

An Interview with

DR. ERNST BORINSKI

December 9, 1979

Interviewed by

John Jones

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Mississippi Department of Archives and History  
P. O. Box 571  
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

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Interviewer: John Jones

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JONES:

This is John Jones with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History about to interview Dr. Ernst Borinski for the second time. I've just been treated to a nice supper by Dr. Borinski; spinach casserole and smothered roast beef. It was very good. We're at Dr. Borinski's house again on County Line Road, and today is Sunday, December 9, 1979. In the last interview we got you to America. It's 1942, I believe, when we left off. You had been working up to that time in a factory situation doing labor in Rochester, New York. Before we pick the story up from there, let me ask you how was that you were drafted into the American army? Wasn't there some sort of naturalization period?

BORINSKI:

It was the war. The draft age was begun in the year '41. I was at that time a victim of the normal course of events. I had no idea whether they had instituted specific induction measures. I was legally an enemy alien because I came out of the German citizenship. I was a German-Jewish refugee, but I was legally German because I was not an American citizen yet. There was a combination of circumstances in which there were persons like me were drafted in the army maybe in their own interests, but maybe in my interest too because it was, again, an in-between, an undefined situation. They made a law in which they clearly said when you are drafted into the army you have then a special law with which you can acquire citizenship in the service of the army. On the other hand, it was in some ways made clear to me indirectly that if I didn't select the army it could happen that they would ship me back to Germany not according to the law, but circumstances can happen like

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happened to the Japanese. As you know, they put them in concentration camps. So my induction into the army was to a certain degree surprising, but it brought on a number of problems because you know where you are, similar to like where they put the Shah, in a military establishment you are official part of the American military establishment.

JONES: Right. How was it you found out you had been drafted?

BORINSKI: No, everyone had to report to the draft board and you had to undergo a medical examination. I was - what you call it? - 1-A, in spite of being already forty. But I was in very good shape as I am today at 78; good shape. So I took it completely in stride. Be aware, again, that no one knows what happened in the war situation. I figured out any return to Germany was out of the question, certainly I cut my ties completely. I figured out I would go in the army and see what happens. The army situation turned out to be complex and interesting and tragic. I can tell you some of the details which were really very interesting.

JONES: Please do.

BORINSKI: I don't know if I mentioned to you that I was living at that time in Rochester with Americans who came from eastern Jewish background. I think I mentioned it already. These people took somewhat the role of parents and so on. So I was drafted and went to Fort Niagara. That was the first induction center. There were many people in the same situation, many foreigners there in my situation. I went through all the testing, and it was very interesting. I had the idea that the more you know the better you can make it up in the army but after a point it could turn out to be the wrongest thing you could do. The dumber you were the better off you were in the army, but I learned this later. Anyhow, I mentioned it only because it had for me very interesting

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consequences. I told them, "Certainly there's no question that I'm European and they had the papers so they knew the story quite well. They had language there and I put down that I knew some Polish, I know some Russian, I know some French, I know some English and some Spanish and others, and I thought they would give you a pretty good position in the army probably. That was completely stupid. They just wrote it all down. They tested our group very much in mathematics of all kinds, measurement and all kinds of things. I have forgotten most of it now, but at that time I was still very much on top of it. They then told us, "You'll stay here two days before we decide where we will send you." We had some interviews. In my interview they said, "You scored very high in mathematics." "Okay, what does it mean?" "It means that you will be sent immediately to Fort Bragg. You will be put in the 105 Howitzer Battalion. You'll go through basic training, and you'll go probably in the first ship to North Africa." They told me that right there.

JONES: This is 1942?

BORINSKI: I think. The years for me are a little bit difficult to say.

JONES: It must have been if they were still fighting in Northern Africa.

BORINSKI: Yes. Anyhow, I came to Fort Bragg. The basic training had its fun and its difficulties. I took it all with a sense of humor. My difficulties were all in that I did not know American slang, therefore I continuously questioned when a man made any remark that I did not know what he meant, I repeated the remark and asked the man precisely what he meant. Then I got the reputation of being either a smart-aleck or an idiot. They had no other way of categorizing me. We were in Fort Niagara only a very short time. We came after only a very few days to Fort Bragg. It was my first acquaintance really with the South. Fort Bragg is in North Carolina. It is close to Fayetteville, the

