now. I guess I must've been about 15 years old then or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when did you go into the Service?

Mr. Escobar

I went into the Service in 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day?

Mr. Escobar

May of '44.

Mr. Misenhimer

Remember the day for sure?

Mr. Escobar

May, I think it was the 21st.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do from the time you quit school until you went into the Service?

Mr. Escobar

I was helping my dad. My dad was farming there in Starr County and we were trying to establish an irrigation system, take water out of the river to water because it's kind of dry country over there, so that's what I was doing. And that's the reason I had helped. I had quit school because I was the oldest one and we were a big family and I was just trying to help my dad.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sister?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, 6 sisters and 3 brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they were all younger than you.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, my sister was a little older, about a year and a half older than I am.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did any of your brothers serve in World War II?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, 2 of my brothers served in World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they come home?

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good. What branch did you go into?

Mr. Escobar

I went into the Infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Army.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, the Army Infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Mr. Escobar

I was drafted.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had no choice of the branch to go into.

Mr. Escobar

I got a letter from my friends and neighbors (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you actually sworn in at?

Mr. Escobar

In San Antonio, Brooks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Brooks or at Fort Sam?

Mr. Escobar

Well, Fort Sam I guess it was. It was Fort Sam, yes, the indoctrination there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take your basic training?

Mr. Escobar

I took my basic training in Camp Walters I guess it was in Fort Worth, close to Mineral Wells. I think it was Camp Walters it was called.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right. It was there, okay. How long did that last?

Mr. Escobar

I think it was 17 weeks, 17 weeks training, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get from San Antonio to Camp Walters?

Mr. Escobar

I think they took us by truck, by Army trucks, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did your basic training consist of?

Mr. Escobar

Well, it consisted of hiking and rifle training and indoctrination and they gave us different exercises that go along with the training at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Military courtesy?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, all of that was part of it, yes. KP.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to crawl under the infiltration course while they were shooting the live machine guns?

Mr. Escobar

We sure did. We sure did.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Escobar

That was kind of scary

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything in particular you recall about your basic training?

Mr. Escobar

They really tried to move us fast through it and most everybody took it pretty seriously at the time, but we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Escobar

We had some barracks, yeah it was barracks, pretty good size barracks. Everything was in fairly good condition.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Escobar

The food was fine, yes, it was okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your cadre, your drill instructors, were they pretty rough on you all?

Mr. Escobar

They were strict and sometimes if you tried to act smart, they would. You know the title, their position, they...

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of weapons did you train on?

Mr. Escobar

The M1.

Mr. Misenhimer

M1 rifle?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, and also the bazooka and the Browning automatic, all those.

Mr. Misenhimer

The BAR?

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any machine gun training?

Mr. Escobar

No, the BAR was the closest to that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Hand grenade?

Mr. Escobar

Hand grenades, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bayonet training?

Mr. Escobar

Bayonet training and practice. We had some of that, too.

Mr. Misenhimer

Hand to hand combat.

Mr. Escobar

Hand to hand, we had a little Jio Jitsu hand to hand type training, you know, exercises, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the weather up there that time of year?

Mr. Escobar

Well, it was about like it is here but maybe just a little bit cooler.

Mr. Misenhimer

It's quite a bit further north.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time in basic training?

Mr. Escobar

Well, it's pretty much we were contained there. We'd go out sometimes on weekends, you know, but just a little bit. We didn't have too much money anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you make when you went in? Do you recall?

Mr. Escobar

Seems like about \$21 a month or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that's what it was.

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any passes while you were there on basic training to go into town or anything?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, I recall a couple of times I went into town, yes, weekends.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any particular friends you had during basic training?

Mr. Escobar

Well, one of my friends, actually one of my cousins, we went in together and we were in basic together. He was from the same part of the country and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was anybody else from down there up there with you?

Mr. Escobar

No, he was the only one.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished basic training, then where did you go?

Mr. Escobar

From basic training, we were taken to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma to kind of get assigned over there. We just spent about a week or 2 there. And then from there, we went to Camp Kilmer.

