

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

JOHN KURIMSKY

Military Police, Army, World War II.
Stateside Military Police, Air Force, Korean War.

2000

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Kurimsky, John, (1919-2006). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 50 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John J. Kurimsky, a Bridgeport, Connecticut native, discusses his World War II service as a military police officer enforcing security among American troops in Great Britain and later service in England and France providing security for General Dwight Eisenhower's headquarters. Drafted in August 1941, Kurimsky talks about his initial assignment with the 27th Armored Field Artillery of the 1st Armored Division, training at Fort Knox (Kentucky), and, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, living in a tent city at Fort Dix (Kentucky). He speaks of the trip to Northern Ireland aboard the Queen Mary and assignment to guard the shore near a small village. Kurimsky comments on his removal from the Armored Division and entry in the 234th Military Police Company, learning riot control, and directing traffic in Belfast (Ireland). Later stationed at Bamber Bridge (England), Kurimsky details an encounter with an Army truck company that took over the town by force after two members had been arrested for being absent without leave (AWOL). Assigned to Bushy Park (London), he talks about duty guarding General Eisenhower in his headquarters. Kurimsky describes talking with Queen Mother Mary during a visit from the English Royal Family, securing leave for an MP whose father was very ill, seeing Winston Churchill, and the feeling of German V1 and V2 rocket raids on London. After the breakout from Normandy, Kurimsky touches on guarding Eisenhower's headquarters as it moved into France. After the war ended, he talks about assignment to the headquarters company of the 1st Allied Airborne Army and moving through Germany. He tells of escorting soldiers from Marburg to Berlin and having difficulties crossing the Russian zones. Kurimsky describes being housed in the Telefunken Works buildings, throwing the equipment there out the windows to make room for bunks, and seeing the Russians carry off all the equipment in the Zeiss buildings. He recalls being seasick on the ships to and from Europe. Upon return to the United States, Kurimsky joined the Army Reserves and mentions being called to active duty during the Korean War to run the prison at MacDill Air Force Base (Florida). He comments on duty as bugler, following procedure after discovering two prisoners had escaped, punishing the escapees, and having AWOL prisoners turned in by the FBI. He portrays a man who tried to turn himself in for being AWOL during World War I. Kurimsky describes the large number of snakes at MacDill and catching a sergeant who was stealing food. Kurimsky recalls a conversation he had with Eisenhower during an air raid, taking a sneak peek at the maps in the war room, and defending the French headquarters in Versailles against German spies. He talks about patrolling the Red Ball Highway to catch personnel selling Army gasoline on the black market or fraternizing

with native girls in their trucks. Kurimsky mentions working with French police to catch someone who shot at him from a side street, discovering the theft of packages to GIs, and catching a robber who had beaten up a lieutenant.

Biographical Sketch:

Kurimsky (1919-2006) served as an MP with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) during World War II. After the war he returned to Connecticut.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000
Transcribed by Hannah Goodno, 2009
Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2012
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Transcribed Interview:

James: I'm talking to John Kurimsky and it's 11 August in the year 2000. You were born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, is that correct?

John: That's correct.

James: In February of 1919?

John: Right.

James: When you entered military service, when was that?

John: 1941, August.

James: Okay. Now, where did you first go?

John: Well when I was inducted, I went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

James: Now the war hadn't started, so were you drafted?

John: Yes. I was drafted at that time.

James: You had planned to be in for a year and then go back?

John: Yep, it was for the year.

James: What were you doing at the time?

John: Well, what do you mean?

James: What was your work at the time when you went in the service?

John: I worked at the Remington Arms Company, ammunitions. I had been working there. I only worked there maybe a year or two before I was lucky enough to get called. And from there I went to Fort Devens.

James: Is that where you took your basic training?

John: Uh, no. Well, we did a little basic marching and all this while we were waiting to be shipped out to whatever place they were going to send us. It was like a center. And every so often, every day, they'd take a group of people, say, "Here's where you're going," down south, or here or there. And maybe I'd been there a few weeks and then I came with a group, they told us we're going to Fort Knox, Kentucky, the 1st Armored Division. So then we went to Kentucky and I went to a tank battalion. I drove a tank for

a while, learning how, and then they took me out and put me into the 27th Armored Field Artillery and I was in the instruments section, setting up the guns.

James: Oh, instruments, that's kind of a nebulous term.

John: Right.

James: So what does that include?

John: Like a surveyor. We had the guns all lined up, and we had six 75 mm on half-tracks. So we'd line them up and he would line them up—I'd have the rod, go way out there, and he would be telling me where and I'd set it, then he'd have it there and the guns would be all aligned. He'd tell 'em where, then we'd come back, and that was it. Then they'd start shooting and all that, so that was, I was in there.

James: That took care of most of the summer of '41?

John: Yes. Yes. And we were in training there too. And then—oh, I forget.

James: Well, the war started.

John: The war started. Okay, I was in Kentucky, playing basketball outside, when one of the fellas comes running out saying, "Hey, Japan—"

James: "Guess what?"

John: Yeah. I said, "Well, here we are, we're going." And then from there we got real serious training and all. And then we went to Fort Dix from Kentucky. We went down the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the whole convoy. We got to Dix, tent city, they had all the tents lined up. We stayed there for a few months, studying how we could tie down our equipment into the half-tracks so it doesn't move when it gets on a ship. And finally the day came, we all got on the train, we got to New York about midnight. The train pulled up, we all come out and down an embankment somewhere, and we got on a boat, ship, whatever you call it. And from there we went out to the ocean, and the Queen Mary was waiting for us. So we all got onto the Queen Mary. And what was funny about it, they had policemen on both sides of us and we were in the center, so maybe somebody's gonna run away or something—right to the boats, then we went onto the Queen Mary. There was 15,000 of us, the whole division, tanks and the whole bit.

