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AN INTERVIEW WITH
WILLIAM LUBBECK

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INTERVIEW BY
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ALLISON VICK: Let me make sure this is starting. Okay, I have to go ahead and record that this is the 27th of September, 2014, and Allison Vick interviewing Mr. William Lubbeck in Asheville, North Carolina. So, to start off Mr. Lubbeck, could you tell us a little bit about when you were born, where you grew up, and sort of who your parents were?

WILLIAM LUBBECK: Well, uh, I grew up on a farm, the oldest of nine children.

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: Three are still alive today, and me. I grew up on a farm until I was about eighteen. The German law specified that the oldest child will inherit the farm. I think this law is still in the books.

VICK: Mm hmm.

LUBBECK: I was the oldest. We had a farm of about 250 acres. So, I personally didn't like too much working on a farm, and I told my parents; I said, "I want to be an engineer." So after, about eighteen, I took off; spent time in Lüneburg. The German law at that time required for new—if you wanted to be an engineer, you have to—before you go to college, you have to observe two years of practical experience in your field, which I was about ready to do.

VICK: Right.

LUBBECK: And I signed up for the Armed Forces because we had at that time the law that you had to serve two years, and I wanted to serve two years before I go to college. So, they had all of my papers and my (?), and one Sunday morning, I came home from church—I lived with my uncle and my aunt in Lüneburg. She says, "You have a telegram," and I said, "Oh! What's goin' on?" Well, I opened it up. It says, "You have to be at the barracks tomorrow morning for training."

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: Well, that training lasted six years.

VICK: Did you have any idea that you were gonna have to go to the barracks that quickly?

LUBBECK: No.

VICK: Did you think that you would join the military that quickly?

LUBBECK: No.

VICK: No? (Laughs)

LUBBECK: No. I wanted to finish my two years of practical experience before. I was about half-way through. So, this was in the summer of 1939, before the war.

VICK: Right, so is that the summer of 1939?

LUBBECK: 1939. That's right. There wasn't any war yet. So, I showed up at the barracks, I get my basic training. It took about two months. Then I was assigned to the 58th Infantry Division, and by that time, the war in Poland started. I was active in the 58th Division, at the 154th Infantry, at the 13th Company. It's all in the book.

VICK: And I'm glad you brought the book up. I'm just going to add for the audience who haven't read it yet, that you wrote a really interesting memoir called *At Leningrad's Gate* about your experiences in the war. I believe that came out in about 2006, something like that?

LUBBECK: Yes.

VICK: The book was published in 2006?

LUBBECK: Yeah.

VICK: I want to ask you a little bit about where your farm was because your family lived in what we would consider today the eastern part of Germany, right?

LUBBECK: Well, the farm was, it still is, in the middle of Germany, about halfway between Hanover and Berlin. But it was inside, or behind, the Iron Curtain.

VICK: Okay. Oh. Wow.

LUBBECK: About ten miles behind the Iron Curtain. So, that's why I couldn't go back home after the war.

VICK: Yeah, I guess not. That was definitely not a place you would want to be.

LUBBECK: So, that's why I got sent to Lüneburg, Lüneburg is actually where I started my training to be an engineer, and at the same time, the training of the Armed Forces was in Lüneburg, which is a city about fifty miles south of Hamburg.

VICK: Okay, so that's more Western Germany.

LUBBECK: It's western Germany.

VICK: Okay. So ...

LUBBECK: So ... Go ahead.

VICK: What was life like growing up on the farm? Did you have to do a lot of work on your farm and what did ...

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. We had to do a lot of work, and my work, mainly, was taking care of the horses and the cows, and stuff like that. I was riding. I enjoyed riding, and at that time, we didn't have any tractors or anything. Everything was by horse.

VICK: Wow. That's heavy labor.

LUBBECK: Yeah. So, then my sisters and brothers came along. Until I was about eighteen, finishing high school, and then I took off from home; wanted to be an engineer.

VICK: Yeah, and get away from the farm life, right? How long had the farm been in your family?

LUBBECK: Beginning of the 1700s.

VICK: Wow. That's hard for Americans to believe that something could be in the family for that long 'cause our history ...

LUBBECK: The family tree, I made up all the way through the 1700s. The whole family.

VICK: That's fascinating. So it's been in your family for a long time. Did you all have a lot of crops that you grew like barley or wheat that you grew on the farm or ...

LUBBECK: Anything you can think of, but mostly grain, potatoes, beets.

VICK: Wow. So, now you're from the area—that farm is in the entire village of Püggen right?

LUBBECK: Right.

VICK: Yes, and so that's ...

LUBBECK: That's what, ten miles inside the Iron Curtain.

VICK: Okay. So that's quite different I should think, living there in the 1920s as opposed to somewhere like Berlin in the Weimar Republic right? So, was it kind of a quiet area ...

LUBBECK: Well it's very quiet. My family was, and still is, very conservative. We have a good relation between us all, no problem. Three are sisters are still alive. All my brothers passed away. My parents also of course, and I had a very happy and healthy youth, very nice.

VICK: Was your father in the First World War?

LUBBECK: My father was in the First World War. He was in the Calvary, and he fell from a horse and broke his leg.

VICK: Ouch.

LUBBECK: And he came out of the war early because of that.

VICK: That's probably good for him.

LUBBECK: Yeah. He was manager of a large farm before he married my mother.

VICK: Did you have any other uncles or anyone who was in the First World War?

LUBBECK: First World War, I had about two or three distant relatives yes.

VICK: Right. Do you remember—you were young. You were born in June of 1920 correct?

LUBBECK: I was born in 1920.