Mr. Misenhimer

New Jersey.

Mr. Escobar

New Jersey, yes, and that's where they shipped us across to Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get from Oklahoma to New Jersey?

Mr. Escobar

I think it was by train.

Mr. Misenhimer

You recall anything about the train trip?

Mr. Escobar

Not that one. I recall more the one coming back.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you got to Camp Kilmer?

Mr. Escobar

In Kilmer, I remember getting a pass for I think I was there maybe just a day or 2 and I remember getting a pass to go to New York City, you know. We just went out there to just look around and look at the town and see what was going on. That's it, that one night.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of New York City?

Mr. Escobar

Well, it was exciting and kind of different than what I had ever seen before.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you spend the night in New York City, or just go down and come back?

Mr. Escobar

No, we just went and came back. We went not by train, but what they call the...

Mr. Misenhimer

Subway?

Mr. Escobar

Subway, yes, subway. I thought they were fast compared to what I was used to.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there then?

Mr. Escobar

We were there just I don't recall how many days but it was just a matter of a couple of days or so.

Mr. Misenhimer

A very short time.

Mr. Escobar

A very short time, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you went overseas.

Mr. Escobar

Went overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you go overseas?

Mr. Escobar

By boat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which one? Do you recall?

Mr. Escobar

I don't recall the name. I don't recall the name of the ship but it took us about, I think about 13 or 14 days, something like that. Almost about 2 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a troop transport or was it a...?

Mr. Escobar

Well, it had bunks and everything in it so I guess that's what it was, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many people on it? Have any idea?

Mr. Escobar

Gosh, I don't know but there was a whole bunch of us but I remember everybody, well not everybody, but most of them got sick, you know, seasick. And I spent most of the night going outside, you know, so I wouldn't get the smell. I had a good friend here from Corpus Christi that had been in training with me and I didn't see him until we got back because he spent all that time in the infirmary. He got sick. He was very sick. I saw him when we got over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you slept on a bunk. How many high, how many bunks?

Mr. Escobar

Oh, about 3 or 4 I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food on the ship?

Mr. Escobar

The food was fine, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't have a problem with seasickness yourself?

Mr. Escobar

No, no, I didn't but like I said, I spent most of my time outside up by where the engines and the blowers were, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what month did you go overseas?

Mr. Escobar

That was in November because we got there at about Thanksgiving so it was November.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of '44.

Mr. Escobar

Of '44.

Mr. Misenhimer

It would have been kind of cool up on the deck, wasn't it, at that time of year?

Mr. Escobar

It was. It was but I had my jacket on and a cap and everything and by the engine where the blower was, it was warm there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall about your trip over?

Mr. Escobar

Well, we had some drills going off, you know, emergency drills getting in and out quickly, you know, that type of thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Life boat drills.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land over there?

Mr. Escobar

We landed in Marseilles, France.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now of course, the invasion would have been back in June 6th. So this was several months after the invasion.

Mr. Escobar

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been assigned to an outfit yet?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, I was with the 42nd Infantry Division. This used to be MacArthur's division in the Pacific, you know, and then they deactivated that and reactivated again for Europe, the division I was with.

Mr. Misenhimer

The 42nd Infantry Division.

Mr. Escobar

Infantry Division, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what were your jobs there?

Mr. Escobar

I was just a rifleman, a PFC.

Mr. Misenhimer

PFC now, huh?

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were assigned to a platoon and squad and company and all?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Recall what company?

Mr. Escobar

Company C I think it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

C Company.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any particular battalion?

Mr. Escobar

I don't recall that, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

A regiment?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, I've got a book that shows that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, so according to this it was Company K of the 242nd Infantry Regiment of the 42nd Infantry Division.

Mr. Escobar

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you got to Marseilles, how long were you there?

Mr. Escobar

Well we were there in Marseilles, we kept moving right on. We didn't stay there. We landed there and we just went right straight to the front line from there.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you went up by truck or how did you go?