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call it Fayetteville, and so on. We were there during basic training. I remember also very vividly when we went to Fayetteville on the first pass we got. I knew something about the Southern town, but very little. So I ended up in the black section. I was soldier and I went in a restaurant and every one stopped. One policeman came and said, "You cannot go here." I asked him in a dumb way, "Why can't I go here? It's a restaurant." He said, "You know why. Don't play dumb." I said, "I still know what you mean." He said, "You want to be smart?" I said, "No!" Then I told him, "Don't make a big fuss." I told him, "I am not from this area, in fact I am an immigrant. I have been in the United States only a short time and I don't know what you are doing here." So he said, "Get out and you will learn!" And I exited very rapidly, but I repeated that. I was rebel enough and I repeated that and simply got by with it. I got it into my vocabulary that this was a kind of unofficial law. I felt that as a soldier in the American army I could go where everybody else goes. I can go in white restaurants and black restaurants. There was no off limits sign, so I was legalistic. I said, "If there was a sign that said off limits I would not go. I cannot see a sign that says 'Off Limits,' so I'll go. I went on in and that was my first experience in that type of situation. Later I went to the slave market and got myself an introduction into the South. In basic training I was in very good shape. They told us very clearly what to do. We got very specialized training in the calculating of shooting range of the 105 Howitzers. We were sent then after four weeks to Camp St. Patrick in Norfolk, Virginia. It is very funny that I remember that. You could have asked me another time and I would have never remembered it. There we came into another stage in preparation for war or whatever it may be. We were very progressively prepared in Norfolk. We were

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put on a ship. I had had boat rides, but it was interesting that we went down into the bottom, the hold I think you call it. The relationship was a very cordial one between all of us. I remember we went through the Strait of Gibraltar after many days, and then we were shipped out in Canastel(?), Algeria, which is close to the harbor of Oran. We were lucky because we can approximately, well, a very short time, maybe a few days after the North Africa campaign was practically over. They said, "You are still in a combat situation here." The French were very ambiguous. There was General Girou(?) and they did not quite know who to join; they were related to the \_\_\_\_\_ they were related to - what was that French general's name - Lepan(?) I think was his name. On the other hand, the French in Northern Africa had officially surrendered to the Americans. That means that we became allies. The whole North African coast was in a complete transition. We were there. There were some encounters. You had battle scenes all around you. You got your first acquaintance with soldiers who were killed. There were still some around. I was also very much convinced now and my philosophy changed from the viewpoint - they put the soldiers, they put on the dead people the - what you call it?

JONES: Dog tag?

BORINSKI: And these didn't really identify them. That means they got bodies in coffin with the wrong dog tickets, but it didn't make a hell of a difference anyhow. I'll give you an interesting interlude here. When I was already discharged from the army I read in the New York Times that they had a great shipment of soldiers from the cemeteries overseas to America so that they could rest in the American soil. I was already at the University of Chicago and I wrote at that time to President Truman. I said, "I cannot understand.

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Why not establish in Washington a world university for peace, and then put the name of every soldier killed in a big auditorium. Let the people rest in Africa or wherever they are, in France, and use the money in their memory for financing this institution." I got back from Truman, from some bureaucrat there, that I didn't understand obviously that the greatest concern is for an American family to have the body of the dead member back. I don't understand that, but I can understand people who do. That was my vision at that time. I wish they would have carried it through then because I could not understand - I had seen too much! It was complete nonsense! Yes, in certain ordered battle situations they could identify the bodies. What was going on in Africa made it impossible to identify, except to say that every dog tag has a body. I guess it serves the feeling of the people like the grave of the unknown soldier. So I was not cynical about it. I had this practical hunch that to really get the memory of the people in terms of a real international learning institution would have been the greatest thing that America could have done. But all that came later.

JONES: Yes. Let me stop you right here, and ask you a couple of questions. In Fayetteville you said you had your first experience with Southern attitudes toward blacks, and you persisted in your efforts to get into the black restaurant in the black section of town. What was the reception that you got from the black people there at that time?

BORINSKI: I'll tell you one thing. I had there an attitude that people can read in your eyes and your expression what intention you have. I've gone very often into situations where I should not go, but I don't care; and I'm not courageous. I simply think that human interaction gets through. You have to realize too to understand my attitude, I came out of the German-Jewish situation and I know what certain things meant.

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JONES: Oppression.