VICK: So do you remember growing up what the people who you were around—how they remembered World War I? Did they think it was a harsh treaty that was put in place after the First World War?

LUBBECK: Well, I tell you it was the main reason of World War I, and it's still true today. Whoever knows the German history knows about the Treaty of Versailles. And Germany had trouble so big that it didn't lose the war, the First World War in fighting. It lost because of the political disturbance at home, and so that clobbered the German villages badly, and that's like until Hitler came. He used that as a base to get his philosophy through. And he was accepted because of that, everything about the Treaty of Versailles.

VICK: A lot of people think the Treaty of Versailles was very harsh, and I think that might have been why they didn't have a similar treaty after World War II. Do you—I think in your book you mention meeting with some members of the Stahlhelm. Do you remember that as a child?

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. I like guns. I liked the uniform. They had a steel helmet and stuff like that, and they had a gathering once a year, and—was always very nice. Stahlhelm was a very conservative institution with only participants of the First World War.

VICK: Wow. So definitely not members who would have—or people who would've wanted to join the Spartacus League right? (Laughs) Okay, very conservative branch. How old were you when you were meeting them? Were you a teenager?

LUBBECK: Well I was joining the participation of the Stahlhelm. I was fifteen.

VICK: Okay. So, very young. Alright.

LUBBECK: It was the first time I shot a rifle. (Laughs)

VICK: Wow. Do you remember what kind of rifle? Was it a Mauser?

LUBBECK: It was a Mauser. Yeah.

VICK: Wow. I bet you got a thrill from that. (Laughs) I think most boys would. I know my brothers would. So when did you move to Lüneburg? How old were you?

LUBBECK: 1939. I was nineteen.

VICK: Oh wow, yeah. So you had not been there long at all when you had news that you were going to be moving into the barracks and getting ready for war.

LUBBECK: Right. Exactly.

VICK: And I think it's—if my memory serves me right, you met a very special young woman in Lüneburg right?

LUBBECK: Yeah at that time, I met my wife, but we separated a little later. There's a story. I think it's in the book. I thought I was too young to commit myself.

VICK: Well nineteen is pretty young.

LUBBECK: When I sent her a letter, she was crying all day long.

VICK: Aw. (Laughter)

LUBBECK: She was practically by herself. She had a father. He was a nice fellow. Her mother was in an institution, mentally. So she was depending on some people, and I let her go.

VICK: Aw, but you came back to her though.

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. Later on—yeah after I was in Russia, I connected again with her, and we got married just after the war.

VICK: Right. Well, I definitely want to hear about that, but could you tell us how you met your wife?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: How did you meet your wife?

LUBBECK: In Lüneburg, I was a soldier, and—no, this was even before I was a soldier. I was still in civilian life, and my future wife was there with some friends at the dance hall, and I enjoyed dancing. I was a good dancer. So I invited her to dance, and then from there, it started.

VICK: Alright. So how long had you known her when you had to leave and join the military?

LUBBECK: Well, a couple of months maybe, at the most.

VICK: Right. Do you remember how you felt when you heard that the German Army had moved into Poland on September 1, 1939?

LUBBECK: Well if you know the history, Goebbels, who was the propaganda minister of the Germans, he was very capable, and he was the one who told everyone in Germany that the Poles did some, whatever, with the German civilian population at the border, and most people believed it. I was skeptical, but they went in, and since I was a soldier, I had no choice. I was part of it.

VICK: Right. How quickly did—your unit moved into France first right? How quickly...

LUBBECK: My unit was created in the end of 1939 in Lüneburg, the 58th Division, Infantry Division. When I joined and we went down to Thüringen, which is part of Central Germany, there's a proving ground. We had some more training over the winter, and in the spring of 1940, we went in to the Maginot Line, across from the Maginot Line. Then the war started with France, was fast, two weeks. We attacked the Maginot Line on the north side, our division. We had so many casualties we had to pull back. And then we went through Luxemburg. We went north of the Maginot Line. And then we ended up in Tour and Nancy in France, but there after we went back from the Maginot Line. It was all with few casualties. The French were running back, and I remembered it very well. One occasion there was a—on the Maginot Line, there was a hill before—and I had orders to go to the first line from our artillery or guns division to the front line. I had to cross that hill, and when I went up there, they shot at me as a single person with artillery.

VICK: Wow. What'd you think?

LUBBECK: I was in a ditch most of the time, but they didn't get me, so. (Laughs)

VICK: How long were you in France?

LUBBECK: What do they call it? Where you have the first participation in a war?

VICK: Right. Like an initiation.

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: That was your introduction to war.

LUBBECK: It was my introduction to war. I went to the village at night. I remember, and the French pounded at that village. It was artillery from the Maginot Line, and the whole building was shaking, and I was down there. We couldn't get out until the next morning, and then I went back. That was my introduction to the war.

VICK: And you were only nineteen years old. So what was your rank when you started with the military?

LUBBECK: Private.

VICK: You were a private?

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. I ended up as a company commander. I should have had three hundred people, but I had about two hundred.

VICK: Two hundred under you? Wow. That's a big company.

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. It was the biggest company, the 154th of the 58th Infantry Division. I had two 15 centimeter howitzers. That's big.

VICK: That is really big.

LUBBECK: I had four 7.5 centimeter howitzers. It's a smaller one.

VICK: That's a lot of artillery.

LUBBECK: I had two 10.5 centimeter mortars ...

VICK: Wow. That's ...

LUBBECK: So I raised a lot of hell with the Russians right there.

VICK: I bet you did.

LUBBECK: And I was on the black list. The Russians, they pronounced my name right. They must have caught a German soldier, and said, "Lubbeck." My name wasn't different then. "Lubbeck, when we catch you, we cut off your..."