James: What division was this?

John: The 1st Armored. And it took us five days. When we left New York we had two destroyers on either side of us, taking us to a certain distance, then they went away and we were alone, the reason being we were so much faster than anything on the water, so we weren't worried about submarines. And about a day before we got into Ireland we had the British destroyers came out and took us in. We got to Ireland—I don't even remember the town, but we got off the boat, and from there we went to Kilkeel on the southern border of Northern Ireland. Yeah, Northern Ireland. Kilkeel was a little town, a village, you'd say, and we were lined up along the coast in case Hitler decided he's gonna come. So they had us there for a while. And one day, walking through the village, a Jeep pulls up and I looked up; it was a colonel in the Jeep. He said to me, "Hey soldier, come here." "Yes, sir." I saluted. He said, "What's your name?" I go, "John Kurimsky, 1st Armored Division, 27th Field Artillery." He said, "When you get back, be ready to move." Holy mackerel, what's going on here? So I got back and sure enough, they told me the captain wants to see me. I went in to see the captain and he says, "John, you're going." "Where? I don't want to go anywhere."

James: "What did I do?"

John: Yeah. "I don't want to go anywhere," I told him. He said, "But you're going." Then I packed up and they had a Jeep, away it went. I ended up in Belfast. So we had a prison there, American soldiers that did something wrong; they were there for a while. So we went in there and there's a bunch of fellas coming in, we don't know each other. That's how they were picked for this MP outfit, 234th Military Police. They were picked—whatever, what different outfits, I don't know how they picked 'em.

James: 'Cause they were tall?

John: I don't know. Probably that. And we got together and they said, "Well, you're gonna be MPs." "Oh boy." [laughs] So—

James: "What's that mean?"

John: [laughs] Yeah. So we went to training. Oh, they taught everything about MPs, riots and all that stuff. And then—

James: Give you a baton to smack somebody with?

John: Well, yeah. [laughs] When you go to a riot, how to get the ringleaders, the first ones, so it deflates, whatever. And then we got to Ireland—and how to direct traffic. Well they took me, brought me into Belfast, the most busiest corner there is, and they said, "Go out there and direct traffic."

[Jim laughs] “Oh, geez.” And so there I am and on top of that, all the Irish people are standin’ out there, they’re lookin’. [laughs]

James: “Who is this guy?”

John: Yeah, “Who is this guy?” [both laugh] Oh boy, that was somethin’. Then from there—

James: Did you screw it up much?

John: No, no, nothing!

James: Good work.

John: They thought it was pretty good, if you went out there. And, you know, all that fancy stuff.

James: Even though it was backwards, right?

John: Right. Then we were there and then they took us right into Belfast; we patrolled Belfast: riots, whatever happened. And we were pretty good there. The dance halls were the most riots, there was always fights.

James: Yeah, GIs get drunk and—

John: Right. So we took care of that. And then they took us—here we go back on a train. We went through Scotland and got to London.

James: Still as a group, John?

John: Yeah, the 234th.

James: That was your 234th MPs?

John: Right. The MPs. We were a company, two hundred men. Not involved with any Army group. We were alone.

James: Not assigned to anything?

John: Nothing. Wherever there was problems, we went. Our biggest was Liverpool, the waterfront. It was rough, tough, yeah.

James: A lot of bad folks there?

John: Right. And then—

- James: But you weren't expected to deal with civilians, were you?
- John: [pauses] No, not much with civilians.
- James: You really wanted to get the Army boys away from them?
- John: Right. But if they were involved civilians, we took care of that, too.
- James: Sure.
- John: And then once the captain says to me again—I was a sergeant about that time—he says, “Take seven men or eight,” and we go with Lieutenant—I forget his name. We went to Southport, it's about thirty miles up, it's an R&R [Rest and Recuperation], you know, a rest area. So okay, while we're there we were patrolling this little town, Bamber Bridge. It was small, we patrolled it and all. And they had a company, a truck company involved there; they were big. So while patrolling this I saw two soldiers jumping over the wall, like going AWOL. So I chased them, we caught 'em, we brought 'em back. But the misfortune for us is we had to pass the main gate of this trucking company and they were all out there, the whole bunch of 'em. They took one guy away from me.
- James: What for?
- John: Well, they didn't—you know, MP's got 'em, hey, let[?] go.
- James: Just on general principles?
- John: That's all, yeah.
- James: They had no interest in him?
- John: No, no. He belonged to the company, so they took him. But we had the other guy. And I said, “That's alright, let him go.” We went to my area there, a little office I had there, with the guy, sat him down, and I said, “Who's the other guy? What's his name?” He goes, “I don't know him”—I don't know if I should say this on here—
- James: Say whatever you want.
- John: But uh, I said, “If you don't tell me, I'm gonna take care of you right there where you're sitting. I'll give you a minute.” And the minute was up, he said, “Okay,” he says, “the guy's such-and-such-a-name.” I called the outfit of the truck and I talked to the captain; I told him what happened. I said, “I know who the man is, the name.” He says, “Okay,” he says, “come on down. I'll have him lined up and you can pick him up.” So I

drove down there, I got him. Well that night—I don't know what caused it—they beat up the captain, broke into the armory, took all the guns—

James: The guy you were talking to?