BORINSKI: Not only oppression. I also knew that in Germany you were legally excommunicated as a Jew. I was smart enough to know the difference. In the United States you had prejudice, but the black was a citizen of the United States. I was aware of these things. I was well prepared. That's why today I am so legally orientated in terms of the American Constitution. It is a constitution which helps the blacks and the minorities to get their rights. I was very secure in that. I was a good lawyer. I always had my argument, I said, "They are citizens like anybody else. I come out of the German-Jewish situation." I told this to some people, "I know what it is to be excommunicated by law, but here that is not what has happened."

JONES: What about incidences of prejudice towards you being a German in the army.

BORINSKI: No, I was always a good buddy. I didn't have any difficulties. I had a tremendous sense of humor. I played out my linguistic difficulties and used them very much to make people laugh. I had very good relationships with friends which still last. I still have friends out of the army time and none of them were Jewish for that matter. It was irrelevant really.

JONES: What about your rank when you came to Africa, were you a private?

BORINSKI: Yes, I was a private. I remained a private until I got out. I made it to PFC. But I had more privileges than anybody else anyhow.

JONES: And where did you land in North Africa?

BORINSKI: Canastelles, Algeria.

JONES: Would you spell that?

BORINSKI: C-A-N-A-S-T-E-L-L-E-S. That is practically a suburban hill resort of the city of Oran in Algeria.

JONES: And there you experienced war for the first time since you lived in Poland?

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BORINSKI: Yes, it was amazing. Certain things I can remember as I talk. The Americans were then victorious.

JONES: This was at the end of 1942?

BORINSKI: Yes, '42. And then there was a kind of parade in Oran, and we as newcomers were inserted into the parade. There I had a very interesting association. There we were marching victoriously, but not overdoing it at all because it was a French city basically, through the city to show ourselves. But I had a very strange association. When the Germans lost the war, the French soldiers marched similarly in our city. That gave me the idea that I wanted to get very rapidly acquainted with some French people. I knew their language fluently. So I remember that even after this parade we were able to go, we had passes and we could go. They told us, "At 12:00 midnight the trucks will load up and bring you back to Canastelles." So I went to a French pub. I had on my uniform, so I started to talk. There were already people in there drinking this North African wine. So I told one of these gentlemen there what impression I had marching through the town. We soon became very very acquainted. His name was Besara(?). He said, "We are living near here, my family. Come visit us." So I became very close friends with the family. He had parents there. When I was on leave on passes I could visit them in town. There was also another gentleman. We had to change our dollars into francs. I spoke of these people I visited. They said, "You are our American guest and you're rather amusing." I said, "Yes, my name is Borinski." I was at that time only a PFC. I said, "I'm with the forces here in Algeria, American forces." Oran was in the Mediterranean Bay Section. His name was Ener(?), and I spoke French to him, I said, "That sounds to me like the German name Henner." He said, "Yes, I am from Alsace-Lorraine." And from my accent he

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assumed I was from Alsace-Lorraine too, but I was not. So I told him, "I am not from Alsace-Lorraine, but I am a German. I come from Silesia which is on the opposite end." He was upper-middle class and we became good friends and I had a good connection which was also very helpful with money matters. I could help the GIs and so on. I always made myself very useful. So I had basically a very good time. I was still in Canastelles, Algeria when we were trained to accompany - they had developed a kind of pipeline system to use in the invasion of Sicily. We were booked for that thing. So we were then brought into Oran where all the holding camps were. But in Canastelles were our quarters. One day over the loudspeaker from the office center came the announcement that they were looking for an officer who knew French to interpret in our negotiations with the French in terms of further regulations and other small details. They wanted a commissioned officer. I knew I knew French but I was not a commissioned officer. The call came then a second time. And then they called me in after the third time and I told the officer, his name was DeGrute, I said, "Lieutenant DeGrute, I am not a commissioned officer, but I know French." He said, "Get out of here!" And then they called a fourth time, emergency. I went back and told him, "Lieutenant, whatever the rules are here, I insist that you call them and tell them you have a PFC here who pretends to know French. Maybe I can help." And he called and told them, "I have got one of the enlisted men here who pretends he knows French, and he says maybe he can be used." The answer was I would be picked up in ten minutes. Ten minutes later I was picked up. They checked my background. I was put in a small group in Oran where I could understand. And my legal knowledge helped me out too, and they said, "You are the man we are looking for. Anyhow, we couldn't care less if you are a PFC or a lieutenant." So I became

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the interpreter for the whole outfit. I was also helping up in Canastelles because the officers were all fine men, but they were absolutely unprepared to deal with linguistic problems in the communities and the people. I didn't know any Arabic so I could make out a few sentences, but not very much. But I knew French very well. There I became also with our outfit in Canastelles the interpreter with population. We had to get wine and cigarettes and all this good and dirty business. There was one thing also that was very interesting which I'll never forget: You know these things the locusts?