VICK: Oh, wow. (Laughter)

LUBBECK: And I—when they would've caught me, even after the war, they caught me once when I crossed the Iron Curtain to my farm, and if they would've kept me, I would've ended up in Siberia.

VICK: In a gulag right?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: In one of their gulags?

LUBBECK: Exactly.

VICK: Wow. I'm glad you didn't. That would've been a very bad event. So, do you know sort of, was there a sense among your company that you could beat the French pretty easily? When you moved into France, did you think that they ...

LUBBECK: I'm sorry. I didn't get you.

VICK: Did you and your company, did you think that you would be able to beat the French Army when you moved across the Maginot Line?

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. The German Army at that time was one of the best in the world. We were very disciplined, very well-trained all the way. And there was never any deserters or anything like that. That was a very, very strong unit. And our division was made up of all north German soldiers from Hamburg, Bremen, Lüneburg, and we were known as a really capable division.

VICK: So your unit was from that region of Germany that used to be Prussia then?

LUBBECK: Yes.

VICK: You had a lot of troops from that part of Germany that used to be sort of the Prussian area then?

LUBBECK: Yes.

VICK: Where your units—were they sort of from that region in Germany that was formerly Prussian.

LUBBECK: Yeah, old Prussia. I had one soldier with me, and he was from Vienna.

VICK: I bet he felt left out.

LUBBECK: He was a lousy soldier, but a very good fighter. (Laughter)

VICK: Well, that's good. How did—do you know how an Austrian ended up with your company?

LUBBECK: Yeah, I don't know how he got there, but he was from Vienna in Austria. He was a nice fellow.

VICK: Did your company, did they go to Paris? Did you walk into Paris when you made it to France?

LUBBECK: No. We went south just before Paris. We were in south to Tour and Nancy, a couple of cities. That's where we had our last fight, but those fights were all minor. The French were taking off. The only bad experience I had—there was a sniper in a church steeple, a French sniper. He killed some of our soldiers, and we caught him ... and he would've been killed, but he was put with his knees on the altar steps in the church, where he was unstable, for a whole day. He had to kneel before the altar. That was his punishment, and then after, as a prisoner of war.

VICK: Huh. Interesting. Did your company take a lot of prisoners of war?

LUBBECK: Yes. Especially in the last month in France.

VICK: Right. After France, your company went into Belgium.

LUBBECK: Verviers, Belgium; Occupation Force. It was very nice: relaxation, training. We would do training at proving grounds a couple of times. Until one day, the captain came and said, “Tomorrow morning, we take off. Pack everything up”, and we had one night to pack up everything. They put us in a train across Germany to East Prussia.

VICK: Wow. Was that because you ...

LUBBECK: Wars with Russia.

VICK: Right. So when you were on occupation duty in Belgium, what were some of the things you did? You talked about relaxation.

LUBBECK: Uh, we had little, very little trouble with the population. They were not fighting. They were disengaged. We could talk to them. As a matter-of-fact, what I did was—I had six years French in high school. I spoke French, and six years, seven years English. So you had to start a foreign language at high school the first year. So, I taught a couple of Belgian girls German. They taught me French.

VICK: That’s a great exchange. (Laughter)

LUBBECK: It was. And [when] I had a couple of hours rest, we’d get together and talk German and French.

VICK: Learning languages in the context of having a war going on all around you.

LUBBECK: Right. But then, I think I explained this—better than anything else, the relation we had with the Belgian population.

VICK: Were there a lot of Belgian men, as well, or were the Belgians mostly the front ...

LUBBECK: No, the population there was ...

VICK: Yeah, so it was everybody.

LUBBECK: Right.

VICK: I think in your book, there’s a photograph of you actually running when you were in Belgium at a race.

LUBBECK: Yeah, at the race. I made first place. (Laughs) I always were and maybe still am—the attitudes I have going to the ... whatever. My professional ... as a soldier, I went all the way

from private to company commander in four years, so I can't complain. [The] good Lord took care of me.

VICK: That's right. How long were you in Belgium? Do you remember if it was a year?

LUBBECK: From the end of the campaign in France until about a week or two weeks—two weeks before the war with Russia.

VICK: So almost a year. That's a long time. So you were talking about after that though, you were sent on a train across Germany? Did you have time between leaving Belgium and going to Russia to see your family?

LUBBECK: Nah.

VICK: How long were you ...

LUBBECK: We had leave, usually, if not in combat, three weeks once a year

VICK: That's not very long. Did you get to write letters to them? How often did you write to your family?

LUBBECK: Every week.

VICK: Every week, so ...

LUBBECK: I'd write along with my, then, future wife about twice a week.

VICK: Yeah, so what was ...

LUBBECK: I still have all those letters.

VICK: Do you really?

LUBBECK: My wife kept them, and I still have them.

VICK: Wow. That's really nice. I'm glad you can hang on to 'em.

LUBBECK: I gave them to my daughter.

VICK: I know she's glad to have those.

LUBBECK: Hmm?

VICK: I said, I'm sure she's glad that you have those still. So, when did you arrive in Russia or when did you start marching towards Russia?

LUBBECK: Two weeks before we went into Russia, we went into some city. Elbing (East Prussia) was the city. We had barracks. We stayed there a couple of days, and we were very close to Russian border. The then Russian border was just Lithuania, up from East Prussia, and we were about five miles from the border in the woods, camping. Nobody told anything of where we were. Are we going to Sweden or coastal Baltic, or are we going to Norway? But nobody thought about Russia because the year before, Ribbentrop, who was the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, had the treaty. Germany made a treaty with Russia with non-aggression. So we didn't think it was Russia until the night before. The captain of the company, the commander came and said, "Tomorrow morning, at 3 o'clock, we are going to go into Russia."