Mr. Escobar

By truck.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was the front line then?

Mr. Escobar

It was right around close to, not too far from Rhine River. That's where we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about what happened there.

Mr. Escobar

Well we were moving forward a little bit and the troops were getting organized and the artillery was kind of farther behind us and all that kind of stuff. And then I got captured in Hagvenau is what the name of place was, the little town there. And like I said, the artillery wasn't quite with us. We were ahead of the artillery so that's how come we got captured cause we didn't have the protection that we needed you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you on the front line before you got captured?

Mr. Escobar

About 2 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you moved to the front line, did you relieve another outfit?

Mr. Escobar

I imagine we did, yeah. Someone else went somewhere else from there, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some of the actions you were in there?

Mr. Escobar

We really didn't have a lot of real... we had some action but just low action where we saw some snipers and things like that. But the real action was when we got captured,

that's when we actually got into the front line where the Germans had their outposts and all of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now that was across the Rhine?

Mr. Escobar

No, before we got to the Rhine, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were up there and you weren't attacking at that time or anything?

Mr. Escobar

No, we weren't attacking. We were moving forward and we camped out and then the Germans came over with tanks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Across the Rhine.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, they came over and we didn't have the protection we needed and all we had was rifles. We had a couple of machine guns and BARs and of course that's the first thing they go for and get those. And the tanks came over and we were in foxholes and they tried to crush us. They went over our foxhole actually with tanks, you know, but the ground was kind of hard and that didn't hurt it. Luckily only one tank, there was a river between us and where the Germans were coming from, a little river. It wasn't the Rhine River, and one got across and it's the only tank that tried there and then they gave up. And then they got us out of foxholes and captured us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now was this part of the Battle of the Bulge?

Mr. Escobar

No, this was after.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day were you captured?

Mr. Escobar

January 25th, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were in foxholes and you were there. You didn't know the Germans were fixing to attack.

Mr. Escobar

No, we knew they were close by, but we didn't know exactly what was going on and there was snow and cold and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

So they surprised you.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And like you say, your artillery was so far back, it just couldn't help you with that.

Mr. Escobar

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Prior to your being captured, do you recall anything that happened along the way there?

Mr. Escobar

Well the only thing I remember while we were at Hagvenau where I were captured and that was part of the neutral territory, which was called at the time Alsace-Lorraine in that area there, you know. I remember, I think it was either Christmas Eve or New Years Eve. We had a party there and some of the German girls came over and danced with us and we had a German band playing for us and it was a nice affair. It was kind of quiet at the time. Maybe they just relaxed because of the holidays or something. But after that is when we moved forward.

Mr. Misenhimer

But that was in Germany.

Mr. Escobar

Well it wasn't in Germany. It was in that neutral territory. In between France and Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, right, Alsace-Lorraine.

Mr. Escobar

But they didn't know actually who you were talking to. It was kind of a mix up there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you stay in there?

Mr. Escobar

In that area there, lets see, well I think that might have been we stayed with some families actually. I remember staying with a French family there and the lady and the husband took very good, it was about 4 of us that stayed with them, and they took very good care

of us, kept us warm, fed us good, gave us wine. And the lady I remember telling me that she had a son in German Army and asked me if me and the other guys, if we ever run into him and show us this picture, you know, to please don't shoot him. But they were very nice to us.

Mr. Misenhimer

But she was French?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, it think she was French but in that area it's hard to tell and make sure.

Mr. Misenhimer

But he was in the German Army.

Mr. Escobar

He was in the German Army, um, hm.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have to stay in pup tents or anything like that.

Mr. Escobar

Oh, yes, yeah. We were staying in pup tents right before we moved on to those foxholes, you know, and we spent quite a bit of time in pup tents, yes. And we slept kind of a couple of guys together to try to stay warm at night and we'd have to stand guard and we'd take turns, you know. One was sleeping while the other one is standing guard at night.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you stood guard, were you in a foxhole or what?

Mr. Escobar

We were outside then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Outside?

Mr. Escobar

Outside of the tent, yes, at that time, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was a very cold winter as I understand.

