Hal Bergen

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McDevitt: The way I like to go about these is just like a casual conversation. You know, we will just talk about whatever comes up. Are there any specific things… obviously, we are gonna talk about the Nuremberg trials quite a bit. Are there any specific other aspects of your service you'd like to talk about? Or of your life? I mean, afterwards I know you were talking about this book. Are there certain books that you'd like to talk about? Or things that you got out of the military?

Bergen: No.

McDevitt: Or things that you did after you got out of the military that you'd like to touch on?

Bergen: After I got out of the military, I went back to college on the GI Bill, and, this makes, or you do the editing. I had two experiences with respect to the trial that I use in casual conversation even with people I haven't met yet. One is my experience sleeping with Walter Cronkite, supposed to be provocative. It turns out that the courtroom was laid out with a gallery with theatre seating on one-half, one quarter actually, of the floor space. There were about ten rows of twenty seats each, etc. It was all for the press core and they all had assigned seats. [Background discussion, unclear] See, my point is, I don't know I have a story. You guys think I do s, I'll just rattle on. At any rate, the Walter Cronkite story… you can visualize the theatre seating from left to right. There's a wall here and then there an aisle where you get into the seats. The other side of the aisle five feet away included a control station for the sound system. The multi-language simulation interpretation sound system, which I'll talk about. And we had two control stations when we were operating and one of the stations was across this aisle from the press gallery. And sometimes the trial got very, very boring and everybody would snooze off, including Walter Cronkite, who sat right across the aisle and me. So we all slept together with two hundred other people. [Laugher] That was that. The other is in getting assigned to trial. I had arrived in a replacement that fall in Cherbourg came on a troop ship. It turned out they were looking for replacements for the sitting core guys in the guard who were all

military people. This was April, ‘46. The trial started about October ’45, it was supposed to last three months, it lasted fifteen months as it turned out. So when the guys said, Okay, I’ll give you three months at the end of October, they all had points, like, one hundred ten points. You know what I’m talking about?

McDevitt: Yeah.

Bergen: And they finally got sympathy or rebelled or what not, like they are going home, no matter what, and so they needed people to fill their spaces. And they jerked me out of the arrivals in early April, ‘46 to go down to Nuremberg and relieve a couple… one guy. I didn’t know who, it didn’t matter, but they had to get it. So they give me my papers, and I think I still have a copy in my son’s basement, regular military travel orders, you know what they look like, edge to edge. The first paragraph assigned me to 3112 Signal [Service Battalion] in Frankfurt and I was told when I was getting on the train: don’t get off at Frankfurt, get your ass down to Nuremberg fast! Because these guys… and he told me the story, they told me the story. So the second paragraph of the order….

McDevitt: You know what, Sir? I’m actually going to stop you. I’m going to take a quick picture…

Bergen: Okay, I’ll forget it, I'm an old guy. I was nineteen when all this happened. So the second paragraph on this sheet of paper said, for detached service the US State department at Nuremberg, blah blah blah. And they, there’s actually… they wanted me to get my ass down to Nuremberg, don’t stop at Frankfurt which is where my home unit was. I was on their T.O. so I did and two or three months later, you know, if you live long enough you get promoted so I was ready for a stripe and they put through the request and it had to go back to Frankfurt because I was on their T.O. not Nuremberg. They didn’t have an official army unit. They were all detached service guys like I was. There was about-- excluding the guard staff -- there was about fifty people like that in various jobs. So turns out they just couldn’t get my promotion through and I had a diligent… Ray Chesnut, Lieutenant Ray Chesnut that was in charge of this civil core unit. And he finally got through to somebody, it took him about three months to get me, you know, the next stripe. Flash ahead to about November ’46, coming home with a whole bunch of guys, military transport, shipping company. By this time, I had a few chevrons so I was in the NCO car with a bunch of other guys sitting around, almost at Fort Sheridan. We were probably around Cicero coming around and I was with this one guy in particular for almost two weeks. And we were sitting there chitchatting about one thing or another and he slaps this one and he says,

"BERGEN!" And I said, "Yeah? And he proceeds to tell me he was the 1st sergeant in 3112 Signal when I was supposed to show up, I didn't show up! He wrote me off after thirty days and I was officially listed first as AWOL and then I was away long enough I was a deserter and they wrote me off the books and I was in some other T.O. someplace so they had to undo, first they had to discover what happened.

McDevitt: [Explains intro] Today is the 26th of February, 2016, and we at the Pritzker Military Museum welcome Hal Bergen, a veteran of WWII. At the age of eighteen, Hal was drafted into the US Army in 1945 and he became the sound technician at the Nuremberg trials. First off, Hal, let's start from the beginning. When and where were you born?

Bergen: Chicago.

McDevitt: Chicago? What year was that?

Bergen: 1927.

McDevitt: What neighborhood were you in?

Bergen: Lawndale.

McDevitt: Lawndale. And what do you remember about the neighborhood in the 30s?

Bergen: It was middle class or maybe a little less than middle class. I wouldn't call it affluent. A lot of…. My father had a job, he had a little business, most people somehow or other got through the Depression, some on what was called relief then, call it welfare now. And it was a relatively quiet neighborhood, we lived in the three story corky iron apartment building… only half of the court. The other half was the lot so it was a U shaped building without the other half of it. I went to Penn school, William Penn School. I had some good friends for a kid. We played stick ball and marbles and stuff like that. It wasn't very auspicious, I don't think. It was typical, mostly Jewish neighborhood. That give you enough?

McDevitt: Yeah. So did your mom have to work during the Depression or did she stay at home?

Bergen: She stayed home during the Depression. Interestingly enough. My father was in the candy business, meaning he had a truck with his name on the front door, it was a big box truck. It looked like a beer truck in the sense that there were doors that opened and a lot of shelves. And he would pick up candy in boxes and

deliver it to retailers and there were several guys who had routes like that throughout Chicago so they were the jobbers, what is it they were called. And he did that all through the Depression and made fairly good money at it. We had a family car. Not too many people had that. Then the war came and his business evaporated. Why? Couldn't get sugar, couldn't get chocolate… there was not candy to sell anymore. Before that, Baby Ruth candy was made here. Mars, the whole Mars candy was that on Oak Park Avenue, and when I was a kid I would go with him on Saturdays and during the summer and be his, like his… ride shotgun in the truck.

McDevitt: And that's a nice job for your dad to have if you're a kid… he's working for the candy…

Bergen: Yeah, so the only thing left for him… he had about at most an eighth grade education as an immigrant boy; he came here when he was about three… So he started driving a cab and he did that until he died in 1953. My mother went to work. I'm trying to peg it to a date.

McDevitt: During the war or before?

Bergen: Before. When the shortage first started coming up and he had nothing left to sell, well he went out. When he started driving a cab he didn't make as much money as when he made when he had his little business. So she decided my brother and I were old enough… that she wanted to work. She worked for an insurance, an industrial insurance company. They insured industrial plants and commercial properties, not individuals. I can't think of the name of it now but it was at Jackson and LaSalle in the height of the insurance industry in Chicago.

McDevitt: And did you have brothers and sisters?

Bergen: Yeah, one brother, seven years younger. Still alive and well.

McDevitt: So you were a child when Hitler started going across Europe. Do you remember that? Do you remember any conversations that your father--?

Bergen: Vividly. I even had nightmares that the Germans were coming and we'd wind up in concentration camps, whatever that was. But, it was a big bundle of fear, you know, which I picked up from the environment because at that point there was no way anybody could figure out how to stop Hitler. He was eminently successful in Europe. I mean, he just rolled over wherever he wanted to go, until he ran into the Russians. So then maybe he'll come after us, you know, across the ocean. So

there was a lot of speculation and fear that something terrible would happen. In Chicago, I don't know about other cities, in Chicago there was an outfit called the German American Bund, which was a social fraternity, I think, that primarily provided death benefits but was a great social organization. And they used to have big picnics in the summer time at Riverview Park, and they would have rallies in support of Nazis and Hitler there, because it was their homeland and they were seeking to maintain a connection. And that was the other side of the connection was Hitler. So that was enough to strike fear even more than if we lived in Omaha where there wouldn't be a German American Bund.

McDevitt: And your last name being Bergen, I assume that you're German, that you have German heritage somewhere down the road.

Bergen: No.

McDevitt: No?