John: His group, his outfit, the trucking outfit. And they came into town, Bamber Bridge, in the six-by-six trucks with guns, they were shooting in the air and all that. They got the constable, they said, "Go to the MP outfit, tell 'em we're gonna come and get 'em." So sure enough, I'm sitting in the office and this constable comes in and he tells me what happened. He says, "They took over the town." Holy mackerel. So I sent one of the fellas out to get the six men I had on patrol. Which fortunately, they get 'em, brought 'em in. I told 'em, "Here's what you do. Stand here." We had a wall, you're pretty well set here, from these people. "I'm going back to Liverpool to get the captain and tell him what's happened." I got on a motorcycle and I drove down, I told the captain. We got our outfit. Meanwhile they got their infantry, the 156th Infantry or something. They surrounded the town, then we had enough. Then as some of the soldiers were coming from town, not knowing what it was, we were just grabbin' them all, putting them in the office there, kept them there. And then this colonel came in and we talked to him, and they sent word to these people in town, "Drop your guns by morning or we're going to come in after you."

James: Now these were civilians though?

John: No. Our soldiers.

James: Oh, they were our soldiers?

John: Yeah. Our trucking outfit.

James: Oh, when you said trucking outfit I thought it was a civilian outfit.

John: No, no.

James: But you mean a trucking—part of the—

John: Ammunitions, or ammo and gasoline, the whole bit. They were moving all that.

James: Okay, I got all that.

John: That morning, they dropped their guns; they surrendered. But the ringleaders—there was four or five of them—

- James: They put them in prison, I assume?
- John: Oh yeah, they got 'em. I don't know what they did, but it was bad.
- James: Because a GI in warfare like that, that's insurrection.
- John: Yeah, that's right. And I was reading the book we used to get, like a *TIME Magazine*; I forget the name. I'm going through there—I have the piece home, I cut it out. They had the riot in Detroit, a big riot. The people, they ruined Detroit, practically, and then in there they had the same type—underneath the military police, and this, and Bamber Bridge, and uh, I don't know. You know, they had had nothing to do with each other, but they mentioned it and all. So we got them, and we took us out of there. That was a nice [unintelligible], the town of Southport—beautiful town, you know, resort—oh, nice. So we went back to Liverpool. Then from there, we packed again—where do we go now? Well, we went to London, right outside London, a place called Bushy Park. It's a big park. Beautiful.
- James: I know; I've been there.
- John: You've been there? Okay. And they said, "Okay now, we're going to guard Eisenhower." So we were the mainstay inside the area. That was hard.
- James: By we, you mean your company?
- John: My company, yeah, 234.
- James: That was about a hundred and what?
- John: Well, we had the two hundred people. We took some people they sent to London. London had another place there where we guarded. We were around all over, but I was right in with Eisenhower. So that was nice. And it was a one-story brick building. It had chicken wire over it; from the air it looked like a hill. And that's—we were right under there. So—here's a good one. I'm like, he's standing here, this is a road, Eisenhower has a big picture window here, and he's sitting over there. And no one's to come either way. I stop 'em. And so I'm walking around, it's a nice day, beautiful day. I look down, I see a soldier come out of the building; he's walking towards me. I keep watching him, he's not going by, he's comin'. Well, I only walk about a hundred yards or better. I look, it's a brigadier general. I said, "By order of General Eisenhower, no one goes beyond this point, sir." "Who are you to tell me where I can go?" Oh, he was giving it to me good. I didn't pay attention, I just kept repeating, "By order of General Eisenhower, no one goes beyond this point." Well, here we hear a voice, says, "Hey, General!" We look and it's "Beetle" Smith, chief of

staff. The general, “Yes, sir.” “Did you hear what this sergeant said?” “Yes, sir.” “Get your ass outta’ here.” [James laughs] Oh, I didn’t know what to do! I says—

James: You were in the middle.

John: Yeah. Oh, the guy salutes and takes off. I look at Smith, he looks at me, we both smiled. [both laugh] He closes the window; I went back. “Oh,” I was thinking, “I have an international incident here. An American and a British here.” Because he wasn’t going by, no way. And uh, so that ended that one. That was good. In the meantime, we kept going. Then I had to man the door before it goes to Ike. The queen of England was coming with her entourage. And she stopped—that’s the one that’s a hundred years old now, Queen Mary. She stopped, and she started talking with me.

James: Was George with her?

John: Oh yeah, right behind her. Then a bunch of generals and all. And so she stopped, they all have to stop. Now she’s talking to me. We talk for about five minutes. “Where are ya from, how do ya like this—“

James: How was that?

John: Yeah, we had a good conversation. And then it was all over—

James: How nice.

John: —and they went in right to see Eisenhower. The other incident with Ike— I loved the guy. I was on patrol. My driver—

James: When and where was this?

John: Same place, you know. And I was doing another thing, patrolling. My driver says to me, “Hey, Sarge,” he says, “I got a letter, my father’s dying.” He says, “I’d like to go home.” Now I don’t know; it came to me. “Let’s go see Eisenhower.” I said, “My gosh, what am I saying?” He said, “Oh, no.” I said, “C’mon, let’s go.” So that morning we walk in the office, and his secretary is Sue Serafin[?]. She’s a lieutenant.

James: Not Kay Summersby?

John: No, Kay was something else. [laughs]

James: She’s later.