JONES: Yes.

BORINSKI: The locust plague came through. They had wine and everything there. It is a very fertile area. The population came to our outfit and asked if we could help them. I had them together, and it was very interesting. The French population was very Catholic and they wanted to have a mass and pray for the locusts to go away. They were practical French and they wondered whether we had chemicals to make them go away. Then came an Arab delegation. They were the most interesting. I spoke with them. They spoke good French. The women all had the name Fatima, whatever that was. They wanted to know whether we had barrels. I said, "What kind of barrels do you want?"

JONES: Bells?

BORINSKI: Barrels. Barrels. Wooden barrels. I say, "What do you want the wooden barrels for?" "We collect them. We salt them in wine and salt, and that is a wonderful food." So I went there and they had them in jars and they tasted wonderful. They tasted like pickled crab or something.

JONES: They tasted like what?

BORINSKI: Like crawfish. That was also very very interesting. You had again multiple cultures.

JONES: That's pretty obvious. What, again, what was the name of your unit?

BORINSKI: Of that unit, I really don't know that name.

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JONES: How long were you in Algeria?

BORINSKI: I must have been there about a year. There were a number of things that kept me there. I was always interested in sociological and anthropological things. In Oran the Arabian and the Jewish sections were off limits for GI's. I had the permission to go. I was interested to some degree in how the Arabs and the Jews were getting along together there. I had just wonderful notes, but they were all stolen from me at Chicago. I had notes that were taken away from me; someone stole it out of my room. I had volumes of things that are just gone. It's okay, it doesn't make any difference anyhow. I wanted to find out - they were at odds together, the two communities were, and had some communication. I wanted to find out what they had in common. So I asked them in all kinds of possible ways what they would call their Golden Age? Interestingly enough, the Jews and the Arabs said that their Golden Age was the Moorish period in Spain. That was very interesting. It was always very funny. The Catholics, the French, the Jews and the Arab people had a funny way. When the Jews and the Arabs pass the Catholic church and cross they spit. When the Arabs passed the Jewish synagogue they pissed. The Jews did something very similar, I don't know what it was. That was almost a kind of primitive interrelationship, but it was an interesting way of coexisting. I had in the Spanish section what was called Victory \_\_\_\_ of Oran. I got well acquainted with the family Moreno. Originally I said I was a Catholic because I figured out I could find out more. I look Catholic and I know them very well so I can easily play a Catholic. One day I came visiting there. They had big courtyards there and so on. Then the lady, Mrs. Moreno said, "We have a great honor for you." "Honor for me?" "Yes." They have a custom, they have a statue of the Virgin. In terms of blessing, it goes into this area every month to one specific section of the town to give the blessing.

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Then, when this march is over, an honorary person brings this statue to the next section of the city. They said, "We have all decided you are the man who will do it." So picture me in this procession carrying this statue of the Virgin Mary followed by the people. But I did not joke about it, I made myself serious. In retrospect it is so tremendously humorous. I remember that really very very much. Then I was assigned to Lieutenant McCoy was his name I think; yes. He was in our office. He was one of the "Ninety Day Wonders," he was called. I thought he made a tremendous mistake, but I tried to help him. I went into the office one day and I told him, "Lieutenant McCoy, I'd like to make a deal with you." He said, "What kind of deal?" I said, I was very open and I said, "You cannot handle the situation here because you don't know a word of French. Why don't you let me run the office? I'll give you the guarantee that I will keep you informed about every small step. Anything I do good goes to your credit." He says, "Come back tomorrow." So I came back and we made the deal. I helped him out tremendously. I was very conscientious with filling out the forms for his agreement. I said, "I will make only one agreement with you." I think that every ten days there was a kind of GI flight to Casablanca in Morocco. I said, "I want to have this flight." He said, "Okay." So I had a chance to fly to Morocco.

JONES: Every ten days?

BORINSKI: Not every ten days, but often. I went about six, seven or eight times.

JONES: Tell me what Casablanca was like in those days.