Mr. Escobar

It was, it was, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Particularly to a boy from south Texas.

Mr. Escobar

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what uniforms and what clothing did you have?

Mr. Escobar

Well we had the regular fatigues and those shoe packs that they had for the snow.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you wearing your wool uniforms or fatigues?

Mr. Escobar

Wool uniforms.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not the fatigues. You were wearing the full uniforms, wool uniforms.

Mr. Escobar

Wool uniforms, jacket, yes, and we had top coats and we had rain coats and we had pretty good clothing.

Mr. Misenhimer

That really wasn't a problem then.

Mr. Escobar

No, no. The main problem there was keeping our feet warm. I got some frost bite because with those shoe packs you feel kind of sweaty, you know, and a lot of them got frostbite from that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any problem with the frostbite?

Mr. Escobar

Some, yeah, it still bothers me some.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever actually get into a fire fight with the Germans?

Mr. Escobar

No, not really, not hand to hand or anything like that, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean did you have to shoot at them?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, we shot at them, yes, but from afar. Not from real close. And that last time when we got captured, we didn't have a chance really with the tanks. What could we do there

with only rifles?

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you shelled or bombed any time by the Germans?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, we were. They used those 88 is what they used.

Mr. Misenhimer

A wicked weapon.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how many different times were you shelled?

Mr. Escobar

Several times. We were shelled while we were POWs also.

Mr. Misenhimer

By the Americans?

Mr. Escobar

By the Americans, yes. I think we were shelled more by the Americans than the Germans really because they didn't know who we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of the people around you hit with the shelling or anything?

Mr. Escobar

No, no, most of the time we tried to kind of let them know by not running or by signaling or something that we were POWs because the Germans did not fire very well. They decided not to just on purpose.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about when the Germans were shelling, any people around you hit with the German artillery?

Mr. Escobar

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were lucky on that.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, the closest I got, I got hit but it was on my boot, a piece of shrapnel. It didn't go through. That was the only time.

Mr. Misenhimer

No one else around you was hit then?

Mr. Escobar

No, I recall one of my friends there that was in the same platoon. One time, they shot at him and he kind of dipped and his helmet got a hole right through it. If you looked at his helmet, you thought that the shell went right through his head but the shell actually went out while he was going down and it went through the helmet. It didn't hit him.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was lucky.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall before you were captured?

Mr. Escobar

I recall going into Marseilles I think maybe just one time after we had gotten there, settled down and that's it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was the town pretty much destroyed or was it?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, it was a lot of damage but there still were sections that were still okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Marseilles is in the southern part of France I think.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, it's close to the Mediterranean. We went in through the Strait of Gibraltar when we went into there. Of course, it was at night and it was dark.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was all blacked out I'm assuming.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about on the Spanish side? Spain was neutral.

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, but we didn't see any of that because it was at night when we went in so I didn't get to see any of that at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the 25th of January, you were captured.

Mr. Escobar

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What time of day?

Mr. Escobar

It was at night.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did it feel like when you had to give up?

Mr. Escobar

Well, it was 3 of us in the foxhole and we started hearing all this artillery and the tanks coming over and of course, we just got down after we heard that. And the tanks just came over and kind of circled around and tried to crush our foxhole and then they came over to see if we were okay and they asked us to get out and we did, the 3 of us. We were all okay. And then they just marched us towards the headquarters and several times they kind of stopped and talked amongst them and it appeared like they were gonna line us up to shoot us, you know, but they didn't. They kept marching us then they got us to their headquarters and got in a truck and they took us to the Rhine River and crossed us in one of those rafts.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many were captured when you were captured, quite a few or just the 3 of you?

Mr. Escobar

A number of us, like the whole platoon there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, the whole platoon.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was an officer there with you, too?

Mr. Escobar

There was a sergeant and there was one tank that had gotten ahead of the others, one of our tanks that was there, and he took off. The tank went back and the sergeant got in the tank left. I don't know what ever happened to him. If somebody ever got a hold of him I think they might have killed him.