VICK: Wow. How did you get to Russia? Did you take the train or did you march or both?

LUBBECK: Well, we were horsed during—at that time. Horsed division, later on, we were motorized, and the year before the war, we went back again to horses. And so we had a heck of a time following our 1st Division going in, which was a tank division. And they went in so fast, we had to walk real fast to keep up with them, because we were supposed to support them. We went into Riga, and then up to the north, Baltic Sea, from there into Leningrad.

VICK: And your division actually became part of what people talk about now as the North Army Group, right?

LUBBECK: North, yeah.

VICK: Okay. I'm not sure a lot of people realize just how far it is between Germany and Russia. It's, you know, a lot further than most people think. How far do you think you all travelled? Was it about a thousand miles?

LUBBECK: Between Germany, East Prussia, and Leningrad, yes. That's about right.

VICK: Right. I bet you did not get a lot of sleep.

LUBBECK: Nope.

VICK: No. So, do you remember sort of what an average day was like when you would walk and travel towards Russia?

LUBBECK: Well, we'd start travelling at nightfall, and the kitchen has the food ready and everything, then by three o'clock [A.M.], we'd go off again. Marching.

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: Yeah, there's a picture in there from the day. Let's see where it is. It's right here. [Shows photograph]

VICK: Oh yeah.

LUBBECK: That's a captain here, and I'm the one next to him.

VICK: Right behind him. Yeah. And it says here that your commander is Oberleutnant von Krempski. Um, how did you feel about him? Did your company like him?

LUBBECK: Oh yes.

VICK: Okay.

LUBBECK: But not only that, you have to realize, the German Army was very disciplined. I mentioned this before, and whoever was on top, that was it. He was the guy in charge, if you like him or not.

VICK: Did he survive the war? Von Kempfski?

LUBBECK: I have no idea. He went after Battalion command, and I don't know what happened to him. The first one we had was a captain, a Rittmeister in German, that means he was—from the cavalry, from the First World War. He was about sixty. He was our first commander, company commander. We had him, and then we had two more, and then I came in.

VICK: That's right. Was it common to have First World War veterans with you?

LUBBECK: Yes. At the beginning, we had a lot of First World War soldiers, about thirty percent. But once we started Russia, they were all gone; released home. And we had all young fellas.

VICK: Right. And I want to get back to talking about Russia, 'cause you spent most of the war in Russia, right?

LUBBECK: Yes.

VICK: You spent most of the war in the Russian front, right? In Latvia, and Lithuania?

LUBBECK: Yeah. Lithuania, Estonia. Latvia was like German. Riga was much like a German city, and it was German at one time. The buildings and everything else like, like Hamburg! It was Riga. Estonia, you would expect Slavic influence. They were all blonde, blue eyes. There was the influence from the north, from Sweden.

VICK: Mm hmm.

LUBBECK: They emigrated from Sweden to Estonia. They're still like most Germans, blue eyes, blonde. Very nice.

VICK: How long were you in that region of Latvia?

LUBBECK: We went right through into Russia, fighting. And the first big fight we had, we had fought before in smaller ones. So this one was on Lake Peipus. I have to look at the map. There must be a map someplace. (Looks and points to map) It's this lake here.

VICK: I'm not goin' to be able to pronounce that. So this looks like Lake Peipus?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Is that Lake Peipus? I have, my Slavic ...

LUBBECK: Can you read it?

VICK: Let's see. Lake Peipus?

LUBBECK: Peipus!

VICK: Okay.

LUBBECK: It's Lake Peipus. We went up on the east side of Lake Peipus, into Noruo, what's it called, the city?

VICK: Oh my goodness. I'm not going to be able to pronounce it, but I'll try my best. Plyussa?

LUBBECK: Yeah. Something like it.

VICK: I'm not very good with Slavic words.

LUBBECK: That's where we had the first big fights, because they still had a lot of Russian soldiers in this northern area, and we were here. They were trying to get through to the east. Now, let's talk, a little about the Russian soldiers. They were good soldiers. People like you and me; there was hardly too much difference, unless you had a far eastern Russian division, then you had Mongols and all kinds of stuff. But the western population of Russia was like you and me. The problem with the Russian was they had commands also covered by political officers, we called them Politruks. There were in the division area. They were the regimental area. They were all the way down to the company area. There was always a leading officer led by a politruk, by a political officer, and those guys, most of them didn't know from beans about fighting. They caused most of the trouble because they sent those poor soldiers against our lines, and we mowed them down. One after the other, and the Volkhov area, which we can talk about later, I remember they came at us, some of them without a gun. They were told to pick up from the dead.

VICK: Oh goodness.

LUBBECK: But those are the political officers. They were awful.

VICK: They sound awful.

LUBBECK: We caught them, but we put them separate. I don't know why they—I have no idea. They were not present at all with the other ones. We separated them.

VICK: Yeah. How common was that? Was that something you saw almost every day during ...

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Did you see this type of behavior all the time?

LUBBUCK: I didn't get you.

VICK: Did you see frequently where Russians would charge you and not have any weapons?

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. They were good soldiers. They followed orders, but when they were prisoners of war, they were even more like we. You don't know this. This is in no history book I have seen. There was a whole army in Czechoslovakia at the end of the war made out of Russian prisoners of war in German uniforms.

VICK: Really? That's fascinating ...

LUBBECK: They were in Czechoslovakia. The idea was they're coming from the south towards the Baltic, and we would come from the north, and we would catch the whole Russian army.

VICK: That's fascinating.