- John: I don't talk about her. They all want to know about Kay, but I don't say anything.
- James: Well, we'll get into that.
- John: [Laughs] So I said, "Sue, his father's in bad shape. He'd wanna know if he'd like to go home. We've been here three years already and he's—we've had no time off or anything." "Okay, I'll go see Ike." She walks in there, about two, three minutes later she walks out. She said, "Okay, go on in." I says to my guy, I says, "Go on in there; I don't have to go in there." Five minutes later he came out. I said, "How'd ya do?" He said, "I'm going home tomorrow." Wow. "How are you gonna go?" He says, "Well, there's three German generals were captured. They're being sent to Fort Dix. And they have two colonels and a major taking them. So I dropped off a colonel to put the PFC in with them." I said, "How'd they treat you?" "Oh, they treated me perfectly," he said, "everything. We got to Dix and the major says to me, he says, "Take the prisoners and give 'em to that lieutenant, MP lieutenant." [laughs] That was the funny part about it. I said, "How'd you do?" He said, "Good. I went home, I met my father, he died the next day." So he met him and he stayed for the funeral, and he came back home. That's why I says, this Eisenhower, he says to 'em, "You know, any time you guys are in trouble or something happens, come and see me."
- James: Now when was this, in terms of the war, when that incident happened?
- John: That was before the invasion.
- James: It was before D-Day?
- John: Yeah. Yeah. And so that went by pretty good. It was interesting guarding him because I met so many people—well, I met 'em to get by me and all. There was all the admirals, you name it, the British, the whole bunch of 'em. And Churchill, every day with that big cigar. He was there steady.
- James: Where was this office? Wasn't this down in London?
- John: No, Bushy Park, right outside London.
- James: Oh, outside of London?
- John: Yeah, that brick building. Yeah, that was the headquarters. Then I think we had another MP outfit on the out[side] of SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force] Headquarters. So it was well guarded. And then in the meanwhile—okay, D-Day came, and all of a sudden we're out there in that area and all of the V2s, the V1 and V2s

came over. Oh my gosh. Did you hear any of them? “Put-put-put-put,” the first V1, you could hear ‘em. You could see ‘em. And you just pray they don’t stop over your head, because the minute that engine stops—“boom,” straight down. Then V2s came after that; you didn’t hear ‘em. All you heard was “oooooooooh” and the whole thing disappears. They said if we have six months’ time—if Hitler had six months’ time, that would have won the war.

James: There was a lot of controversy about that.

John: Yeah. You couldn’t stop ‘em. And then meanwhile, I’m watching these planes comin’ over, the B17s and all. I wonder how they flew, everything, holes all over ‘em. You know, parts trailing, hanging, and here they’re comin’ over. And then you know there’s people in there that are hurt.

James: What was your duty, then?

John: Same thing, guarding Ike, yeah, until then. Then—

James: Didn’t he move to the mainland?

John: Oh yeah. Yep. Then we start packing—

James: Then you went with him?

John: Yeah—no, he went alone, with a few of the guys. And we were packing, and we went to Southampton there, we got on the LCI [Landing Craft Infantry] and we went across the Channel to Omaha Beach. And then from there we went to—through Saint Lo and all those—

James: You were still with Eisenhower’s headquarters?

John: Yeah, still with Ike, yeah.

James: How many are there guarding him in your particular group that went over to France by that time? The whole company?

John: The whole company, yeah, we always went with the company, yeah.

James: Did you rotate your people or were you always at the desk?

John: I was mostly with—nah, I was mostly outside with Ike and all—it was good.

James: But nobody else in your company did what you did?

John: No, we had different things. But if you—

James: Must've had some time off, is what I'm saying.

John: Oh yeah, we had a lot of time off.

James: You worked four hours and then off or something like that?

John: No, maybe most of the day and then get relieved, and some—

James: Then someone else would be there at night?

John: Yeah. Everybody had a different job. But if you asked each man in my outfit, they all have a different story than I have.

James: Why is that?

John: Because they were in another section. And you hear some good stories, too, from those people.

James: How many people did Eisenhower have in his office?

John: In his office he was alone. And his secretary.

James: One secretary?

John: One secretary, Sue Serafin[??], that's it. And then everybody would come in just to see Eisenhower. But we had all the WACs, the British women all typing. The whole building was whatever they were doing, you know.

James: Well, where did Kay Summersby appear?

John: She was a British subject.

James: I know, but when did you see her?

John: Well, when we'd come to headquarters sometimes, yeah. And we also guarded her.

James: 'Cause she was a driver for him?

John: Right.

James: So you must've seen her sometime.

- John: Well, yeah, and then he had his driver, Mickey—oh, I forget his name. Short, stocky fellow. Mostly with him. And uh—[laughs] I don't want to say anything about Kay.
- James: Well don't say anything that you don't know personally, anyway.
- John: Right, that's it. So then, like I say, we went up there, went to Frankfurt. And then there's an area in the woods, where we were in the woods, where Ike, Churchill, and DeGaulle—I don't know what was going on there, but we were all lined up all around with guns in case—there was some kind of conversation going on or whatever. I don't know what that was about.
- James: You had more than your .45?
- John: We had the machine gun at that time, yeah. We had the .30 calibers. I have pictures of our guys with them, and all that. And what that was about I don't know. Then the war was ending at that time, right. So I was supposed to go home. And meanwhile they put me in the 1st Allied Airborne Army. So I went with them. We went to Berlin. In fact, we stopped at Halle, Germany. We waited two weeks. The Russians didn't get to Berlin yet. We had to wait for them to come in, otherwise we could've been in Poland if we kept going. So when they came in, then from Halle we went into Berlin.
- James: What was your duty then?
- John: Well I was in the headquarters company in charge of the men that were comin' in, takin' their names and all this stuff. And I met a guy from Bridgeport who I worked with in Remington. I saw the name "Steve." I said, "Oh, for cryin' out loud, a reunion." [laughs] Then while in Berlin, I get a call again. Report to headquarters. General Gavin—he was in charge at that time—I saw the major and the major says, "Sergeant, I'm going to send you to Marburg, Germany to pick up some people, 82nd Airborne men that were wounded and they're all set to come back." Marburg, Germany. I says, "Where the heck is that?" He said, "Get a map and look for it." "Get a map? Nah—just, here it is." "Take a six-by-six, I'll give you a driver, get three days' rations and go." Well, by the map, Marburg is by Czechoslovakia, for cryin' out loud. Well, okay, we get the truck, okay let's go. So away we go.
- While we're going—people jumpin' out of bushes—soldiers. Russian soldiers. They want a ride. In fact, they kinda scare us, they've got the guns and all. What do they want, to hold us up? So now they want a ride, they jump in the back, and we'd take 'em wherever we go. And along the way we had kitchens. You want something to eat, you go in, they have the fifty gallon jug with the hot water with the cans and the C-rations. So you