Mr. Misenhimer

You did not have a lieutenant with you though?

Mr. Escobar

No, not right there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So there was about how many that were captured, 20, 15?

Mr. Escobar

I'd say probably about 20, 20 somewhat, yes, that I knew about. There may have been others but.

Mr. Misenhimer

As far as the group you were with.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were all together when you went across the Rhine.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And did they question you?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, they questioned us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they pretty rough on the questioning or?

Mr. Escobar

They really weren't that rough, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they speak pretty good English, those that questioned you?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, we understood them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you speak any German at all?

Mr. Escobar

A little bit, little bit, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you pick it up over there?

Mr. Escobar

I picked it up over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me what all happened while you were being a prisoner there then.

Mr. Escobar

Well when we got to...they took us to the prison camp there in Germany and I was there like 7 days, but we didn't stay there. Stalag 7A. And while we were there, they fed us and of course, they didn't have too much food at the time themselves but we ate what they ate themselves, bread and potatoes and soup and things like that. And they used to take us on work details. I was close to Munich where the Stalag was and in the mornings, we'd have a little breakfast and then we'd get on the train. And they were boxcars that took us to Munich to clean up some of the mess the Americans were making. And on the way over there, of course, most of the time, they'd be shelling us. And they'd stop the train and the guards would get off and get in their pillboxes or whatever they had for protection and they left us in the boxcars. We stayed there. And I don't know whether any of them got killed but I didn't see any of them that got killed while I was there. We didn't get too much done when we got into town because the airplanes were always bombing, but still did it anyway and took us.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was this train ride?

Mr. Escobar

Probably about 30 minutes, 45 minutes, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Less than an hour.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank were you then?

Mr. Escobar

I guess it was corporal by then. And then after a while, they kept moving us because when the Americans were getting too close to where that Stalag was and the Russians were coming in on the other side, then they started moving us and they'd keep us just barns or just different places. We never stayed in another Stalag. That's the only Stalag we ever stayed in.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long were you in that Stalag then?

Mr. Escobar

I'd say probably maybe a couple of months, 2 or 3 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were in the Stalag, what did you live in there?

Mr. Escobar

There were kind of huts, you know, not in very good condition but it was okay. It kept us warm.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many people to a hut?

Mr. Escobar

Probably about 5 or 6.

Mr. Misenhimer

Small hut.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have any kind of heat in it?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, they were okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had coal? What did you heat with?

Mr. Escobar

I guess it was, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't have a stove in your hut?

Mr. Escobar

No, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Some kind of a central heat.

Mr. Escobar

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see. And then food there was pretty short?

Mr. Escobar

It was pretty short, yes, and you did have a little medical attention and things like that.

They checked us out if you got sick.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were they guards, pretty rough?

Mr. Escobar

They were okay. They were using mostly the older guys as guards because the younger ones they had on the front line so they were okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

They really didn't mistreat you then?

Mr. Escobar

No, the only ones I saw that were mistreated was guys that would try to be kind of smart alek or something like that. Otherwise, they were okay, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many people in this stalag would you think?

Mr. Escobar

Well, that was a pretty good-sized stalag there. I'd say probably about 200.

Mr. Misenhimer

All American?

Mr. Escobar

No, I think there was some British there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So probably in March or April they started moving you out then as the Americans were getting closer?

Mr. Escobar

Right, that's when they were moving us around to different places, you know, barns and ranches and farms and all that. And we were scattered, small groups here and small groups somewhere else.

Mr. Misenhimer

There would be a guard with you.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, the guards were with us, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you marched wherever you were going?

Mr. Escobar

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you able to get much food or water when you were moving like that?

Mr. Escobar

No, no, they'd give us enough time to eat and fed us, you know. And the marches were short. They weren't that long.

Mr. Misenhimer

One day or less than a day?

Mr. Escobar

Less than a day, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you were moving on.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was starting to get a little warmer by then, was it, the weather?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes, it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened while you were there?