Bergen: No… original family name was Ginsberg. I'm not sure where that came from. My father, it's my father's surname, his family name. He came over when he was three years old, about 1903. My mother's maiden name was Bernstein and her mother's… my mother's name was Kate, for who my daughter is named. So we… I have a mundane family tree and as far as I'm concerned, very undistinguished. But I find my daughter-in-law, my son's wife for example-- my son's wife-- has been a real bear on digging out information about our forbearers. And I don't know what she does, she goes to the passport offices and this, that and the other thing. And she's gotten back to about 1850! What's amazing to me is… my understanding is that with the great influx of immigrants a lot of people gave their own name, old, different names, because they didn't want people from Europe coming after them. And the story goes that maybe apocryphal that some of the immigrants that were coming into immigration service, booths or wherever to get into the country… they would be asked what their name was and they would say "Fergessen!" [Yiddish for "I forgot"], they forgot, so they came in with their name Ferguson. So there are a lot of Jews out there whose name is Ferguson only because their forbearers used this ruse to protect their identity so the bad guys wouldn't come over from Europe. My mother was definitely afraid, for example, that the Russians would come after my father who was born in Kiev and get him back in the Russian army, so she pushed him to get citizenship here, which he did. She was a citizen because she was born here.

McDevitt: That brings me to another thing. You were talking about having nightmares of concentration camps. What was the feeling in Chicago and in your neighborhood and in your family about the Russians at the time? I don't know if you recall, I don't know if that was a big point of conversation.

Bergen: It wasn't.

McDevitt: Okay.

Bergen: The Russians were some sort of mysterious heathens in Eastern Europe and the concentration, as I remember, was Western Europe, Germany, Czechoslovakia, maybe. [indecipherable] That's all I need, Hitler said. Peace at any price, what Chamberlain said, it didn't work out that way.

McDevitt: So when you went to high school, did you participate in sports? Or were you in any extra-curricular activities?

Bergen: Yes.

McDevitt: Would you like to--

Bergen: I'm not a jock, I never was. Never enjoyed it. My son was a jock. He's six foot eight and he played almost professional ball, he was scouted to play professional basketball after college, in Tel Aviv, of all places. So he went there and during the pre-season training he re-injured himself. He had a back injury when he was, like, twelve that went away, never worried about it again, but the training was so intense for this professional basketball thing that it reactivated the injury. So, he had to give that up, but to this day he plays pick-up ball. My daughter is a great swimmer. She's not just a certified Red Cross lifeguard, she's a certified Red Cross lifeguard trainer. And she swims two or three times a week just for fun. She lives near on Peterson and near the hospital, Swedish Covenant. That's Foster, I guess, not Peterson.

McDevitt: So did they get the athleticism from their mother or--?

Bergen: No. [Laughter] My wife was clumsier than I am.

McDevitt: So what subjects did you enjoy in high school? Were there any… or were you kind of a knucklehead?

Bergen: Well, I lettered in high school, just not in sports, in debate.

McDevitt: Debate.

Bergen: I was on the debate team and it really riles me to hear all these debates now with the political season. They're really not debates.

McDevitt: Press conferences.

Bergen: Debates are very formalized. There's a very strict structure as to how they're conducted. It's a lot of rules but they call them debates and I figure, well, I don't have to go tilt that windmill, not gonna win it anyway. What I really got into… when I was finishing my sophomore year they asked me if I'd like to take special English in my junior year and I figured special was better than regular so I said, "Yes"! It turned out it was a ruse! It was a class in journalism that one of the English teachers, her name was Lavinia Tinker, was wangled to train kids to run the school newspaper. My daughter went to University of Illinois J school downstate, four-year. I think I learned in a semester from Ms. Tinker everything I needed to know and more.

McDevitt: Regarding journalism.

Bergen: Yeah, it was the equivalent of four years downstate. Journalism isn't really all that complicated in terms of technique. At any rate, I loved it.

McDevitt: Do you remember what you wrote about at that time? Was it mostly high school stuff or did you step outside that box and talk about the community or talk about the war?

Bergen: No, I did a lot of on-site reporting of school events. But, you have good questions I must say. My favorite assignment was a gossip column. I shouldn't even call it a gossip column, that was somebody else's. It was a humor column I wrote jointly together with a girl named Natalie Fisher and we would just have a grand time enjoying ourselves writing these ridiculous columns. We invented people like Consuala Shlepkis and her adventures and her boyfriend like they were members of the school group, students. So our imaginations ran wild, and we got as salacious as you could get away with, but it was great fun. And leaping ahead, I would say ninety-nine percent of the income I made as an adult was writing and in the PR business at that. And what I really liked more than any other writing at all was speechwriting for executives, who were my clients. Because the format was very loosey-goosey and you could say almost anything. I remember one of the earliest speeches I wrote was for a guy who was president of his company. He was a client, and I wrote this speech. I talked with him and he looked at it. Couple days later he says, "Hal, I don't want this." I said, "Bill, that's what you told me! So that kind of straightened him out in terms of watching what you say

because what you say lives on and you can't deny it once it's out your mouth. So I enjoyed that part, I wound up in the, as I say in the public relations business for probably fifty years working for three in succession public relations consulting firms, which was interesting because in each instance we had two or three clients. So you learned their business and their mores and their world and their environments and their challenges because you become advocates for them. And the thing I had a hard time, well not a hard time, but I had to recognize and I had to recognize this with people I was training later on: when you're in journalism, you're a reporter and you advocate for the reader, if you advocate at all. When you're in PR you advocate for your client, you're not objective, you become a combatant. The fiercest battle I got into which almost, well, it did ruin a friendship. I got involved in lead free gasoline, getting the lead out of gasoline, catalytic converters on cars which offended some people that I knew. Particularly the director, the public relations director of the ethyl corporation. We had been friends otherwise, see he was down in Monroe, Louisiana, but we were on the board of the Public Relations Society of America, so we knew each other. But, here I was an advocate, and so was he so that was our job and that's the distinction between PR and journalism.

McDevitt: It's interesting how life works out. I mean you thought you were going into debate class and you end up basically getting a journalism class and it kind of… it influences the rest of your life.

Bergen: I didn't even know about, debate was a club, it was an extra-curricular thing.

McDevitt: Oh yeah, it was an English class, it was an English course.

Bergen: Yeah, they just only said it was special. So I said, "Okay well, if it's special, it's gotta be better." It wasn't that I was stupid or mentally deprived or anything like, I didn't even think of it in those terms. Special must be better, okay.

McDevitt: Was at this time was there kind of a fog over everybody's head? I have to assume. Did you have family members in the war or friends who had been drafted?

Bergen: Well, there's your answer. I can't think of any. I certainly didn't have any siblings. I had a cousin, a couple of cousins who I wasn't all that friendly with. They just were related on my father's side, no.

McDevitt: Not so much. So as high school was rounding out, when did you find out that you were going to be drafted? Did you know? 'Cause it was 1945 correct? It was-- go ahead.

Bergen: No. This requires another gulp. During the war--'42, '43-- there was great competition among the services for the best and brightest. The draft was on but you could volunteer for the Navy Radar program, the Army Air Corps, a number of other specialized services like that and they would reserve a place for you when you graduated. Part of… you had to take an exam, and they looked at your record, and you had to take a physical exam as well. It turned out that I was, clinically, still am, colorblind.

McDevitt: Me too.

Bergen: Well, you know the story. And I passed the… I failed the test, swimmingly. The… get the hair with the little dots.

McDevitt: Yup.

Bergen: And there was one spread where only color-blind people can see it, clever. So I was not able to join anything until I was eighteen. And the mood of the country was-- I know it's hard to believe-- was such that I couldn't get in fast enough. So I went down to the draft board-- they had an office in a school building I think-- and requested accelerated induction. I wasn't gonna wait till my number came up. As soon as you get me in, I want to go. So that's what happened.

McDevitt: And how did your family feel about it? How did your--

Bergen: My mother didn't care for it at all. My father was, I think secretly proud. But, my mother dominated the household. But, that was one of the few decisions that I made while I was still living under her roof that she couldn't countermand. The time was such that, as I said, I couldn't wait to get in and do my part. One of my cousins my age plus or minus a week, was very unhappy with the atom bomb being dropped because of the way the timing worked out. He hadn't gotten to shoot a Jap yet. I'm glad the bomb went off when it did because it saved my life.