get those, and meanwhile, now we're coming to the Russian zone. The Russians won't let me through. I show them my papers, that it's okay. No, nothing. All of a sudden they call an officer, comes in, and I'm talking to the officer. He's kinda, "No, no," then he decides, "Okay, come on." So we get the truck, we come around the bend, there's a big building full of Russian soldiers. Oh, cripes. So I stop, he went inside in the meanwhile, and the Russians come out. One of them's asking me about the American flag. He wants to know if the red stood for Russia, the stars for the United States, the white for British. Didn't know a thing. So I explained to him. Then this fella comes out, gave me the papers and said, "Okay, go ahead."

So I go through, and when I get past their zone, the British zone is there. Now I gotta go through the British zone, which was no problem. They let me go. I got to Marburg. There's a big sign out there "General Patton's Headquarters." It says "No tie, no button, \$25 fine." [laughs] All these fines are written on this big sign, holy mackerel. So okay, the next morning, we got up, we had breakfast and I got these 82nd people and a lieutenant, both of 'em. So they went in the back. Now I'm coming through the British zone to get back where I'm going. The Russian zone—they won't let me through! [James laughs] "No way! No way at all!"

James: Did they give you a reason?

John: Nah, just, "No way." So let's go, I get the map, we're gonna go through the French zone or whatever. Now we can't get across the river. I don't know if it's the Rhine or whatever. And it's wide. And they have—the GIs made a—what the hell you call it?—a bridge across the line; it was laying right on the water.

James: A pontoon bridge?

John: No, it was just—oh, you know, it wasn't pontoons, pontoons I wouldn't—hey, it'd be good. But I was worried. Geez, this six-by-six is heavy, and I don't know if I should go across. The fella I was with spoke German. So he asked the German, some fella there, "Can trucks go by?" "Yeah." I'm saying, "Is he lying or what?" But okay, let's take a chance. We got in the middle, it almost covered the motor, the whole thing. The guys in the back are yelling. I said, "If this goes, we're all dead." Because there's no way we could be—

James: You'd be swept downriver?

John: Yeah, and we had the heavy clothes on, the boots; we never would have made it. Then finally we start coming up. And we got to the other side.

James: You were in the center of the river and it started to sink?

- John: Oh yeah, that was scary! So we got there, then I went around, I hit the British zone again on the other side and there was no problem, then I got into—oh! Before we got to the Russian zone where they wouldn't let us in, "Let's shoot our way through!"
- James: Who said that?
- John: The 82nd guys in the back. I said, "Fellas, you don't know what's around the bend." Because there's that big building full of Russian soldiers with guns and all. I said, "Fellas, we would never make it." So that's why we went this way. I got them to Berlin, and they went one way and I went back to my outfit. [both laugh] That was scary. And then we stayed there for a while. We came into this building, the Telefunken Works. It's like General Electric, electrical. And they had the big long buildings; we were taking them over. Captain says, "Okay, we all go in there, we throw everything out the window." It's like you walk in here, take this, all that, out the window.—[End of Tape One, Side One]—We cleaned the whole place out.
- James: Why?
- John: We were going to have bunks there. That's going to be our place. And as we were throwing those things out, the German people were picking up the wood and all because they had nothing. We demolished the whole place. Meanwhile, across the way was that German Zeiss cameras and all, beautiful. Everything's in there; the Russians had it. Well, when they got through, all the machinery was put on flatbed cars, away they went.
- James: They stole the whole thing?
- John: Right. In our area, there's a beautiful machine shop I walked in. It was like ready to go to work. Nothing was disturbed. They took it all. Every piece of machinery, everything they get their hands on, on the flatbed trucks and cars, railroads and away they went to Russia. So that was something. And then I got the call. It was time to go home.
- James: When was this now? How far after the war was this? The whole war over or just—
- John: No, it was over, the whole thing, yeah.
- James: So probably the fall or '45?
- John: Japan surrendered—right, it was the fall. But meanwhile, when I was supposed to go home, nobody went home, because Truman was coming. Is

that the Potsdam Agreement or something they had? So we had a week until it was all through. When he left, then we started goin' home again. And that's how I got home, November '45. That's the day I got home. We come in on a Liberty ship. My gosh, five hundred of us on that little tub. And that was bouncing all the way. It was something. I lost a lot of weight.

James: You were spoiled, going over on the Queen Mary, that's the problem.

John: I got sick on the Queen Mary.

James: Oh, you did, too?

John: They sent me on guard duty, way up on top, the officer's quarters. I was in the aisle and that's it. There's nothing there, just keep me up there. They forgot me. They kept me up there six hours. And I go out the ship on the top, I'm watching, and we hit a storm. I saw that nose of the Queen Mary go under water, come up, and I took my bag out and that was it. Oh, sick! I went and I sat on the floor, I wouldn't get up. Eventually a major came through and I stopped him. I said, "Major, can you get somebody to come relieve me, somebody down there? I've been here six hours." He did. Also, my relief comes up, okay, take over. I go down, see, I was in D deck, way out. All we had was hammocks, nothing on the ship. Two hours later I hear them yelling, "Hey Kurimsky, guard duty." "I just got off; I'm not going." I laid on that bunk for three days. I didn't even get out.