Mr. Escobar

I remember one time I think we were going on detail but they marched us somewhere and about that time that we were, I guess we were kind of resting there. We had stopped at a place out in the open and German airplanes were flying around dropping leaflets. That's when Roosevelt died. And they were just throwing those and letting everybody know and trying to discourage us you know saying that Roosevelt kapoot, you know, was gone and all that. A few of the guys I think tried to get away. I don't know what ever happened to the ones that tried to get away. I didn't try it. Most of us didn't. We just stayed with the group there cause we didn't know where to go.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you're in this train going to Munich, were you ever strafed by the Americans?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

But your particular boxcar was not hit.

Mr. Escobar

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you don't know whether anybody was hurt?

Mr. Escobar

No, I don't know. But it was a risk, you know. We stayed, they were supposed to be marked but they weren't marked either, you know. When we were marching, they'd be marching within columns of 3s, and that's the way they marched over there. And I remember one occasion that we were marching somewhere and one guy got real frightened. He was the only one that ran and ran into a ditch, but the rest of us just took our shirts off, our caps, and started waving and the airplane just took off and left us alone.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Escobar

Well when we were liberated then, like I said, the Russians were coming in on the one side and the Americans on the other, we were always hoping that we were liberated by the Americans, not the Russians. So when we started hearing the artillery that was getting very close to us, we were in a barn in France and the guards were even happier than we were. The guards actually put the rifles away. They stacked the rifles and

started dancing and singing, you know, and telling us that they were gonna have it made from then on, eating well and sleeping well. And then after a while, the Americans came over and just liberated us. Everything was kind of easy really, no problems.

Mr. Misenhimer

They just took the guards.

Mr. Escobar

Just took the guards, that's all, and they were ready to go, anxious to go really. And then what happened then at that time, they were trying to organize us so they could take us somewhere you know in trucks. A few of the guys kind of got crazy and went out looking for souvenirs and I recall one guy that went over and picked up a German bazooka. And it was loaded so he blew one of his eyes out with that thing. I didn't care to bring anything back. I just wanted to get myself back.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, it's a shame to go that far then to wound yourself like that.

Mr. Escobar

I know, I know it is. So then from there they took us by trucks and I think they took us to Regensburg, and they flew us from there to Paris, from Regensburg to Paris. And we spent the night in Paris coming back. And that Paris stay there was supposedly for us to get a clean issue of clothes and we would spend all night kind of getting cleaned up, bathed and getting new clothes and then they fed us a real nice breakfast at a restaurant there. And then from there, they took us by train to LaHarve, France, Camp Lucky Strike. You've heard of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Escobar

And that was kind of a holding place there for POWs and wounded soldiers awaiting to be shipped back to the States.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were rescued by the Americans, do you know what outfit this might have been?

Mr. Escobar

No, I have no idea, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was an infantry outfit though.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did yall have any kind of a celebration with them or shaking hands?

Mr. Escobar

Well, we did that but that was it. It was kind of fast and they were wanting to do their job.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they kept on going and turned you over.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

You don't know what happened to your guards.

Mr. Escobar

No, never saw them after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they ask you how they treated you or anything?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, they did.

Mr. Misenhimer

You told them they were okay?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, they were fine and those guards were very good at the end.

Mr. Misenhimer

How much weight did you lose while you were a prisoner.

Mr. Escobar

I probably lost about, I'd say probably about 20 pounds, maybe more than that.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were pretty skinny when they rescued you?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes, when they took us to Lucky Strike, to Camp Lucky Strike, we spent a couple of weeks there and all they did was feed us egg nog and vitamins and gave us our shots that we needed and medication if you needed something, you know, and showed us movies and things like that. We didn't do anything else there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were a prisoner, did you ever bathe at all?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, we did sometimes, not too often but we did, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And of course, you just had whatever uniform you were captured in.

Mr. Escobar

Right, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any way to launder it or clean it up or anything?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, we did our own there.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were able to wash it.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You still had your combat boots or your shoes or whatever.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay so you were at Camp Lucky Strike.