BORINSKI: Casablanca was a different kind of French city because Oran, Algeria was much more French than Morocco. And the casba(?), that means the native element, was much more interesting in Casablanca, and you saw also much more handicrafts and so on in Casablanca. Casablanca was much more Moorish, Islamic, but with a good French overtone. Oran was so French, and a good many

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Arabs and Algerians became French. When you were sitting in Oran in a cafe unless they had on the Arab dress you couldn't tell who was Arab and who was French. In Morocco you knew the difference. I also remember we went through the city of Belabess(?), which was the seat of the French Foreign Legion. I got trips in to Ushla(?), which was in the Sahara Desert. So our situation then changed. I had a very exciting time because I was involved in just so many things. I learned very much at the same time. I cannot say that I suffered anything. I was busy because I like to do things for other people. I always enjoy that because when you have the facilities, and we had the facility. People came, the Arab people came with all kinds of things. You could see their whole life story in their possessions. Then it happened that the invasion of Sicily was planned. In our outfit there were I think fifteen guys who were not citizens of the United States. We organized and went to the officers place there and told them, "We have participated in most of these things. We are willing to go to Sicily and so on, but we are not willing to do it as citizens of other countries. If we are caught we will be shot." They were not aware of that. So they looked at our papers we had with us and said, "You will be citizens in a very short time." They sent a wire to Washington. There came a Dr. Hazard to Canastelles, Algeria, and we fifteen became naturalized American citizens in the field there. It was very impressive. Now when I ask for my passport, when you look at my immigration papers they say I immigrated from Havana, Cuba into Miami and was naturalized in Canastelles, Algeria. The Mississippi federal office says, "We cannot understand what kind of papers you have." So I have to tell them the whole story.

In the countries that you were going in to with the invasion forces, how

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would they have known that you were not a naturalized citizen?

BORINSKI: Oh, they would catch it if you were with other army prisoners and so on.

JONES: So you organized your group and was naturalized.

BORINSKI: Yes, I was made an American citizen in the army. It was very impressive. It was also at the same time very interesting. The Jewish people I lived with in Rochester, they played the role of my foster parents. So when GIs were naturalized out on the fields they made in your home, which for me at that time was Rochester, New York, a big festival out of it. I got from the people a letter where they sent cheers and everything and it was very funny. They cashed in on all the honors we got and it was very funny. My army experience has really made me very much an American citizen. That means that in spite of speaking with an accent I am probably more Americanized than many other people who were born in this country.

JONES: But you became an American citizen mainly to insure your own safety. At the time had you been working, or were you very anxious to gain your citizenship?

BORINSKI: That was natural. You see, at that time the Jewish situation was deteriorating in Germany. The Jews were then excommunicated and were not considered as citizens at all. That means I had the German, but I was practically a man without a country because it was beyond consideration to go back to Germany. Therefore; when I was already in Rochester, very rapidly after I arrived I gave a declaration of intention. I gave one after I was there about two or three weeks saying that I wanted to become a citizen of the United States.

JONES: Was it a matter of great pride with you? Did you feel all the old glory about becoming an American citizen?

BORINSKI: Yes. There are always in these things mixed motivations, but being in the army and having to do some small job it still meant very much to me. I still have my American passport always with me. That means these kinds of things

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you don't lose at all because it gives you an identity which you simply need. That's why I feel secure in this country. Whatever people call me I couldn't care less. I feel completely a part of it without emphasizing it. For instance, linguistically, I kept my accent, but linguistically I'm as American as anybody else.

JONES: Certainly. After you were naturalized in Oran, what happened?

BORINSKI: Then came a second law. I was at that time forty-two. There was a law from Washington saying that military personnel who had been in service about a year or two years and were this age had the privilege to be discharged.

JONES: Oh. When was this?

BORINSKI: That was whenever the invasion of Normandy was, in the same year.

JONES: 1944, June 6.

BORINSKI: Yes, '44. It was for the convenience of the government. That was interesting too because...

JONES: This was after the invasion?