James: Find somebody else.

John: Right, right. Well, we get off, line us up—this was still in Ireland when we got off first, I forgot to mention this. First sergeant calls my name; I said, "Here." He says, "Where were you?" I said, "Down on the bunk." Okay, he didn't say much. Now we get to this area where the British soldiers were bivouacked; they're gone already. And there was a stove about ten feet long, dirty, black, cast-iron. "Kurimsky, come here. Start cleaning." [James laughs]. It took me two days. It was dirty. Oh, I made it shine. [laughs] That was my punishment. Oh, he gave it to me good. [laughs] So that was real interesting. And I got home, then in '50 I got the call, I went to Korea. I went through Fort Dix.

James: How did you happen to get called to Korea? Were you in the reserve?

John: I was in reserve, the last year of my reserve. And now, here's another thing; I'm Army. I get a beautiful citation: "Sergeant John Kurimsky now in the United States Air Force." I was never in the Air Force. I'm Army. When I get to Dix, it was all Air Force people. "How the hell did you get in here?" "I don't know." I got the nice, beautiful-lookin' thing, you

know. [laughs] So they sent me down with a group of fellas as MPs to MacDill Air Force Base. When I got there I ran the prison, a good-sized prison they had there.

James: At Fort MacDill?

John: Yeah, at MacDill, yeah, Air Force base. In Tampa. So I ran the prison and I was also the bugler.

James: That's quite a combination.

John: A big record, they had in the office. And all the calls—now I gotta look at it, what call, that o'clock, turn it on, and oh, it drove me crazy. You hadda be blowing calls all the time, all kind of calls. Retreat came down one day, everybody's out; I forgot. Blow retreat. I expected, "Oh they're gonna hang me now." No one said a word; nothing happened. That was beautiful. I fouled up big here; they let me go.

While I'm out there, I'm up in my office, I look down, all the prisoners in the yard, they're playing basketball. Now no one's moving too much. See, something's wrong. They're not moving. I lined them up; two prisoners escaped. I have the guys out there guarding—I don't know how they got over and all that. So I called the officer of the day who's always a pilot. I can't find him. I called the civilian police in Tampa, told them two prisoners—I called my captain, told him what happened. And it got all through the whole thing. And a couple hours later, the OD [Officer of the day] comes in, I don't know where he was. Now I explained what I did. He thought I did something great, but this was procedure. But he didn't know procedure. I told him what I did. Oh! Hey—I get a commendation in the next couple days from them. Colonel of the base, what a good job I did, they need more men like me, but I didn't do anything great!

James: You covered up for him, I think.

John: Oh definitely, yeah.

James: That's the reason they were so nice to you. He was out screwin' around.

John: Whatever he was, right. So that went by, and eventually we got 'em. The civilian police caught 'em. And they brought 'em back.

James: What year was this? 1950?

John: No, this is still '45.

James: Oh, this is before Korea?

John: Yeah, yeah. So I just—coming to mind, all that stuff—and they brought ‘em back. I said okay. I stripped ‘em, put ‘em in a cell. It was cold. Oh my, they’re yellin’, “Hey Sarge, it’s cold!” I says, “You make me look bad by going over that wall,” I says, “Well, suffer!” So a couple days later, the chaplain came. Oh, they told him what I did; oh, my gosh, he read me in and out, but it didn’t mean anything. So that went by the boards. I’m sittin’ in the office and here come two FBI agents with a soldier. He was a big guy. He went AWOL in ’43 or something. He became a stevedore on a ship and all that. They caught him coming off the boat. He was in Turkey. He had beautiful rugs on him. I said, “What’s this?” “AWOL.” Okay, so they go away. I get to him, I says, “What’s all this?” “Well,” he says, “I went AWOL in ’43; I don’t know how they got me.” He says, “I come off the boat here in Tampa and they were waiting for me.” I says, “That’s good. Lock him up.” Another incident, another AWOL lived in Tampa. He was mowing the lawn. Two agents come up to him and say, “Are you so-and-so?” He says, “Yeah.” They said, “Come on with me.” They took him—“I gotta tell my wife.” They didn’t even give him a chance. Right in to me again, AWOL. The prison again. So incidents, all these things that happened. Another thing, my buddy was at the desk. This old man come in. He says, “What do you want?” He said, “I wanna turn myself in.” “What do you mean, turn yourself in?” He said, “I’m AWOL from World War I.” [laughs] He went to—

James: AWOL from World War I?

John: Well, yeah. He was turning himself in. In ’43.

James: Did he look like he was old enough?

John: Oh yeah; he was old. “Hey captain, what are we gonna do with this guy?” I said, “Throw him out.” [both laugh]

James: Not allowed to surrender?

John: No. I figured hey, maybe he had nowhere to eat, nowhere to sleep, he wants to come in and we’ll take care of him. [laughs] They tossed him out. [both laugh] Oh boy, I’ll tell you. [unintelligible] World War I. Wow! “I wanna turn myself in.” That was good.

James: That was excellent.

John: I guess that’s about it.

James: So tell me about getting back in the service.

John: Oh, in '50?

James: Yeah.

John: I just got that paperwork telling me I gotta report here such-and-such a date.

James: In the Air Force?

John: In the Air Force, yeah.

James: What did they do with you? Did they just keep you there? In 1950?

John: Oh yeah. Yeah, they kept me right at MacDill. Took care of the prison, got patrol—we patrolled, which I didn't like, town patrol.

James: How long were you in the service in Korea?