McDevitt: Were you supposed to go out to the Pacific?

Bergen: Oh yeah. This was the summer I went in, in May of '45. Went down in Camp Fannin, Texas and they told us we were being trained to go into Tokyo Bay and conquer Japan just like was done in Normandy. I got the sense that the Army overall had laid out plans two to three years, in advance, and they needed so

many infantry etc., etc. And in terms of sheer numbers, infantry is what they needed the most, so I trained infantry. But, it turns out that in the infantry, there's some guys that are pulled out for special, additional training. One was cooks and bakers School, one was company clerk's school, and one was radio school. Because those functions in the field, below the division level, are supported by the units themselves, the companies, even the platoons…. The military has this MOS system, military occupational specialty number. So being in radio, I had an MOS. I forget the number now, but they discovered that when I landed months later in Cherbourg, they were looking for people to replace the guys in Nuremberg, and I had the, the magic MOS number. That's how I got there, to Nuremberg.

McDevitt: And what do you remember from basic training? Is there…'cause you were… Had you traveled around and met people from all over the country or was this your first real experience?

Bergen: No, a couple experiences. We got down, I say we… a bunch of us at Fort Sheridan were shipped down all over the country to get to Camp Fannin, Texas, Tyler, Texas. This is where I learned about land grant railroads. The government doesn't have to pay the railroads to use their trackage if the trackage is part of the land grants of the 19th century. So they're saving money except they're saving a hell of a lot. They're spending extra money with the extra travel, the fuel the time. But, the psychology was, we'll save money by using land grant routes. So there were like holding pens at these training camps, like the one in Texas, waiting for enough guys to form a company. So for two or three days we were on the steps of the barracks just waiting for something to happen, really, and what amazed me--

McDevitt: That's when all the trouble happens.

Bergen: What amazed me was the number of adult people, either my age-- eighteen or nineteen-- or in their early thirties were being drafted at that point, reading comic books.

McDevitt: Really.

Bergen: I couldn't imagine that.

McDevitt: And was that your thing too? Did you look at them at all?

Bergen: No, not at all! That's for kids!

McDevitt: Yeah.

Bergen: That's when I first realized not everyone was like me, and some peoples… 'cause they as well as I had access to a library with all kinds of different books, newspapers, and what not. They were reading comic books. The other big surprise was to see red clay dirt down there. I'd never seen red dirt. Woke up in the morning going down there and red dirt! Some years later, three or four years later, there was a story, must have been on the AP wire or UPI about some guy in Tyler, Texas, a farmer, who collected ten thousand dollars from the government because soldiers from the camp across the road used to sneak into his fields and steal his watermelons. I was one of them! [Laughter] Now those are the things I remember. I remember the first day when we formed the company, when the guys were reading comic books and what not, and they scooped us up and organized us and put us into a company with a first sergeant and everything. As soon as that was done, he introduced… I mean we all stood in line, the order of the day and how you do this and how you do that. And he said, "By one week from today, you all will run a mile without stopping before breakfast." I couldn't imagine that! Well, you know, the end of the story, it was kind of a…. in that sense a mind stressing experience. More so I think than organized travel today because we ran into people who were much different psychographically than you would today. You take a tour today, it's mostly people like yourself, income bracket, interest, etc. So that's what I got out of the army. In particular, I'm trying to remember….

McDevitt: Do you remember your drill instructors? Were they combat veterans? Had they been overseas?

Bergen: Boy, you got great questions. Our company commander at basic training Camp Fannin was a guy named Sills, S-I-L-L-S. I forget his first name, Captain Sills. He had a couple lieutenants under him who really showed us the ropes and what to do and how to fire the guns etc. Captain Sills at that point had been in the army thirty years or so and he had been in before the war started. He was Regular Army and I don't know exact circumstances but he was shot up, and he wouldn't leave, and he limped a lot. But, that little guy went everywhere we did. If we go on a ten mile march, he went with us. Some of his lieutenants would sit back and wait for us to come back, you know. Smoke cigarettes and chit chat. Not Captain Sills. If you were gonna do something because he said so, he's gonna do it with you. And I obviously remembered that and I saw it many times over in operation, in corporate life when I was a PR guy. So I worked generally with the CEOs quite

a bit, and the ones who were very successful did the very same thing. There's a guy, one of my clients was Phillip Morris so I got to work with Miller Beer. Miller Brewing was not doing so well when Phillip Morris took them over and they put a guy named John Murphy in charge, moved to Milwaukee. And he did one thing apropos what I was talking about. In his calendar he would put a half a day a month, I forget what he wrote down but the point was he put it in his calendar, to walk the floor and talk with the guys who were moving the kegs, stirring the pots, and cleaning up, trying to find out what he could do for them that would make the job easier, or better or more effective. You would think they were almost resentful that he was spying on them. He was able to genuinely win them over that he was one of them and he wanted to have their experience. It was Captain Sills all over again. And that's when Miller really caught up with Budweiser. It has since fallen behind but Murphy was moved back to New York and, of course, I didn't work for them too much after that. But, there are lessons like that that I look back on.

McDevitt: And what do you remember from your radio training? Do you remember any of the gear you were working on? Or do you remember… was it a pretty small group of guys that were working on the radios at the time, getting trained on them?

Bergen: In the infantry, yeah. There was about ten of us. There was the special duty, well, the cooks and bakers and all that, we were in one company. And there was I think, maybe, two platoons that were in radio and the rest were these others… it wasn't necessarily numerically equal. It's interesting, it amazed me when I got into it, when the war ended in Japan they didn't know what to do with us, anybody, so they sent us home. This was the era that troop ships in the Pacific were turned around to come back to the States. The war was over that abruptly and they didn't know what to do. We were well on our way to fill the pipeline for landings in Tokyo Bay and not too many people knew an atom bomb was coming so the only thing they could do was send us home. And they said, honest to god, they said, "We'll call you." After about sixty days I got called for more training, go down to Fort Benning, Georgia, which is the headquarters of all the infantry. I think it still is, for more radio training. So I learned a lot more about equipment. It was like going to school. The irony was that Fort Benning, we got into, actually, more repair work with soldering irons and taking things apart, and color blind me was now doing this. And if you know anything about radio equipment then, pre-transistor, pre-solid state, everything was hooked up with wires, not Trane circuit boards. They weren't invented yet. And these wires all have little threads,

they were color coded. And if you're color blind, you know, if you see a big blob of red you know its red but if there's a little thread you can't see it. So here I was doing a job that required color sensitivity or whatever you wanna call it when, you know, I was kicked out or not even let in a couple years before that, but so goes the Army. And the reason, frankly the reason I got to Fort Benning was I was in a shipping company out of… after the sixty-day period to go to the Panama Canal. And I got a cold or yeah, I guess it was not quite the flu. At any rate, I fell flat on my face after getting on the drill field at Fort Benning so they put me in a hospital and I never went to Panama. But I had gotten all my uniforms and they were all summer uniforms. So then they send me to Germany about a month or two later and I had two sets of uniforms and I told the guy, you know, the quarter master guy I don't need more, I got. He said, "You gotta take it you know I gotta give it to you." So I ended up with an awful lot of uniforms for the summer for when I got to Nuremberg in, I guess April.

McDevitt: And real quick, can you touch on what it was like when Roosevelt passed away? Because that was before you headed over there. Do you remember any conversations or do you remember how you felt?