Mr. Escobar

Camp Lucky Strike.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you went from there back to the States?

Mr. Escobar

Back to Kilmer again, back to New York, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you come back?

Mr. Escobar

By boat again.

Mr. Misenhimer

You don't recall what it was?

Mr. Escobar

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you when Germany surrendered in May of '45?

Mr. Escobar

I was already in, let me see, May of '45...I was liberated April 28th.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were liberated, okay.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, it was only a few days later because May 7th or some such is when Germany surrendered. So you were probably at Camp Lucky Strike.

Mr. Escobar

I probably was there then, yes. That's right. Cause the one I recall was when Japan surrendered. I was in San Antonio then, but I imagine if it was that short, I was there then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any kind of a celebration?

Mr. Escobar

I don't recall any celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer

Germany surrendered and you were back there being processed and they gave you clean uniforms and all that.

Mr. Escobar

Oh, yes, they took good care of us there.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your trip back, did people get seasick again?

Mr. Escobar

I don't recall that anymore. I remember these guys having good fun. Some of them were shooting dice and just having fun and visiting with each other and planning what they were gonna do when they got home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they give you any of your back pay, or when did you get that?

Mr. Escobar

I got that later on when I got home, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they give you any kind of money at all over there?

Mr. Escobar

I think that probably we did. We got some, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So they could play dice?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, I didn't but some of the guys did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else in your time over there in Europe?

Mr. Escobar

No, that's all I can recall right now.

Mr. Misenhimer

You came back to Camp Kilmer.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long did it take to come back?

Mr. Escobar

Probably another 2 weeks or 13 days, something like that, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you went straight from LeHarve to Kilmer. You didn't stop anywhere else.

Mr. Escobar

Well, we stopped to pick up some other wounded soldiers or something in Liverpool, England. But it was just to stop there. We didn't get off or anything, they just stopped and picked some up and left.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got to Kilmer, what happened there?

Mr. Escobar

From Kilmer, then we were brought by train to San Antonio and we stopped on the way in St. Louis I recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were at Camp Kilmer how long?

Mr. Escobar

It was probably just a day or 2 maybe not even that.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned earlier you remembered about that train trip back. What was it about that train trip you remember?

Mr. Escobar

Well, it was kind of a long trip, of course. And some of the guys, I remember one guy that was kind of wild, he was an officer, and he got off the train and either somebody had met him there or something and drove back to San Antonio. I remember that there was a lot of smoke from the train at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

A coal fired train.

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes, but it was okay. It was nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in a chair car or did you have a sleeper?

Mr. Escobar

It was a sleeper, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had a bed to lay down in?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, we had a bed, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And about how long did that take?

Mr. Escobar

It was probably about 3 or 4 days.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you stopped in St. Louis? Anywhere else?

Mr. Escobar

That's the only place I remember we stopped for any length of time, cause I remember when we stopped by there, there was a bunch of girls there and they all came over and grabbed one of us. Everybody had a girl.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food on that train trip?

Mr. Escobar

It was pretty good, yeah. I don't recall exactly what it was but I remember it was okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you got back to Fort Sam?

Mr. Escobar

To Fort Sam again, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what happened there?

Mr. Escobar

At Fort Sam, again, there was more processing done and interviews and checking us out and all of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you finally get out?

Mr. Escobar

I got out, lets see, when was the date? November 30, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

November 30, '45 you were discharged.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got home probably sometime in May to Fort Sam.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what did you do from then until November?

Mr. Escobar

Well, from Fort Sam, they were trying to kind of rehabilitate us is what they were trying to do, too. I went to, what was that camp? Was that Camp Swift?

Mr. Misenhimer

Could be.

Mr. Escobar

Close to Taylor, Texas there was a camp there and it was more or less a rehabilitation center and they sent me out there in between that time there. And over there, we weren't doing much of anything, you know. They were kind of feeding us good and we had recreation and we had movies and we had things just taking it easy. It was like a vacation really. In between the time, I spent it over there, too, Camp Swift.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any problems you did any rehabilitation for?