John: One year.

James: And it was all at MacDill?

John: All at MacDill. Yeah. Then they decided, I guess, there's nothing gonna happen. That's why they brought us in. And in MacDill, they were gonna put a tent city, all the palmettos there and all. And so they burned all that area out and there were a million snakes in there. I went through with a Jeep. Oh, they were all over the place. All rattlers. Trying to get into the hole before the fire and all. But they never put the tents up there. [laughs]

James: They probably couldn't get anybody to put the stakes down or they'd step on snakes.

John: Oh yeah. I'm telling you, it was terrible. I never saw so many in my life. Some burnt to death, others got away, they went and got into the hole fast enough and all. But there were a lot of snakes. There's a place, Rattlesnake Florida, right next to Tampa. The people that run it, we brought them in to get the snakes. They come in with a half-ton truck and with the poles and all that.

James: And round 'em up?

John: Geez, I mean, they got 'em by the tons, threw 'em in the back, into the back and all. But still there was a lot there after. And nighttime, if you're walkin' along, you go up to mess or wherever and it's dark, you gotta wait, they come out on the road for the heat or whatever it is, I don't know. So you gotta be careful. That was good, we got some good

incidents. Another one, each outfit—what the heck would you call them?—had their own mess halls and all.

James: Each squadron, probably.

John: That's it, okay. Then I used to go around at night. I'd stop in and get a coffee and all that. And this one time, I walked in on my drive for the coffee, and there's the KP [Kitchen Police] sitting there with the master sergeant in charge. I walk in, he says, "Out." He threw me out. I says, "Sarge, okay, thank you." I went to the main gate, I says, "Now listen. There's a sergeant rides a motorcycle. When he comes, stop him and check his bags." He was married and off the base there was houses where the married guys were living with their wife. Well, he was stealing stuff from the cafeteria. And he had that. So when they stopped him they brought him in and they called me, and I walked in, the guy almost died.

James: Last person he wanted to see.

John: Yeah he—that's right. I said, "Hey Sarge, how are ya?" Boy, he was mad. Next day he had nothing on, you know; they took it off. I don't know how long they had it off, but he got it.

James: He was stealing food?

John: Oh yeah, he was takin' it home. In fact, they were all doing it. But this guy, I figured he had it, he's from there too, so we got him. And uh, real interesting. I had a good time down there too, in Florida. In the prison I had twenty-four hours on, two days off. Then my other buddy was a sergeant, he took the prison for the next twenty-four, and that's how we rotated. One day I saw the list up there, they took me off, they put me on town patrol. When you go town patrol you need a new uniform every day. You gotta take it to the cleaners, get 'em cleaned. They give you so much money to do it. Terrible. I walk into the office, this captain, salute him. "Captain, I'm on town patrol," I says, "but what I'd like to do is stay here working with you at the prison." It worked. Okay, he took me off and kept me on in charge of the prison. [laughs] That was pretty good. There was a lot—very interesting. Oh these, you know, you talk about it, you laugh, but some of these things were real crucial to the—especially with Eisenhower, yeah. You had to be on your toes all the time.

James: Was Eisenhower a very chatty type of guy? Did he make small talk with you a lot?

John: Oh, oh, let me tell ya this—see, I forgot this other thing. In SHAEF we would get the bombers comin' over droppin' bombs, the sirens would go off, and everybody in SHAEF had a place to go when this happened. So

I'm out here and he's in here. He comes out, and I don't know where I'm gonna go. No one told me. He says, "Come on, Sarge." Went into a little bunker of his. He had a long desk, all telephones on it, all everything in there. So we just sat in there, we were talking. The one that gets me best, he says to me, "You know, this is a great nuisance, don't you think so?" "Yes sir." But what I thought, I says, "Well, you're the big guy, why don't you stop it?" [laughs] I thought to myself.

James: You didn't say that to him?

John: Oh, no way! No way. I said, "Yes sir." So we were there about fifteen, twenty minutes. It was nice. Just us two. Oh, great guy. The one thing I just didn't care what he did was they brought in trainloads of Russians in freight cars, just like the Holocaust you know, putting them in it. The Russians wanted 'em back. He sent them back, and that was no good because they weren't gonna be well treated. So that's the only thing I didn't like. But that's it.

James: Someone said he smoked a great deal?

John: Yeah, yeah.

James: Is that true? Was he a chain-smoker?

John: Yeah, yeah, and Churchill too, with that cigar, never without the cigar. Always. And one night I was in charge of the war room, me and another guy. That's in the center of the—General Bull was in charge of that war room. Now when they all leave at night we always had two MPs go in there and nobody comes in, you know, guarding it. Well, the war's over, I can say this. We were in there and there's a door in there and I says to the sarge, to—his name is Castle—I says, "Let's go into there." He says, "No, no, we don't go." I says, "Come on!" I opened the door, and it was a room, no windows, no nothing. Draw drapes all around. So I pulled the drapes. Map of the whole world all around the whole thing. A million pins in where each outfit is, German and all, they had it all in there. I said, "Hey Castle, do they know we're here?" **[Tape cuts out]** No, no. Whew. That was scary. We're not supposed to touch anything in that room, just sit there, you know, and wait. But we went in there, looked at that map, and wow.

James: Now when you were in that situation there, how were you fed?

John: Good.

James: I mean, did you have to leave and go to a mess hall?