LUBBECK: So that's—most of them got killed by their own officers ... because they were in German uniform, and they fought for the Germans, was a whole Russian army.

VICK: Wow. I can't even imagine.

LUBBECK: Yeah. General who was in charge of it was a Russian, name was Vlasov. General Vlasov was caught by our division in the battle of the Volkhov. We will get to that later if we have time. We caught him there, and he was in charge later on of the Russians in German uniform to fight against Russians. I haven't seen any history book or anything like it that mentions that one.

VICK: No. I haven't heard that before either. Did your division know who he was when they caught him?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Did your division know who he was when they caught him? When he was taken prisoner?

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. We caught him, and he was prisoner of war about a year I think or six months, and then he became in charge of the—he got killed also after the war by the Russian. All

those soldiers who were in German, who fought in that particular unit, they killed every one of them.

VICK: Right. I thought that might be the case after the war. You talked a lot about sort of taking prisoners. Was there a general fear among the German divisions of being captured by the Soviets?

LUBBECK: Definitely. Because the Russian, as far as I know, did not take any prisoners who couldn't walk or work. They wanted people in their mines in Siberia but not one who ended up in the hospital to be treated. They shot them, killed them. So we were aware that if we got caught ...

VICK: It wasn't going to be good.

LUBBECK: As an officer, I, and all of friends too, had one bullet left for yourself.

VICK: Right. That was a better alternative. So were you all afraid more of being captured by the Russians than by the French or by the Belgians?

LUBBECK: French we weren't afraid [of], because we knew they were civilized. It would be prisoner of war and whatever. I had a brother who was caught at D-Day in France. He ended up two years prisoner of war here in the United States.

VICK: Really? Do you know where in the United States?

LUBBECK: Down in Arizona, California, picking all the oranges, stuff like that.

VICK: That's a lot better option than being captured by the Russians. You mentioned you had brothers. Were they in the war as well?

LUBBECK: This one and one other one, the youngest brother, he was in the anti-aircraft battalion in Berlin. And at the end of the war, he was able to cross over to the West by swimming the Elbe River. So he made it, and he came back, and he was alright after all. It was my youngest brother, and of course my second brother, he was prisoner of war here. He came back, and all three in German Army, and all three came back alive.

VICK: So where was your brother who was a prisoner of war? He was in the United States as a POW.

LUBBECK: I don't know. In Arizona? Down there? I don't know, down in the south of America.

VICK: But it was lucky that all three of you made it through the war. You all survived. So let's move back. One thing I wanted to ask you about is you had a dramatic rise through the military ranks in the German Army.

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: You really climbed the ranks of the German Army. You started off as a private, and by the end of the war, you were commander. So can you tell me a little bit about that, like how you became a second lieutenant?

LUBBECK: Well, right from the beginning, after France, I was forward observer into Russia, meaning even before the lines, I was very active with my guns, and so I got promoted very fast. I went through ranks, and then one day, the captain of the 154th Infantry Company asked me, "Lubbeck, you want to be an officer?" I said "Sure, why not?"

The next thing I know, three months later I was sent down to the War Academy in Dresden for six months. After that, I became a Lieutenant. We were short of officers, so they sent me back to Russia. At the border, I had to check in, and they told me "Oh, yeah. We're looking for you. Your regiment requested you return." So I went back to my original company as a company chief.

VICK: Wow. Were they glad to see you?

LUBBECK: Well I don't know. (Laughs) Like I told earlier, if you are of a different rank, you're accepted, period. So six months later—I was the next grade to lieutenant. And in—at the last couple of weeks in East Prussia where we were fighting, the captain came, the regiment commander came to me, and he said, "Mr. Lubbeck I've promoted you to captain." But there's no way to get a certification from Berlin 'cause the Russians were already in Berlin. So yeah I was captain, but six months before the end of the war.

VICK: So you were about 24 years old?

LUBBECK: 24 years old.

VICK: Wow. That's so young. That's younger than I am now.

LUBBECK: So, I was not really captain. I was only company commander.

VICK: And you were awarded the Iron Cross first and second class right?

LUBBECK: I was awarded the Iron Cross. The Second Class (Iron Cross) in France. And later on after, some other decorations, I became the, one of the few of the First Class Cross.

VICK: Do you still have your medal, the Iron Cross First Class?

LUBBECK: I gave the medals to my oldest son. He has them.

VICK: I wondered if you would be able to hang on to that after, 'cause you—when you were living in occupied Germany. So, can you tell us a little bit about, you alluded to the Battle of Volkhov. Could you tell us about that?

LUBBECK: Battle of Volkhov?

VICK: Yeah.

LUBBECK: We were in Leningrad in the first winter. It was very cold, over 50 degrees below zero.

VICK: That's bitterly cold.

LUBBECK: In February maybe or March, the Russian broke through our lines, just south of us. It was in this area here, broke through here. (Gestures toward map). The whole division, whole army went through, and we were shipped from here (Gestures toward map) to here in order to contain the Russians so they couldn't go any further, and we encircled them, the whole army.

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: It was heavy fighting. And they put the 58th Division right at the River of Volkhov where the Russians were and right by where we were. It was a small area which we cut off so the Russian soldiers in the encircled area couldn't get out. You wouldn't believe the artillery fire there on both sides at least four regiments of artillery cornered in this little area to keep the—we call it Kessel, the encirclement, closed, and I remember standing when it was finished. It was a wooded area. All that was left (were) stumps from the—(Laughs).

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: And that's why also I got nearly killed. Like always, I wasn't in command, but I was master sergeant, forward observer. So I was in the first line all the time, and here I was in the first line. Next to me a guy was with a machine gun, soldier, and he was firing away. His barrel of the machine gun was red.