Bergen: I don't remember any conversations, but it was hard to imagine that anybody else could be president of the United States because I grew up with him. In 1932 I was, what, five years old, and through the war and the fear itself and the four freedoms and all that propaganda stuff, the Jimmy Stewart films and what not, FDR was the thing that… he made things happen. And then Harry Truman comes along and he probably… I've seen a lot of experts say and I agree with them he was the most underrated when he came into office. I mean he did some fabulous but quiet things, really, in the interest of the country. Particularly dealing with the Far East and the oil and the OPEC people. What I… I remember also that same period in the 30s and into the 40s-- the mayor of Chicago was Edward J. Kelly-- and then he died in office I think and I couldn't imagine anybody else being mayor of Chicago. It was the same phenomenon when FDR died and that was, how shall I say, widespread emotional involvement among the general public. His funeral train was an event people came out ten deep to see. It was the first big death that I remember seeing reported in the newspaper, where now they have special sections, and now I know they have all these special sections ready for the personalities, show business and politics so they don't write these obits from scratch. All they have to do is plug in the numbers to the

latest dates and what not. But, that was… the country was, I think, very much in a funk and almost groping for leadership. Feeling adrift, the country was feeling adrift. That's the word I want. Because there was no leader there! Harry Truman shows up and he's not the personality or the cigarette smoker. He had none of the attributes that we had associated then with leaders. And the interesting thing was, they amended the constitution to limit presidential terms. Which at the time I thought was bad. If somebody good… if he can get reelected, he should, or her. But as I got older I think Truman was just a good idea, at that level, at the congressional level, because so much depends on seniority. I want a congressman like Dan Rostenkowski representing me in Washington because he was by then chairmen of the House Ways and Means Committee. And Chicago in particular got a lot of money for bridges and stuff like that, 'cause Dan was part of the committee! So there is some value in longevity but it's obviously selfish. I mean, long term I think it's better to have people squabble a little bit and not take for granted the way things are being done.

McDevitt: Did you ever do any PR work for any politicians?

Bergen: No, no. The PR work I did… I never did political work, or food, or fashion, or theatre, it was all corporate. It was all corporate, financial relations, employee relations. Did a lot of, did a lot of.... I probably wrote maybe one hundred corporate annual reports. A lot of product promotion, but on the industrial side I was an engineer. So it's publicized in electrical switches, electrical motors, locomotives! One of the clients I worked on wasn't mine, it was a firm's client and I worked on it… it was electric motor division General Motors out in La Grange. It's not there anymore but so… who needs publicity for locomotives? The fact of the matter is a classic public relations technique was invented by a PR guy on staff in the electromotive division in the 30s. He had been an editor of some kind, Indianapolis Star or whatever the big, whatever the big Indianapolis daily is. And he invented the concept of providing electromotive clients, customers, with cans, we call them Swiss cheese releases. When electromotive was selling diesel engines in the beginning great opposition from the people who liked the steamers and the coal and they named the locomotives and revered them. And now we are taking away their… with all the cinders and the ash and what not, there was great opposition. So what was his name, I'll think of it. Even the press kits, for the railroads who bought the locomotives, press kits for the railroad to use in writing up background stories on how wonderful a diesel locomotive was, how many jobs it would help keep, the cost advantages. So they got, I would guess like ten different items in this kit, the buyers of the

locomotives that they could use in their local media to fend off the opposition. In some instances, there were demonstrations to keep the diesels out.

McDevitt: Yeah. The trains have always been powerful. I mean you go just go down to Pullman and you look around…. I'm sorry I don't want to get too far off track. So when you, you went back for more radio training, when did you find out you were going to Germany?

Bergen: You mean Nuremberg or Germany?

McDevitt: Germany and then Nu…

Bergen: I would say early January of '46 'cause we got leave for the holidays and we came back, yeah.

McDevitt: And did you know anything about the trials at that point?

Bergen: No.

McDevitt: No.

Bergen: Not any more than any citizen would have.

McDevitt: And how did you get your news at that time? Were you a radio guy or were you newspapers, or--?

Bergen: In the Army? I think it was all accidental, I don't recall ever sitting down and reading a newspaper, on purpose.

McDevitt: And was there a feeling… did, did you think was there kind of an atmosphere like oh, Germany's secure right now? And did you have any worries of going over there? Was there news of attacks still being carried out in Germany?

Bergen: Yeah, there was some apprehension on that score, yes.

McDevitt: And what did your mom say when she found out you were going over there? Do you remember? Did you have a lot of correspondence with your family when you were in--?

Bergen: Those are two different questions. The first one… I guess I told her when I knew. I was already at Benning -- Fort Benning -- so I did a lot of letter writing and it came easy to me. So it was just another event. There was nothing she could do about it, in particular. All I knew when I was going over was that I was going to Cherbourg with this replacement depot where the units that were operating in

Europe would say, “We need this many riflemen, we need this many of this that and the other thing.” And as they came across on the troop ships, you know, they would be shipped out like I was from the replacement depot to go to these units and relieve people who should have gone home a long time ago or whatever. But they didn’t ask you what you wanted to do or where you wanted to go. You’re at replacement depot and they tap you on the shoulder, “Here's are your orders, go!” In some cases, I think they put traveling companies together where there were a lot of guys going to the same place, but in my case I was one guy going to one place, I was a unit all my own, so it was easy to lose me.

McDevitt: And so you get to Cherbourg. What’s it like there? What’s the atmosphere? Is it pretty relaxed or is it really… is there a lot of security measures in place?

Bergen: No, you touched on an interesting thing that I had in my mind to tell you about the trial, you can plug it in later. But by today’s standards the security at the trial was absolutely zero and in many cases worse. There were no magnetic detectors, nothing like that. In fact, our billet was like a half a block away and we went from where we lived into the court building, not the building, the real estate. And there was a fence around it, a decorative fence. And they had a guy, a GI standing guard. You had to show him your pass. So you show him your pass and after a week or so he knows you and you know him, so you don’t show the pass, “Hi Joe, how are you today?” Some reporter from *Time Magazine* put a picture of his dog on his ID card covering his own picture and he made a big story. Obviously, it printed about how you can put a picture of a dog on your card and you can get in, isn’t that terrible, no security? Well, it was stupid to begin with but that’s how lax things were. You see these pictures of these guys standing behind the defendants, that would be the worst duty anyone could have in the Army guard duty. In particular, I hated it, just terribly, terribly boring. I’d rather have KP; kitchen police. I forget where I was going with that now.

McDevitt: You were talking about the security and the lax--

Bergen: The security. But there was no, compared to today, you didn’t have an ISIS, you didn’t have rogue elements blowing up people. These guys stood at attention for an hour, an hour and a half at a time and if somebody came in with a gun they would they could kill six people before these guys would even know it! And the way it was laid out… if you came in the courtroom floor and started doing bad things, you could get to the witness stand, you could get to the judges before these guys could get out of the pen where the defendants were.

McDevitt: Yeah, you know what? Let's just jump right into Nuremberg. So what were you told your duty was going to be when you went to Nuremberg?

Bergen: To help guys to run the sound system. It had been invented, it had been installed, it was running and they just needed bodies to run it. We needed three guys in the court room to run it. One where that picture is and two this console I talked about with Walter Cronkite across the aisle and we learned by doing. There was no Nuremberg school. It wasn't all that complicated to begin with.

McDevitt: What were your impressions when you got to Nuremberg? Was the city just devastated at that point in time?

Bergen: My, well you have great…. I was amazed. It had been bombed. Nuremberg war trial was not in Nuremberg; actually, it was in a suburb called Furth-- F-U-R-T-H. Furth is to Nuremberg as Evanston is to Chicago. But, we get in there and it was not bombed. And I think one of the reasons they put the trial there was because they had a courthouse with offices and detention facilities and what not, intact and useable. But, the city itself had really been bombed. I had two impressions, I propose to your question. One, there's a lot of rubble still there but it's piled so neatly, it was a work of art, you know, it was conical and they had it in big piles. The other thing that impressed me was with all the damage, apartment houses obliterated etc…. One of the big construction efforts was to rebuild the moat around the old city. That was obviously very important to restore the moat around the old castle with the walls and the water. To me, it seemed, initially it seemed, stupid. People are in sub-standard housing, there's all kinds of problems, you ought to be building for the people that are there now. And I finally grew up and realized what tradition means and their grasping at straws that there's a sense of continuity and self-worth and all those good things. So those are the impressions I had of Nuremberg as such.

McDevitt: And how about the people? Did you interact with civilians?

Bergen: No. The way we interacted,…our billet was actually an apartment house, it was three stories high and had about fifty units in it 'cause it ran about a city block. And one of the features was that little kids -- eight, nine, ten years old -- would come around and they would collect your laundry, take it home and somebody would wash it, and iron it. I never had my underwear ironed before or after, but Nuremberg my underwear was ironed. And we didn't give them money, we gave them chocolate, or coffee, or cigarettes, which we could get very, very easily. It's presumably rationed but you get… I had three ration cards simultaneously. One

from 3112 Signal [Service Battalion] in Frankfurt, one from the US State Department, and one from the building itself. If you worked in the building, you got a card. So I had money coming out of my ears, in the sense I had all the coffee I could money I could buy, I could use as money.