- John: Yeah, our mess hall.
- James: They didn't bring any food to you when you were in that office?
- John: No, no, we were on duty, yeah. It was no problem eatin' good with him, yeah.
- James: I was gonna say, you probably had better rations than others.
- John: Oh, now I got this other—I don't know how you can do this, but we were in Versailles and Eisenhower had a big hotel right outside of Versailles. We were guarding that hotel; he was in there. And the Malmedy Massacre, all that, what was that, that breakthrough [unintelligible] come through. And we got the okay that Colonel—oh, I forget his name. He's one of the great—like double-oh-seven—he was what they had in the German—
- James: He was a spy?
- John: Yeah. I can't think of his name. He and four or five others were coming to kill Eisenhower. I got the papers home, too. And they give a description of this colonel, the majors, you know—
- James: Scarinski?
- John: Skorzeny?
- James: Skorzeny.
- John: That's the guy. Okay, you got him. That he was comin. So we had the whole area of Versailles surrounded, all the roads and all. We had people stopping buses, cars, checking people out and all. And I had our guys in front of the hotel about a hundred yards back. It was winter, it was cold. They had the fifty gallon drum with wood in there to keep warm. I went down into the basement with a driver, and he had a French chef making pastries. Oh, he made the best pastries you ever saw. [laughs] So I went down and we got a couple of 'em. And as we're coming up the machine guns started going off. We ran out there and the guys that were shooting at this six-by-six truck, it went right by me, and they were shooting. I says, "They broke right back through the barricade." Now they went by, and there is a park there, a beautiful area by the hotel. And as I got in the Jeep, it turned. So I got into the Jeep as fast as I could, we went up and we turned, and the truck was there. I told my drivers, "You go on this side"—we had machine guns—"I go here. Push it in the cab, and if you feel something, shoot." We did both sides—nothing. They were gone. And it's a woods, so they jumped out and they went into the woods. We never got 'em. But I figure two minutes more I would have had them. That's

something. Every time I think about it, boy, that was close. Just minutes. And they got away. 'Cause while I was there this infantry outfit started coming in. And I got worried because, hey, they're gonna shoot, you know, that was kinda scary. But finally they came by and said, "What happened?" and they got away, they went through the woods. But we never got 'em. We never got 'em. I got the truck, and there are German rations in it and all, so there it was.

James: Suicide mission?

John: That was—yeah, that was close. They got some of them; they shot 'em. For spying, naturally. But Skorzeny, no, we captured him. Not me, but our Army. We got him; he escaped again. He ended up—I don't know if you know—in Spain.

James: I know about him.

John: You do? You do. See, in Spain and he died a natural death. I don't think he was killed, no.

James: So after this incident did things tighten up?

John: Oh yeah, yeah. But we did a good job. And they disbanded us in Europe too. We were brought together in Europe, and disbanded.

James: Your company?

John: Yeah, it was like we were never there. You know?

James: When you went home, you didn't go home as a group?

John: No.

James: You went over as individuals?

John: Individuals, yeah.

James: You were at the right points?

John: Right, the points, that was it. But you see, what got me is the Air Force guys, they were going home way before us because every time their planes went to bomb, they got a star. They were in England. A bunch of battle stars. They had a million points, so they were gone first. [laughs] Eventually we got home.

James: Were you married then?

John: No, no. That's why.

James: Sent all the money home to your mom?

John: A few bucks. That's what we got, peanuts. Yeah, I sent some.

James: Did you spend it in Paris or London?

John: Well, yeah, we were gone enough. Yeah, me and my two other buddies. [laughs] We had a lot of fun. We went [unintelligible], all that stuff. And then we patrolled—you heard of the Red Ball Highway? Yeah, we patrolled that from here to here, because what the truckers were doing, they were stopping, selling the gas that's supposed to go to Patton, yeah.

James: To the natives? Sell it to the French people?

John: Right, the natives. Or they'd pick up some girl, park along the lanes. That was it. So we would have to go there to, you know, throw the girl out, tell 'em, "Keep going, you're in trouble, pal. Go." And driving through Versailles one night, somebody took a shot at us from a side street. We went right around, we come back with the headlights, nothing. Then along the building there's about twenty-five, thirty-five gallon cans of gasoline. They're ours, you know, so they sold them. So we got those and called the French police, and we got 'em. Another incident, patrolling again by the railroad at the freight, and there's these buildings, so I walked around this building. No roof on it and a long wall and the train was here. Walked into this place and there were boxes and boxes of—empty boxes that were being sent to the GIs. They were stolen, torn open, took everything out. The whole place was full of 'em. My gosh. I just couldn't believe this. I called the French police and ours and I don't know what happened, but what could you do? You don't know who was there. So I went the other way, look under the car, and there's some guy underneath it. I said, "Come here." [whistles] He's a German, he'd escaped from Cherbourg, he was on his way home. Well I caught him, and I guess he went back where they got him. But all these little incidences. You know, the more you think about it these little things keep coming back to you. So it's interesting.

Another one in Versailles, I checked air raid shelters. Go down there, look at them, and they were filthy. I went in and one day there's a body laying there. I look, it was a second lieutenant; somebody beat him up. So I took him and brought him to headquarters.

James: Oh, he was alive?

John: Yeah, he was alive. He was beat up. Smelled, oh, he was bad. And I took him in I told him what happened and all. Now we go on patrol. On patrol I see a soldier walking. I stop this guy, I stop him and I look. It's a Senegalese, you know, the red cap, all that stuff. And he smelled just like that lieutenant. That was the guy.

James: That was the guy?

John: Yeah, he got 'em. When he saw me, he was shaking. Oh, he was scared. But when I got the smell, I said, "Yeah, come on, jump in here." Sure enough, he had the wallets and all from the lieutenant and all. So that was another incident that happened. There were so many of them. Well, that's about it. I hope I did good.

James: You did very well. It was most interesting.

John: Thank you.

James: We appreciate it.

[End of Interview]