VICK: Red?

LUBBECK: So we had a little puddle of water. He took it out and threw it in the water and put in a new barrel. And the Russians were right across from him, so he was putting away. I was next to him with a sub machine gun. (Laughs) And I was trying very hard, and I was very careful every time I put a new clip in there. I went down. The first line was a barrier of trees, and whenever I went down to put in a new clip, the guy next to me with a machine gun was a soldier. He lay there, I looked up, and he was shot through the head, a sniper.

VICK: Shot right in the temple?

LUBBECK: Right. Right in the temple. So I took off and went to the next position 'cause I know this was dangerous. I would've been the next one.

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: So this was one of the experiences I had at Volkhov, and we were fighting very heavy there 'cause the encircled Russians tried to get out. They had big heavy artillery on the other side of the Volkhov River supporting them, and we were clobbered too, big time. So, that was one of the toughest battles I was in I think, except the last one. I lost twenty pounds then. (Laughs).

VICK: What did your diet look like at that point? What were your rations?

LUBBECK: Sardines, tuna cans. They couldn't make anything over 'cause there was fighting through, the Army couldn't get in there.

VICK: Did you have a lot of fuel? 'Cause I know that there are a lot of people who talk about the German Army got stalled in Russia because they didn't have much fuel. Did you all have fuel for the winter?

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. No, we had fuel for all [the] trucks and everything else. Everything was alright. But at the first winter, when I was in Leningrad, we had small problems with supplies of food particularly because the steam engines at the time, it was not diesel engines, were frozen. They couldn't get the trains through and not only that, they had to go through an area where partisans, Russian partisans, were, and they killed quite a few of our people. We had to keep a lot of soldiers to keep the—open the area, so we could get supplies.

VICK: How long were you at Leningrad?

LUBBECK: From the beginning of the war [when] we reached Leningrad, and I don't know. It must have been September. We went in Leningrad. I was in the suburbs, and then Hitler decided we can't go in. We don't have enough soldiers. He put us out, and he was about, we were right in the suburbs of Leningrad, that's where we dug in. I remember when I told you about the Volkhov. The division who took over our area was a Nordic division made up of soldiers from Denmark, Sweden, Norway [4th SS Panzer Division]. They were all six foot something, and the fortifications we had were made out of snow but only five feet high.

VICK: Uh oh.

LUBBECK: So we had to duck because the Russians were very good for snipers, and those Nordic soldiers came six foot, six foot three. They killed ten right the first night, 'cause they didn't duck, as we learned fast.

VICK: Wow. Well, a lot of Americans I think are more familiar with the Battle of Stalingrad than Leningrad. Did your division hear about Stalingrad?

LUBBECK: No. We heard about Stalingrad, yes, but no, we didn't—but I think, even at that time, I was really skeptic, I said this may be the end of the war; end of the fight with Russia. I was right.

VICK: How did your division feel when you were told, that Hitler told you, “We’re not going into Leningrad. We are going to lay siege to the city.”

LUBBECK: Well, we were ready to go in.

VICK: You were ready for it.

LUBBECK: Gung Ho. nineteen years old.

(Phone ringing)

VICK: Take it. Right.

(Tape paused)

VICK: Okay, so we were talking about how your division wanted to move into Leningrad when you got there, and how you didn’t want to just wait like you were told you had to. So, how did you all feel about Hitler at that point? Did you think that he was ...

LUBBECK: Well, most people think that if you talk to Germans, they were all Nazis. We didn’t have any Nazis in our division at all. We were soldiers, and that was it, and so was the whole German army. We didn’t fight Hitler, but we didn’t like him. To give you an idea, 1944, beginning of ’44 I think it was, Hitler had all of us salute at the soldiers like this. (motions hands) Like the Hitler salute.

VICK: Right.

LUBBECK: We didn’t accept it. The whole division stayed with the old, traditional greeting. So that was dangerous for us because, they could’ve put us in the clink somewhere. So, but nothing happened. They needed us. Our whole division was known as a fighting unit.

VICK: Yeah, and you mentioned throughout your book that your family did not particularly support the Nazi party either. That they were ...

LUBBECK: Nobody.

VICK: Yeah.

LUBBECK: Nobody. As a matter of fact, they put my brother in a jail for a time. My father had to cross the Iron Curtain to the West, to get out of jail. They would’ve caught him, too, so. No, we were not what they call Nazis. Nazis in Germany, I would say, is a similar situation in the (?) in Russia today. It’s only the top echelon (?) There is cause all the trouble.

VICK: Right.

LUBBECK: And it was the same with Hitler. Most of them didn’t like him.

VICK: Yeah. And Germany had been through a lot of hardship when he came into power.

LUBBECK: But if you look at the propaganda at that time, here in the United States, you would think all of the Germans were Nazis.

VICK: Most of them were just fighting because that was their duty.

LUBBECK: Right. As a matter of fact, in Russia, I and all my soldiers, we were fighting communism. We didn't fight for Hitler; we fought communism.

VICK: Because you were ...

LUBBECK: Because we all knew that if we wouldn't stop 'em, the Russians, they would come in and take over, which they did later on. Half of Germany.

VICK: Yeah. So you were also fine because you were very patriotic, protecting your country.

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: You were patriotic in fighting to protect Germany.

LUBBECK: Yes. Exactly. Not for political reasons.

VICK: Right. Yeah, you were awfully young, too, so yeah. (Laughs) Can you tell us what your parents may have told you about what life was like on the German home front during World War II? What did they have ...