McDevitt: And did you ever go out on the town? Did you ever… were you guys allowed any kind of a base liberty?

Bergen: Oh yeah. There was a… in town there was not a night, a tavern-- it's called the Stork Club, it's modern. It was named for the New York Stork Club so we could you know mingle, off base, mingle in the city. The other thing I got hooked on was beer mugs. And I don't know why but I got fascinated by them, and if you've ever collected something--

McDevitt: Like the decorative steins?

Bergen: Yeah, yeah. If you've ever collected anything… my first wife was a collector of owls, little miniature ones. And after a couple of years she realized that the first ones she got were inferior to later ones because she got smarter or better educated. That's what happened to me with beer mugs. The first one you pick up are… they're plain like this. The other end of the spectrum is what you're referring to. And you finish the beer and the base is sculpted and there's a picture that comes through as the light comes through the bottom of the mug. So that made interesting collections possible. The most interesting, which is almost pathetic or tragic, was I got a lot of mugs, thirty maybe, that were regimental or otherwise commemorative. And in the good old days, before the war I would guess a lot of the folks, particularly from the military would get the commemorative beer mugs with their own names written and fired in, I wanna say porcelain, but like this, what's the word I want?

McDevitt: I think porcelain is right.

Bergen: I'll think of it. Ceramic at any rate, and they were on the market as you looked here and there. And I did, and as I say it was kind of pathetic, people gave up those kinds of things 'cause they needed money. And I wound up with about one hundred mugs of every variety and finally got to the point where I put back a lot of the Coca Cola, you know, massed produced things because I had so many better ones. So how do I get them home, I'm in Nuremberg? Little more chocolate, little more cigarettes, and you find a guy who knows how to pack them in wooden crates so they don't break and they shipped them to my home, parent's home, by boat. It took maybe a month, I don't know. And that was

again… the coin of the realm paid for it. You really high on the hog in terms of having spending money, in terms of frivolous things. The other thing that was great about the duty there as soldier was there were no formations. There was no revelry, there's no taps, there's no Saturday morning parade. We had jobs like civilians. When the court was in session, we had to be there, maybe a half hour early 'cause you had to make sure everything was working. One of the things we had to do… one of the three of us who were in the console, we would go from Goering on down, can you hear? Because one of the things they wanted to be sure about is that, their defendants could not claim that the sound wasn't working and they were deprived of their rights. So we had to do that every day, so I was this close to Goering, when I was doing it. I did it maybe three times a week, or every third time. But when the court was not in session we had nothing to do except go home. One of the problems we did have that upset all of us was, the trial was originally planned to be about ninety days. And everyplace somebody sat, whether they were a prisoner or in press gallery or whatever, they had a set of headphones and a box and they twirled and they got the proceeding in the language of their choice. Nowadays, at Lake Success or the UN or whatever… all that was connected… now is connected by WiFi. Then it was connected by cable, physical cable. The cable was about half inch in diameter, I think so, and came in like twelve-foot lengths. And they were connected with connectors… they're the size of a bratwurst, they did like this. Well, the folks found out when things were kind of dull or just anytime, if you rolled your foot on top of those connectors, it's a very nice massage. It did nothing for the connectors, in fact, it broke them. It broke the sautered connections inside and we would get shorts and half the courtroom would go down. They can't hear, they can't hear. Sometimes they just had to stop the proceedings all together. When the judges couldn't hear we had to stop, obviously. Sometimes it was just a row or two in the press gallery and they just shifted out of their seats to the ones that were already empty. But, when the… a couple times they closed, postponed the proceedings altogether… but in the evenings we had to go around and not only repair the damage to the cable but we installed, not my idea, but we installed switches, what did we call them? Isolating switches. If we could find where a cable had been damaged we had another cable that could go around it, and we could do that maybe in an hour, typically, after the court was…. Because then we could unplug everything and isolate the fault, but that was the only time we worked nights, so to speak, or weekends when we had to isolate the cable. But, it was interesting because the thing went fifteen months instead of three and all the equipment had been scooped up, some from the Wehrmacht who

had some great amplifiers that we used in the court and some single cord stuff. It was a patchwork. The sound system in the Nuremberg war trial was a patchwork. And then when the UN was being formed and Lieutenant Chesnut, the brains of our outfit, was about to go home or get reassigned, he wound up at Lake Success putting in the same multi-language simultaneous translation sound system in Lake Success. On my way home, I obviously admired the guy, and I wanted to see him. So I stopped and visited him one afternoon and the truth and justice and wonderfulness of the world was at Lake Success. He could buy new anything he wanted, he didn't have to take the junk that people found in the wastebasket, so to speak or old cables. He did it right… he could write his own ticket. He had some stuff custom designed, so that's where truth and justice prevailed.

McDevitt: So when you arrived in Nuremberg and you found out your job, was there any kind of turn over with the gentleman who you were replacing?

Bergen: No. The guy I was replacing… I think left two days before. I found out what his name was, but there was enough slack so that and I don't remember the details. It might have been over a weekend. Even Monday to Friday, there were a lot of days when the court was not in session. There were arguments. Well, there couldn't have been arguments, they had work to do but it wasn't in the courtroom. So when the courtroom wasn't being used we had nothing to do. We could polish things up and that kind of thing, but the courtroom couldn't operate without us because you have this… if you look at the picture you see where I'm standing. In front of me I'm looking to make, I know what's there so--

McDevitt: Just for the people at home, this gentleman right there is Mr. Bergen. Go ahead.

Bergen: So there were four little cubicles there defined by some glass panels and each was a language and channel one on the system. If you dialed it, channel one was the live transmission whoever was talking for the record was on channel one. Could be a judge, could be a witness, could be a prosecutor or a defendant's lawyer. But, the goings on officially were channel one. Channel two was all English. The rest… I don't remember the sequence but there was a French channel, a German channel, and a Russian channel and you could dial into anyone of them, language of your choice which was what they replicated at the UN but on a much higher style. After a while, this was before I was… you have to understand… well, you don't have to. But the fact is, I got there in the middle of the trial. The trial started in October. I didn't get there 'til following April when the prosecution had just about finished presenting their case. Then the defense

came on. That's about when I started. Sometime, after about the first month or so it became evident that some of these translators couldn't keep up with whoever was speaking, for any number of reasons. Some of their own were not all that competent. And we knew as… you'll find out who was who on that score. But a lot of times people who were talking were mumbling or they were shrieking or… so the problem was to keep the translations in-sync with the actual proceeding. So if you look at pictures of the courtroom that were the first three or four months, you did not see red and yellow light bulbs. They… before I came along, they installed them so that any translator could push a button and get the yellow light or the red light everywhere, and that meant to everybody shut up until we catch up. And in some instances, they asked for the question or the comment to be repeated because they knew they didn't get it right or didn't hear it right. But, that's all what non…in front of me in that picture.

McDevitt: And you bring up the lights. Was it awkward? Because in this trial people were told they could only speak at sixty words a minute, I believe. Did it seem like people… when people were… when Justice Jackson was speaking, associate Justice Jackson, or any gentleman or any of the other gentleman, did it seem like it was effecting how they were presenting the case? Or how did that seem like an impediment to the trial? The speed and the lights and all of these new--

Bergen: I have no knowledge of what you're talking about. I'm not aware there was any speed limit or any restriction like that. Lights were not a problem. They were just lit from overhead. We didn't have spotlights and we certainly didn't have flashbulbs going off.

McDevitt: I meant the yellow and the red light.

Bergen: Oh.

McDevitt: Yes.

Bergen: I don't… I mean some people's style-- Thomas Dodd, the original Dodd -- his son became a senator -- was number two on the American team. And in terms of courtroom questioning and what not, he did most of the work and he was…. I remember this, very deliberate. Which to me then was for effect. Now it may be he was aware of the speed limit. I'm not aware that there was a speed limit, I'm not saying there wasn't. I just wasn't aware that there was. And somehow… I don't know how you would enforce that anyway. But, I think everybody was… and I think to your point they wanted to be recorded faithfully, accurately.

McDevitt: And the gentlemen you were working with-- you had a team of three-- had either of the other two guys been there when… 'cause when they were setting up the Palace of Justice they had to knock down walls. Like you were saying, they had to set up the area for the press corps. Were those… were your two teammates for lack of a better word, were they there, were they present for the construction of the… were they present from the jump off of the trials?