BORINSKI: No, no. We were on the boat from Northern Africa to America on the same day that the invasion of Normandy came. I remember that. That's the only way I can really check on the dates. It was also interesting because I did my job but I had the feeling in many things as I do now. I am now older and I know at any given point that maybe the next day you will have to quit. So I did a good job in the army because - I really did a good job on the whole outfit but then I figured it was time to quit. In fact, the lieutenant told me, "We can give you a promotion." I said, "I don't care," because I was a PFC and had more privileges than the young officers. When you do, again, the kind of job that I was doing - I'm not bragging. I was just there and the job needed to be done - the people could call on me and I could do anything I wanted for them while I was there. There was never any problem of looking

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for promotion because I didn't want to make the army my career. I had enough money because wherever I went I could get billeting. That was no problem. So I departed. There were about fifteen or twenty men there. We were put on a boat in Oran and shipped back to the United States.

JONES: One the same day as the Normandy invasion.

BORINSKI: The boat ride lasted about a week. It was while we were on the boat. Then we were taken to Newport News. The only thing that I remember there was that as the boat approached the shore of America, the mood of very many of the men changed. Some of them were very excited, but a considerable number became sad. There were a number of blacks who were desperate. They were afraid to go back because in the field, there was no black and white. That made me very very sad. I spoke with some of them and they were completely aware of it.

JONES: Southern blacks?

BORINSKI: Yes. They said, "We come out of a social paradise into hell." There were some tragic aspects there, but some very good aspects too. Now comes the story which is almost humorous. We were sent to Fort Buckner, North Carolina for discharge. First, we got about a week off, so I went to Rochester and we all celebrated and all these kinds of things and it was fun. Then I went back to Fort Buckner. In the meantime I also made up my mind what I wanted to do. I said I wanted to go back into academics. I said, "I am a good teacher and I'll go back to the university." I made up my mind and told my foster parents, who were all old now, "I go back to the university. I want to go to the best university I can find out about." So I came to Fort Buckner with my discharge papers. He read the papers and said, "You know languages. You know French, Russian, Polish, German." He said, "We have a strict order that

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any soldier who comes to be discharged who knows German, Polish, Russian, cannot be discharged."

JONES: Oh no.

BORINSKI: They were overloaded with French, with German and Russians who'd joined the German army. They were being held in Fort Dix and they needed military police who <sup>could</sup> go into the camps and communicate with the people. So they gave a twenty-four hour order that I be shipped to the military police in Fort Dix.

JONES: Did that break your heart?

BORINSKI: No, it didn't break my heart because I figured out, "What can you do? What can you do?" I figured out that probably there was a need for it. I was in good shape and so on. So I came into Fort Dix and was assigned to Lieutenant whatever-his-name-was. Interestingly enough, I was there two days and I got the title of "Professor." I was immediately brought to the German camp, and so they called me "Heir Professor." There were a number of things that were interesting there. There were Germans there, young, fifteen and sixteen-year olds. They were caught by the Americans. And a considerable number had a complete mental breakdown. I remember one young fellow, he cried and cried. I said, "Well, why are you crying?" He said, "I just remembered we were on the Russian front, and we were ordered to kill all the people; men, women and children. I'll never forget that." There were so many young people who killed Jews wherever they were. The Russians were not so anti-Semitic. The young soldiers did have breakdowns. They had time to reflect. At least some of them I could bring back to their senses. The real tragedy occurred in the Russian camp. I could communicate there quite well. Some of them were from \_\_\_\_\_ and it was quite difficult, but with most of them I could communicate. I also always had difficulties with the lieutenant because he could

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not understand that people that spoke a different language were different. But we really had a very good relationship. Then was the Yalta Conference. The Yalta Conference was where the Americans agreed with Stalin to <sup>send</sup> all of these prisoners back to Russia. I was like sending the Shah back to Iran. We had no choice. We could go and let them out. It was too dangerous. I was close to saying, "Why not? Scram!" Anyhow, they were ready to be shipped. The next morning half of them had committed suicide.

JONES: Out of how many soldiers?

BORINSKI: I don't know; ten, fifteen, maybe twenty. That was very tragic. The rest were forced out and sent back to Russia. That was a very very tragic history very tragic. I had very good rapport with them. They were all very gifted people. They were all very educated. I have not overcome that yet.

JONES: Why was it that Russian soldiers were being held in American prison camps?

BORINSKI: That was the Yalta agreement, that they were really traitors to communism. They had joined Hitler when they thought he was going to win the war. I spoke with very many of them and they simply said, "We joined because we did not know the strength of the Russian army. We did not know that we could win it, so we figured we needed to join before they kill us."

JONES: And they were caught with the Germans.