LUBBECK: Well, our farm, for example, kept on going. We had four or five prisoners of war, some Polish, some French, that worked at the farm, and at night they stayed at a compound. Things were, some things were short in supply, but nothing serious, on the farm. Now in the cities, a lot of cities, it was different. They had the coupons to buy food, and what have you, supplied by the government, and there were shortages sometimes. But, uh, the Germans kept on fighting.

VICK: Yeah. How long did your parents have prisoners of war working for them? Was that throughout the war?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Do you know how long the prisoners of war were working on your farm? Did they work on the farm throughout the war?

LUBBECK: Yes. And then they went home.

VICK: Right.

LUBBECK: They were treated like any other help. No problem. As a matter of fact, I think my parents were still in contact with some of them after the war.

VICK: That's interesting.

LUBBECK: Poland.

VICK: Yeah. What about—when you were on the Eastern Front, did you hear about the Allied bombings of Germany, of the German towns?

LUBBECK: I saw them.

VICK: Oh, you saw them?

LUBBECK: When I was on vacation, you know, on leave once a year. Yeah, I saw them coming over in formation.

VICK: Wow. What were you thinking when you would see that?

LUBBECK: Well, there was nothing you could do. We had our orders, and again we were soldiers, and it was just typical for the Germans. You follow orders; doesn't matter what.

VICK: I can't even imagine that situation. Let me think about how I should ask you this. What was your leave experience like when you'd come home? Was it hard to adjust to being ...

LUBBECK: Well, to adjust when you get home on leave, it took you about a week to get used to it. You had another week, or week and half, to enjoy it, and then ... and most of the time, I went for a couple of days to Hamburg to visit my fiancé at that time. But, we all knew you had to go back to the front line, and that's where I went.

VICK: When did you get engaged? Do you remember what year it was?

LUBBECK: Engaged? This is my ring. I show you. (Shows ring) Now you see it.

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: I made a stone on it.

VICK: Really?

LUBBECK: So, 1944, I think, yes, we were engaged. The last leave I had before the end of the war.

VICK: Right. And you tell a story in your book about how you got the rings made which is really interesting.

LUBBECK: Yeah. Yeah, this is my wedding band, and I went to Lüneburg through a specialist, and he put a stone in it.

VICK: So where did you get the gold for your wedding band? Because you couldn't really buy rings at this point in Germany, right?

LUBBECK: We collected gold in the family. A little here, a little there, until I had enough for two rings.

VICK: Wow. That's really neat. Alright, is there anything you'd like to tell me in particular about what life was like on the Eastern Front when you weren't fighting? How did you—'cause you didn't fight necessarily every day, how did you spend that time that you weren't fighting? Did you have a lot of time where you were bored or were you always doing something?

LUBBECK: When you were not fighting, you were always very anxious to get ready in case you had to get out—for example, we were playing cards. Skat is German. I love it. I still play it. We'd play cards at night to stay awake. Sometimes we had to, 'cause when the Russians attacked, we had to be ready, and sometimes they attacked at night. When I was an officer, I remember, I still was up front always, and the regiment commander said, "Lubbeck, what the heck are you doing on the front again?" (Laughter) I always had to get into action, and the Russians attacked middle of the night. Right under the bunker, near where I was, I called in my—I was in middle of woods, so I couldn't use my artillery. I used mortars, but they come up like this. (Gestures) So, I used my ten centimeter mortars, and I get one shot out, and I do this to distance, towards the area where the Russians were, and I called in about half a dozen shots. That was it. We didn't hear any Russians anymore. The next morning, one of the soldiers came and said, "Captain," or at that time I was [an] Oberleutnant, "with one of your shots, we counted thirty-five dead. Our shells." I was on the Black List for the Russians.

VICK: I guess so.

LUBBECK: They had me on loudspeaker "Lubbeck, when we get you, we're going to ..."

VICK: Right. That was not going to be pleasant. (Laughter)

LUBBECK: But I had no chance. To fight it or kill myself.

VICK: Yeah. In your book, you talk about fighting both in the springtime and in the winter in Russia. Which was worse? 'Cause I know in the spring they had a lot of boggy landscapes, and it was wet, and it had a lot of mosquitos. So was that worse than fighting in the cold?

LUBBECK: Well, the problem was mud. All of our equipment was stuck in. This is one reason I think also we lost the war because, we had a tank division east of—what's the city of Russia?

VICK: Moscow?

LUBBECK: Moscow, east of Moscow. And they ran out of fuel, so there was not much we could do them for them. So mother nature was against us.

VICK: And you had to deal with also with things like lice right?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Didn't you have problems with lice on the Eastern front? And mosquitos?

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. Especially at the battle of the Volkhov which went into June. Oh, the mosquitos were awful there. This was tough fighting. We went in a little further west of Moscow. From there, what's it called, that city here. (Looks at map) This placed called—right in here we went. (Points at map) And we had, really had fighting there. The reason was there was a German Army in here (Points at map) encircled by Russia, and we all went up, and our division was on one side of the opening to protect the other Germans, which pulled off back later, but there was heavy fighting too. The first time I got close to [a] Stuka bombing. I saw him coming, and I saw the bomb, came right me ... about twenty yards further this way. (Laughs)

VICK: Yeah. That's got to be scary to see Stuka flying over you dropping bombs.

LUBBECK: But at the end of the war, I was in carpet bombing from the Russians. The Russian used American airplanes. They used American guns. All of it came into the northern port of, what is it, Russia? It's a big port up there up north.

VICK: I'm afraid I don't know. I can't remember.

LUBBECK: Murmansk.

VICK: Okay.

LUBBECK: Murmansk.

VICK: Okay.