Bergen: I honestly don't know, but I don't know why they would be. Lieutenant Chesnut was, I'm sure. Well, I shouldn't say that… was likely there because somebody had to direct what was done like, we want this here, this…. But, I think the guys I worked with… by the time I got there were all like me. They were just plugged in because they were available with the right MOS and I can imagine they might not have had the right MOS to begin with because just twirling the dials, turning microphones on and off is really not all that difficult.

McDevitt: What were you're…. So you set up. Was there a specific section of the trial that you dealt… like giving the headphones and everything? Did you work with the defendants or did you work with everybody who was present?

Bergen: No. We as the crew, sound crew, worked in terms of the headphones only with the defendants because the defense lawyers -- the prosecution and what not -- they were compelled to use their headphones. There was no reason for them not to, but the concern was, as I said before, the defendants might not have working headphones or headphones at all. And then they could claim they were disenfranchised or whatever the legal term is. So that's what why we, we did the…every day. And when we went out for lunch and came back we did it again. Every time they came back to sit down for a session, we did that.

McDevitt: And were you given any instructions about how to interact with the defendants?

Bergen: No, there was nothing as formal as all that. The defendants, basically, were taciturn to begin with. They were mostly… every one of them looked bored as hell. They didn't want to be there, obviously. And I think in many cases, in my own interpretation, they were saying, "I don't want to hear this. I can sit hear but I don't want to hear this." I think a lot of them thought it was a forgone conclusion that they would be convicted and executed. They were absolutely right with respect to the Russian judges.

McDevitt: Yeah. Did you… the lead Russian judge was Nikitchenko did you at that point in time… was there any feeling of, like, hypocrisy? Was there any knowledge of the

Russian war crimes that had taken place at that time? Did you or any of the other guys know about that? No?

Bergen: No.

McDevitt: What do you remember of, say, Goering? What do you remember of these defendants?

Bergen: Let me tell you, what I really remember. Goering… as I said along with all the others: taciturn, bored, didn't want to be there. As I said, I got there when the defense started, like early April '46 and there was a lot of testimony, a lot of movies and what not. The thing that really sticks with me is Admiral Jodl. Jodl was the guy who signed the surrender. I guess he was the highest-ranking military guy they could find. When he became a defendant, in his defense, as a number of people did, was that he was being a loyal German. He was supporting his country, he was a citizen, it was a noble thing to do. He went to a military school just to be able to do all this. But the one thing he said that I don't think anybody else said was, that if we had won, the Germans, Eisenhower would be sitting here, not me. Obviously, I remember that. It had a lot to do with position, destiny, fortune, I don't know. I guess I just realized that it's probably true. Part of the reason was, you know, you lose the war, you get thrown to the lions. And we mentioned before the Russians… the Russian judges all voted, excuse me, voted to hang them all. And if you look at the voting by the other judges it was pretty well distributed. Some were lighter sentences than others. I don't think…I don't recall there being an absolute acquittal of anybody.

McDevitt: I think there was one gentleman, one or two. Hans Fritzsche, the propaganda guy. He was on the news. But, I think that was… and Franz von Papen.

Bergen: Von Papen. He was a diplomat, I think.

McDevitt: Yeah, he was the chancellor and the vice chancellor and I think he was the ambassador to…

Bergen: Yeah.

McDevitt: Did you ever speak to any of these Nazis, or--?

Bergen: No. First of all, I didn't speak German, and second, there was really no opportunity. It wasn't like we met in a bar one night and got… and we ate in the State Department dining room. Which is another good part of service there, aside of formations that we didn't have to do and all that other stuff. But, we ate

very well because State Department was running this dining room for its own people, and that included us. So I had great food, ironed laundry, underwear. In fact, my first inclination when I went over… I was still on the troop ship, was I wanted to apply for *Stars and Stripes* to get an editorial experience. And what has to happen is, you have to go to where you're assigned first and then make application for a transfer. Well, after two days at Nuremberg, I didn't want to leave that. As it turns out *Stars and Stripes* was very political. Mauldin wrote a masterful biography when he talked about how *Stars and Stripes* was manipulated, and how political it was, internally. So all in all it was a good experience.

McDevitt: Do you think at that age you understood the gravity of the trial?

Bergen: No, no. The… an example we had, I would say five or ten photographers who were constantly taking pictures like the one on the book… and some of them were tight close ups, and we gave them recordings to take home. And I could have gotten one hundred different photographs of that nature. Some, if you look inside the book, are in the prison, yeah, in the prison. And I regret that I didn't appreciate the gravity of it all. I was just too much in the forest to see any trees. I think that's what happens to a lot…. I was nineteen and I think I was as aware as almost anybody at that age of what was going on because of… particularly the debate team back in high school, because we would debate these worldly subjects, not have any facts, but that was the drill we went through. Debating is really more of mind training and technique than right or wrong, like how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. I really didn't appreciate it while I was there. The other thing I didn't do… I did some… we had great travel opportunities. You get a three-day pass to go down to Garmisch-Partenkurchen, Berchtesgaden, for next to nothing because you would travel on GI transportation and the army had billet for everybody. It was like your own country club wherever you went. I could have gone to London. I'd never been there before. I've been there since, and I didn't, just because, maybe I was lazy. Paris, I could have gone to Paris, you know, as I say, very cheaply. I did not take advantage of the opportunities that were in front of me. I don't know why, but I didn't.

McDevitt: Did your friends go out? Did they take advantage of it or was that kind of for the for the lower--?

Bergen: Well, they didn't because you'd generally go with two to three other guys.

McDevitt: What rank were you, at this point in time, do you remember?

Bergen: I was a T/3. [Technician Third Grade]

McDevitt: Yeah. So the other guys in your team-- your co-workers-- were they about the same rank?

Bergen: Yeah.

McDevitt: So what did you do for fun, if you weren't traveling all over Europe? Did you guys just go out on the town, or have a couple of beers?

Bergen: Yeah, we'd go to the Stork Club, have a couple of beers… there were symphonies. German symphonies. We went to a couple of those. We went to the opera once -- again we got passes, we didn't have to pay for that.

McDevitt: Did you meet any girls out there? Did you have a girlfriend when you were in Germany?

Bergen: Yeah, I dated one girl, a French girl with the French team, which was interesting, too because the French, the Russians, and the English and us were supposed to divide the workload. The Russians never showed up to do anything, the English, somewhat. The Royal Cumberland Guard signal were in our barrack and they would show up to help out once in a while, but their big contribution was introducing me to English tea, as it should be made. I have to look at the time, what time is it?

McDevitt: It is 11:35.

Bergen: Okay.

McDevitt: Did you interact with a lot of French or British?

Bergen: Not really. We tended to stay to ourselves, I think. Part of it was the language problem. The British, yes, because they spoke English and they were in our building. Now, I don't know where the Russians were or the French. But this one girl, Helene, I forget her last name… I ran into in the courtroom somehow or other and we dated a little bit. Nothing very serious, I didn't know if I wanted to bring home a war bride. Nineteen years old, what did I know?

McDevitt: Did you ever feel any personal animosity towards the Nazis that were sitting in front of you?

Bergen: No. That's what was interesting, they just looked like ordinary guys. It was hard to imagine that they did what was said that they did. That was quite revealing and I think it's probably a common phenomenon, down to this day, where you meet some criminals, if you will, in a kinda neutral setting and you can't imagine they did what it is alleged that they did do. Some of them were kind of engaging. Von Papen was, as I remember, because he spoke English, so we checked his earphones. He'd talk to us in English, nothing deep or…. I would say, I didn't at all feel a kind of animosity on a personal level that would have been warranted.

McDevitt: Do you think that's true for the majority of the people in there, or--?

Bergen: Yeah.

McDevitt: And you said you had some sort of interactions with Walter Cronkite. Can you go over those one more time?

Bergen: No, no, no. Just the sleeping story.

McDevitt: Oh, all right.

Bergen: First of all, he was in the press core and they had a relatively privileged status, and he had a job to do and I had a job to do, and they weren't related. And anyway, it was only that I remembered who he was later. At the time, he was just the guy from UP, United Press. I mean we knew a couple of the Americans, the Associated Press guy, who was actually a woman, as I think about it now.