Mr. Escobar

Well, of course, I had lost quite a bit of weight and I had a back problem. Cause I hurt my back while we were on the front line over there. I jumped off a truck one time and I didn't know my legs were numb and I ended up on my seat, you know. From way up on top of the truck, and of course, I had to keep on marching. We were moving forward at the time, so that gave me a lot of trouble and then they figured I wasn't going to be able to do what I was doing before, you know, we were farming. And they were trying to rehabilitate me. And then of course, that's when I got into the program, the VA called me to go over and they interviewed me and they said, "Well we need to train you to do

something else.” And that’s when I went back, finished my high school and got a college degree and got into something else.

Mr. Misenhimer

So there at Camp Swift, it was basically physical therapy or whatever?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, yeah, that’s what it was. I remember they checked my teeth and then cleaned them and did things like that, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

While you were a prisoner, you probably did not get your vitamins like you needed.

Mr. Escobar

No, just to survive it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then when did you finish high school?

Mr. Escobar

Well actually when I came back, I tried to go back to high school to finish and then when I went over to the VA, they suggested that I go back to go to college and that I could get credit at the same time for high school and college but I didn’t have to really go to the high school with other kids. So I enrolled at A&I Kingsville and I was getting credit for high school courses and college courses at the same time so I did get my diploma but I got college credit for it, too. And it turned out, I was able to graduate at age 23 anyway even though I had lost some time.

Mr. Misenhimer

I’m sorry, graduated what?

Mr. Escobar

At age 23, cause I went straight through, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

From A&I.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And when did you graduate there then?

Mr. Escobar

In '49. That's all I can recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now did you have any experience with the medics there? Like when you got your back hurt or anything like that, did the medics come?

Mr. Escobar

No, no we really didn't have any medics right then and there. I just went on, you know, with a hurt back and hurting real bad. And I kind of got over it and I finally put up with it for several years and had surgery about 15 years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any time you were on the front lines, were any medics around treating anybody?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, yes there were some.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they pretty good?

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, they did the best they could.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Escobar

Not really. I didn't care to bring anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO Shows?

Mr. Escobar

Not over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Here in the States or anywhere?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, in San Antonio, I did yes, a couple of shows, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have an experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Escobar

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were overseas, could you get any mail?

Mr. Escobar

No, I never did get anything, and I sent some mail and my mail actually got home after I did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you send any from the POW camp?

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you sent some before the POW camp, mail home?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, I had sent one or two and then they'd receive that and then when the notification about me being captured kind of got delayed, and then the one about being released is the one that took longer. I got home before that got home.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't know you had been released.

Mr. Escobar

Yeah, that's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

All the time you were overseas, you never got any mail at all then?

Mr. Escobar

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers you had?

Mr. Escobar

They were okay. We had I recall one officer that was fairly young officer but he was okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a lieutenant over your platoon?

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was he?

Mr. Escobar

He was alright.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Escobar

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Haven't had any, huh?

Mr. Escobar

None at all. We got scattered. I used to have a little book, you know, with addresses and

I lost it somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Escobar

That night I got captured.

Mr. Misenhimer

They ran right across your foxhole?

Mr. Escobar

They ran right across it and kind of circled around trying to crush it, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

They knew you were in it.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't shoot at you in it though.

Mr. Escobar

No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then did you have a white flag or anything when you surrendered?

Mr. Escobar

No, we just got out.

Mr. Misenhimer

They came up and told you to get out, huh?

Mr. Escobar

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got home, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Escobar

Not really, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Went to school.

Mr. Escobar

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were single at that time?

Mr. Escobar

Yes, I was single, yes. That's all I can think of, Richard.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well I want to thank you very much for your time today.

Mr. Escobar

You're quite welcome.

Mr. Misenhimer

And thank you for your service back in those days. We appreciate very much what you've done for us.

Mr. Escobar

I'm glad that we were finally able to get together and it was very nice meeting you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Thank you.

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