BORINSKI: Yes, they were caught with the Germans. It was tragic in ways that we cannot say. Stalin wanted them back, so they really must have done something wrong while they were still in the Russian army. They were army traitors. You need to know the whole story. Personal and human tragedy is different. We do have the same thing going on here right now with Iran and so on. Some people, for instance, as one woman said tonight on T.V., "I know when I see the Shah that he has killed all my children, all my husband's whole family." While there are personal tragedies involved, some don't lend themselves to collec-

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tive punishment. So I was in Fort Dix. Roosevelt when I was at Fort Dix. I remember I got me a pass to Washington and was in the legislature when Truman spoke the first speech. I finally did get out. I did the following thing. They had consultants who tried to get you a good job, but I was not so young anymore. I came and they asked me what I wanted to do. I said, "I want to go to a university." They said, "Which one?" I said, "How about Chicago University." They said, "Are you prepared for it?" I say, "I don't know, but I want to go." He said, "There's no sense in it. You cannot apply there." I went to the head of the libraries on campus for soldiers to read, who can read, and there a Life magazine came into my hand. It was an issue in which Hutchins - you know he's now with Century magazine. He was a great scholar. He was president of Chicago University. They reported at that time the complete mechanization he introduced. So I got me one of the sergeants there and said, "Can you help me? Can you type?" "Yes." I say, "I want to have a letter typed." So I wrote Hutchins a letter, I said, "My name is so-and-so. This is my background;" very brief, "and this is my situation." Then I said in a very delicate way, "I am impressed with what you do in Chicago. That means you do things that are extraordinary. Why don't you do another extraordinary thing and let me come to the University of Chicago without any credentials." In ten days I got a letter back, "You are fully accepted."

JONES: Is that right?

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: And how did you gain release from the army?

BORINSKI: I was at that time discharged. So I went back to Rochester, packed my things and went to Chicago University.

JONES: Were you discharged before the war was over?

BORINSKI: I was discharged after Germany had surrendered. The Japanese war was still

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going on, but it was over in the European theater.

JONES: So you spend the time until the end of the war at Fort Dix on MP duty?

BORINSKI: Yes. It was a fantastic experience. My life was lucky that I came into a situation, probably not because I am so smart, that I am ready to enter always. When they said I was to go to MP duty I said, "Okay, nothing I can do about it." Then comes Chicago and the beginning of the academic career. How much time do you have there?

JONES: Well, I think we've talked about an hour.

BORINSKI: We can continue or go if you want to?

JONES: It may be best if I come back and we take up here. Don't you think?

BORINSKI: Yes, I think so too. The Chicago period was also a very interesting period certainly.

JONES: This has been simply fascinating to learn of your war experiences. Certainly they are unique in terms of the average GI Joe's experience in that war. You spent the duration of the war in Northern Africa before coming back to serve out the last year of the war at Fort Dix?

BORINSKI: Yes. You can say that I helped very many people out. That's what I enjoy best, in Algeria or anywhere. I had very many friends, former GIs because I encouraged them to do all kinds of things; try this and that and don't just wait!

JONES: You were never in a combat situation?

BORINSKI: No. We had small skirmishes, but it was not too much.

JONES: One final question. What was it about your army experience that helped you decide on an academic career?

BORINSKI: I was always very conceited, I said, "I have a unique talent in teaching." I was aware of that all the time, and so I figured out - the way I could perceive and conceptualize my own experiences in the army made it clear to

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me I would be a good social scientist or sociologist, and that I can use my talents very well. I made up my mind that when I went into American academic life, I wanted it on American terms; that means get me credentials in America, not go and say "I was this and this in Germany."

JONES: You had no desire to practice law in America as you had in Germany?

BORINSKI: No. I am always related to law though because I teach constitutional law here. Certainly during the civil rights movement I wrote more briefs than any lawyer wrote. Still now, if any critical case comes up, I can handle it I teach of course constitutional law and it gives me a sense of satisfaction because I think I'm a good constitutional lawyer, but that doesn't mean I have to go before the court. I don't care.

JONES: Well, that's good. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the supper too.

BORINSKI: That's good.

JONES: So I'll come back in a couple of weeks and we will pick up where we've left off.

BORINSKI: Yes, that will be good. And come to the party on the twenty-ninth of December if you want.

JONES: I will.

BORINSKI: I will send you an invitation anyhow.

JONES: Thank you.

(End of interview)

(Transcribed by John Jones)

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