McDevitt: One question that I have to ask… with all the cables running around on the ground, you had these big cables to support this immense system that was being implemented for the first time, were there a lot of people tripping and falling over the cables?

Bergen: No. The reason being we ran them under the seats, for the most part. In the press gallery, did I say it was like a movie theatre? So we ran the cables under the seats which was easy to do. In the courtroom itself, some of the cabling did have to go across the floor where people walked, and I'm trying to think how we handled that. Well, the only place it would occur would, for example, be behind the bench where the judges sat, and they knew they were there, and in the defendants' box, and they knew they were there. So there wasn't any heavy traffic, foot traffic, crossing the cables… and I'm just trying to think of where they were. They were pretty well secluded.

McDevitt: And did you have any interaction with the prosecution? Did you ever talk with Jackson or Dodd?

Bergen: No. You have to remember that we were-- me and my buddies-- were nineteen year-old kids who were performing, as I said before, relatively a housekeeping janitorial function. The only reason the prosecutors would talk to us was, their microphones weren't working. They had no reason to talk to us. We weren't lawyers, we weren't contributing to their work at all, except that the damn sound system better work or they were dead. I don't remember except for some of these cable interruptions… And in the time I was there-- there might have been five or six of them. One a month, let's say, or two one month and then three… random. But, it was all indoors, no formation, good food, ironed underwear, a lot of time off.

McDevitt: And did the cables-- the cables went into the interpreter's box-- were the interpreters segregated from the rest of the courtroom? I think you touched on it a little bit. Did you ever have any interaction with the interpreters, and what was their situation?

Bergen: Yeah, quite a bit. Well, if you look at the picture… you see where I'm standing?

McDevitt: Yes, Sir.

Bergen: I see… the interpreters are here off to this side so you really can't see them, but we are as close to them as the picture shows we are to the defendants. And there was a lot of downtime and we were kind of in the same boat in terms of our conditions of servitude, and particularly there might have been four or five, or maybe six interpreters, for English. In other words, if there was a German to English translation, it might have been two or three people that did it over a course of time, and they are obviously physically close. We just chatted about idle things, no real conversations.

McDevitt: And do you remember what their shifts were like? Were they… was it one interpreter doing a whole day, like a whole trial, like a whole day of the trial, or did they have shifts?

Bergen: I think they had shifts. Some would take it in the morning, some would take in the afternoon. Interestingly, there was a movie at the Music Box Theatre about the trial some maybe two or three years ago and I had friends who saw it and they thought I should see it, so I went with my wife. Do you know the Music Box Theatre, here?

McDevitt: No, I don't. I'm not familiar.

Bergen: Oh, okay. It's a theatre in Southport-- artsy film kind of place-- and I went into the men's room. It was rather small and this guy was standing over here talking to somebody else while I was going, and it occurred to me from, what I overheard… there's a Nuremberg connection here. So I get out of the men's room and he's still talking to somebody, and I just, I said, "Pardon me, but were you at Nuremberg, at the trial?" It turns out at the time he was a young college student translating German into English. Here it is, forty years later, whatever it was. So it was, I don't know, who else I'm gonna meet but Nurembergers kind of pop up all over. I guess there's an alumni club but, again, I don't think anybody who was there otherwise had anything in common. You were just, you know… I had this great friend, David Eisenberg. Why? Because he was the other guy in my room, and he too was on the courtroom crew, he ran the same kind of… he had the same job I did.

McDevitt: And were you present the day they handed out the sentencing?

Bergen: That was the only day, and I think I still have them… I think my daughter-in-law or my son my… has them. It was the only day that they issued special passes and you had to show a government ID to get the pass and to get in the courtroom. Even us who lived there! We had to show credentials and a special pass just for that particular session because there was obviously some concern about what could happen. The only thing that happened was, a lawyer slipped Goering some cyanide which he took later in the day.

McDevitt: And yeah, that's…. Do you remember the… you said before it seemed they were all resigned to the fate that they were going to be convicted… they were all…. But was there any outward expression of emotion on that day? Do you remember?

Bergen: On that day?

McDevitt: Yeah, do you remember anything about that point in time in the trial that caught your eye?

Bergen: No. There were points in the trial where some of them got a little emotional, you know. I mean I mentioned Jodl, but he was more wistful than emotional. I think for the most part ninety-nine point nine percent of the time they were just putting in their time, feeling powerless. They had been rounded up and that's where they are.

McDevitt: And what about Goering? I've read a lot of things… I've heard he was like a morphine addict, I've heard the guy was very unstable, he was very… did…. Was there ever any… do you remember anything about--?

Bergen: I've heard things like that but I could not justify that there was… I didn't see anything. He would sit, you know, he was the first one. He would sit with his arm on the side of the dock and just kinda stare into space.

McDevitt: And were you in Nuremberg for the executions?

Bergen: Yeah, but that wasn't there. That was very private.

McDevitt: And who was able to attend? Was it just a small amount of press, or was it--?

Bergen: I really can't remember. I would think there was press…I don't know.

McDevitt: And how about the fact… did you ever hear any anything about the reason that they were hanged as opposed to firing squad or anything like that?

Bergen: I think it was the choice of the day? I have no reason to know.

McDevitt: So once the trial is over… do you have to do clean up duty? Do you have to de-source all of the gear? Is it like a quick clean up?

Bergen: No. We left because there were further trials coming in the same room, the second tier, which nobody heard much about because the novelty was over. The big guys were taken care of. And then there was some new trials in Japan for the Japanese offenders starting about the same time, and I think it wasn't news anymore. I'm sure there were mentions here and there but it wasn't the news that it was the first time around.

McDevitt: And I'm sorry, let's jump back real quick. You said Goering got cyanide. Can you tell me a little bit more? Do you remember what happened when he committed suicide?

Bergen: It's rumored that, it was cyanide or strychnine, allegedly. It's the rumor… I remember it was given to him by his lawyer. He had two lawyers as I remember. One, I remember in particular given to him, I think, as I remember in a fountain pen. The lawyer gave him I'm told… I remember the rumor. But the question was how did he get it in the first place and who screwed up? They didn't give him a bottle with a label on it. The rumor was he got a fountain pen from his lawyer and the poison was in that instead of regular ink.

McDevitt: And what do you remember from the day of his suicide?

Bergen: Nothing.

McDevitt: Was it, was it in the jail cell, or--?

Bergen: I think so.

McDevitt: Okay, so now we'll go back. What's your next assignment after Nuremberg? I mean, you've had this great detail, you been working a really nice job. When do you get orders home, or are you staying in Europe?

Bergen: I got orders about a week afterward. I'd piled up a number of furlough days, and I came home. Took a train ride with my first sergeant from 3112 and I was mustered out. I wasn't reassigned to any kind of duty. Took a slow-boat home, so to speak, but the troopship was about a fourteen-day ride. They were slow, they were liberty ships.

McDevitt: And did you… did you sail out of France? Or where'd you sail out of?

Bergen: No, we sailed out of Bremerhaven and they had a big dormitory kind of thing, had been a big airplane-hangar. And about five thousand?? guys in double-deck bunks in an airplane-hangar… I think we were there like two days.

McDevitt: And you sail home. Where did you port when you got back to the States?

Bergen: Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And I think we got… I forget the port we came into, actually.

McDevitt: And what was next? Did you hop on buses and they take you, take you to your next--?

Bergen: They took us into Manhattan and then we got trains from there.

McDevitt: And did you have to sign your release papers? Was it pretty immediate after your return to the States?

Bergen: You don't sign anything, they give you a discharge page, it's an 8.5x11 sheet.

McDevitt: And then did you just hop a train home?

Bergen: Yeah.

McDevitt: And what was the reaction when you came home? Did you guys have a party?

Bergen: Well, they knew I was coming. My mother was happy about it, my father, I'm sure.... It was not a surprise like you see on TV, "Oh, here's Daddy!" Nobody knew that he was coming… nothing like that.

McDevitt: And what was next? Did you immediately enroll in school or did you take some time off?

Bergen: No, I immediately… 'cause I got home right after Thanksgiving. I started the spring semester at IIT.

McDevitt: And did you notice anything different about Chicago? Did it seem… yeah. Was there any change within you based on what you had just done and experienced?

Bergen: Nothing earth shaking. People are no longer talking about the war and their kids overseas and that kind of thing. There were still, maybe for a year or two, and this probably applies around the country, there were still some gold star flags in some windows, and those came down after a while and that's all I remember. But there was no welcome home parade down Michigan Avenue because we didn't come home as a huge group, we just dribbled back. Lots of dribbling at one time, but not connected to one another.

McDevitt: And you went in to ITT. Is that where you met your wife?

Bergen: My first wife, yeah.

McDevitt: And you said you used the GI Bill for school?

Bergen: Yeah.

McDevitt: Was there any kind of special process for that? Was it pretty simple?

Bergen: Well, before I went in I'd won a freshman scholarship which was a competitive thing, and I could have gone back on that and used it, but the GI Bill paid better. And the school would just as soon have me go on the GI Bill anyway because they get revenue. And if I'm back on scholarship they wouldn't get revenue. Now, I met my first wife on a double date 'cause I joined a fraternity and they had a spring dance for everybody including the pledges who were supposed to show up. I was dating this one girl at the time and she had a friend who was dating some other guy and they were talking how they were going to this thing and that thing…. It turned out they were going to the same event, so we double dated because the girls were… and that's how I met her.

McDevitt: And what did you do when you, when did you finish? And I'm sorry, I think I said ITT before, it was IIT, correct?

Bergen: IIT.

McDevitt: Yeah. When did you finish up school?

Bergen: June of '50.

McDevitt: And did you go immediately into the workforce? What was your first job?

Bergen: My first job was for a company-- Steve Marsh, Stevens and Marsh-- and they were an agency that worked, promoted… that's the wrong word… provided parts, catalogs, operation manuals, and things like that on contract. One of the contracts they had was with International Harvester who was building then the first armored personnel carriers ever, and my first job was to write the operations manual and repair handbook for that. I don't know how good it was… I didn't get fired. It was almost a learn by doing. The military then, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, all had their own specifications for these publications. What goes on page one, what goes on page thirty, what photographs, so it was not all that fumbling. You knew what you had to have because of these publications. They ultimately merged the spec so you used the same specification regardless of whether it was an Army, Navy, or Air Force publication. So it made it easier. As I remember, the Navy's was the best. And that was the basis for the combined book.

McDevitt: And did you receive any special medals or ribbons for your service in Germany? And were there any other benefits other than the GI Bill? What were the veteran's benefits like, back then?

Bergen: Oh, yeah, to this day. VA has a system, maybe you know about it, of levels of disability, and I'm at the lowest level. I have no service-connected disabilities, but I can get all the prescription medications I need through the VA. Very, very inexpensively. A thirty-day supply of anything is eight or nine dollars. And I take a lot of stuff, and that's been a great benefit, in terms of saving money. It's very easy. You just phone what you need and they send it out. They have a big computer in the sky and, as a matter of fact, if you make a mistake the computer will say you just ordered that yesterday. For the most part, they'll tell you when the prescription will be filled and mailed and you get a bill once a month and you pay it. But, it's very, very small compared to going to CVS or Wall Street, err Walgreens.

McDevitt: And have you been part of any veteran's organizations since you got out?

Bergen: No.

McDevitt: Do you think the military helped prepare you for civilian life?

Bergen: Yeah.

McDevitt: How so?

Bergen: Well, I told you, good ole' Captain Sills taught me a lot, Ray Chesnut taught me a lot. I learned I could run a mile before breakfast. That teached you something though, it teaches you you have a lot more potential then you use, which is probably the case still today, maybe more so.

McDevitt: And just to touch on a couple of… what do you remember, what are your t thoughts on the Korean War?

Bergen: On what?

McDevitt: The Korean War?

Bergen: I don't know if I thought seriously about that.

McDevitt: How about then Vietnam? 'Cause how old were your children when Vietnam started?

Bergen: My children?

McDevitt: Uh huh.

Bergen: My daughter was born in '53, my son was born in '55.

McDevitt: Okay, so…

Bergen: I'd have to figure it out.

McDevitt: Okay, so there was no worry about them having to go to Vietnam, they were a little bit too young.

Bergen: You know, I'm torn between in general between the United States going in and telling people how to run their lives as a country and setting up governments for them, and on the other hand letting them hack it out for themselves. If you impose a solution on people, a lot of people will rebel only because it's imposed. Leave it up to themselves and they may come up with the same answer, only it's

theirs. And every so often you hear that even in political conversations, Syria for example--

McDevitt: Did you… looking back on it now, did you feel there was a touch of that in the Nuremberg trials? Because these… some of the laws that we were trying the Nazis for… I mean they were obviously war criminals, in my opinion, I don't think there's any doubt about that, but we were trying them for laws that had just been created at that trial. Do you feel the same about that or no?

Bergen: I don't think I understand your question. I think the laws they violated were created after the violations, they weren't violations strictly speaking at, the time that they happened, and my view is: you've got to start someplace. Otherwise, we'd still all be living in caves and settling things with clubs. Was it retroactive? Yes. But, I think it was a new level of sin, if you will, that didn't occur, before. It came close in WWI with gassings. I'm not that much a student of these things but maybe we are as a people getting smarter -- people in an international sense. But then, have this, you know, this guy in North Korea. A whole new generation of troublemakers. Putin… I think Putin got away with murder twice with the Ukraine and --

McDevitt: Chechnya.

Bergen: Yeah. Who's gonna stop him? And he knows he can get away with it.

McDevitt: And have you stayed in touch with any of the guys you served with? Did you stay in touch with any of them?

Bergen: A couple, but very briefly. Again, we went our separate ways. When you're sharing a pup tent with somebody, then you're gonna be friends, forever. When you get home and you have other things to do and other things on your mind…. This one guy in Detroit, I shared a pup tent with at Camp Fennin, Donald Ward -- we might of exchanged Christmas cards a couple of times. But, you have to teach that to your children, too. That you pick up and you move and your circumstances change, your environment changes. Not everybody you meet is gonna be a friend for life.

McDevitt: And, what speaking of your children and, you know, the upcoming generations, what would you like them… what do you think that they can take from your story and what do you hope that they will take from your story?

Bergen: My daughter is sixty-three and my son is sixty-one. At this point, I don't think they will take anything from me.

McDevitt: How about your grandchildren and great grandchildren?

Bergen: Not that connected to them, and I don't remember my life being connected to my grandparents. It was really only my maternal grandmother and my paternal grandmother. I knew both of them, but I was a little kid when they died. I think that's a lost asset from the generation I grew up in, is the matter of passing along traditions… was not very well done.

McDevitt: Do you think it was because of the move to America - were they were just trying to assimilate?

Bergen: Assimilate, yeah. Absolutely, absolutely.

McDevitt: Well, how about for students of history that pull up this video and look at your transcript? Is there anything you'd want to tell them, or people going into the military? What would you hope that, or what could you teach guys like myself or guys that are eighteen years old and going in that may have to go to Syria or prosecute Kim Jong Un for war crimes?

Bergen: I don't have advice for anybody, along these lines. I think… All I can say is, there's more opportunities in the military than I was aware of or took advantage of. And I think military service today is a lot different than it was. I don't even know if they train infantry anymore.

McDevitt: Sure they do, yeah.

Bergen: Maybe, they do. But, when I was in, infantry was about seventy-five percent of the manpower, maybe more. I don't know if that's true or not now with all the technology. Our highest level of technology was the M1 rifle and for a while there we got bazookas. But the nature of war and conflict is so different, now. You have rogue nations; these terror groups… the conditions are different. I think the eternal value to look for is what you get from a Captain Sills or Ray Chesnut… you run into people who are role models for the way they act as individuals, not because they're in the military, per se.

McDevitt: And how did you practice what Captain Sills preached? Was there is there any examples that you think pertinent?

Bergen: I'd like to think so but I can't think of them right now. And I think I'm really running out of time, 'cause my wife has another appointment. I'll come back if you want.

McDevitt: Sure, well, Hal, is there anything that we, that you thought I would ask that I didn't ask or anything else you'd like to cover before we--

Bergen: No.

McDevitt: Well, thank you very much for your time.

Bergen: You're welcome.

McDevitt: Thank you for coming down the Pritzker Military Museum, Thank you. And you know, it's something that I won't forget, I really appreciate it and I had a great time.

Bergen: Okay.