LUBBECK: And as a matter of fact, one of the last battles I fought, we attacked the Russians. They had anti-aircraft, anti-tank guns lined up every twenty feet. There was a dozen of them 'cause they were going to attack the next morning. But we hit them early, so they weren't prepared. All those guns were made in the U.S. Without U.S. help, Russia would never [have] won the war. They had the four tracks and everything else.

VICK: I think President Roosevelt was letting them have equipment through the Lend-Lease Act. So I have a question sort of related to what we've been talking about. When did you realize that the war was changing, that it was becoming a defensive war for the Germans, and that the Russians were pushing you back?

LUBBECK: Well, I think that started at down here. (Looks at map) What's the big city where we lost down there? Stalingrad. You have to bear with me sometimes I forget. Stalingrad. When that went flat, I noticed it was the beginning of the end. And I was an officer. I had some insights, but not too much. I knew that was coming.

VICK: Right. Did you expect the war to last after you heard about Stalingrad? Did you think it was going to end soon?

LUBBECK: No. We didn't expect that time wise, but it was coming. You know, it's all we knew.

VICK: Right. Right. And I wanted to touch—or have you tell us about sort of how you got out of Russia, how you managed to not be captured by the Soviets.

LUBBECK: Well at the end of the war, our division was up here in the Baltic, Riga, and we defended Riga for a whole winter from 1944 to 1945. Then we were picked up on a peninsula all the way out to East Prussia in this area. (Points at map) The Russians were all over here. So they cut us off. They went up here, and we went up there at—they had all of us go to Memel. So I had, I was in charge of the whole company, moving equipment. I had to bring it back. And halfway down, they told us now go to Riga, but then we went to a little port just south of Riga, and we were put on a ship overnight and went to Memel, which was a German city. So right here, Memel, right here. (Points at map) No, not here, up here. There must be a better map than this one. (Looks through maps) But anyway, it's in the Baltic. And then we went from there to East Prussia, and that's here, up here. (Points at map) And heavy fighting, every day. That's why I got promoted to captain in that area, and there's a little village Fischhausen. First of all, we attacked one morning and took care of a whole Russian Army, who was attacking us later, but it was gone. So I took my group and went through Fischhausen to a city right at the Baltic Sea, and in Fischhausen, we get clobbered from artillery, from here, from there, from there. (Gestures) Fighter planes, bombers, you name it, and it was only a little fishing village. It was two streets I think and whatever, so I went through there, and this bombing, and I was lucky, I didn't use the main road. I used a side road, came out on the other side, and all I had left were eight people.

VICK: Eight people? How many did you have going in?

LUBBECK: A hundred, I don't know a hundred something.

VICK: Wow. High casualties.

LUBBECK: Yeah, but then the horses were pulling the guns and everything else. They couldn't go anyplace. They had to go right through that little village, and they clobbered us with rockets and you name it. So then I tried to get ahold of my regiment commander. I finally found him. It was an episode in which I go into the bunker. There were six generals with a red stripe on their [pants]. They all pulled back when they were there, but I didn't want them. I wanted my regiment commander. I finally found him, and he gave me orders in my book to go to Hamburg, but Hamburg is way up here. (Points at map) To create a new unit. He knew and I knew that it wasn't possible, but in order to protect myself, not to desert. I took off as I could take one soldier

with me. I took my head sergeant with me, and the other was transferred to a different division, and then we went from here. (Points at map) No, it's on here. No this is Leningrad. No it's down here; down here it was. This is East Prussia here. This is Memel, and we went from here across the sea by boat, or whatever, I don't recall, to the peninsula of Hela. Hela, that's on the map but a different map, and I don't know if it's on there. It's like a peninsula, with nothing there except a few homes, sand on both sides, only a couple of hundred yards wide. And of course, there was Hela, the city, a little city, with apartments and a few high rises. That's where we stayed, and then we get artillery from the Russians, heavy artillery. Its thirty-five centimeters. That's big, and my top sergeant who was with me had a grenade piece here in his leg, and I brought him to the first aid station and told the doctor and said "Take care of him." He said, "Take a look here." And there were hundreds of wounded soldiers. Well, I said, "I will be back tomorrow morning to see how he's doing." I came back the next morning, and he was dead; he was passed away. He bled to death. I was all alone. On Hela, this peninsula up on the Baltic Sea, they had German battleships and German ships taking out everybody who could, and there was—because the Russians were already in Berlin, and they took out another company, a regiment of German soldiers who were still one hundred percent intact. I joined them. Nobody stopped me. My rank and my decorations took care of me.

VICK: Mm hmm.

LUBBECK: And I set out going, out to the sea in this landing boat, and it was dark, and all of a sudden I saw a silhouette of a German destroyer, a brand new one, and we went on the Destroyer, filled it up with as many people as we could, and then the rest in a convoy, and the Russians started to stop us. The reason was, that night the war was ended. A sailor came in my bunk which they had gave to me at the destroyer and said "Captain, the war is finished."

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: That was it. So I was ... (laughs)

VICK: You didn't know what to think.

LUBBECK: I didn't know what happened. So then the Russians attacked, even after the end of the war, and the captain of the destroyer asked Wilhelmshaven, the headquarters of the Navy, to ask the English—he knew the English were already there—what to do. The English captain told him, "Give them hell." So even after the war, they told us to put the guns around on those Russian speedboats and knocked the hell out of them and then took off. We ended up in Copenhagen, and I went like this on land. It was the end of the war.

VICK: Wow, and you became a prisoner of war after.

LUBBECK: Yeah, I was prisoner of war from the end of the war until beginning of September [1945]; I think it was. Then they released me from there to Lüneburg, and then from there, I was looking for my wife. She was a nurse in the meantime. She was in Belgium and somewhere else, and she was finally released too, and we met in Hamburg.

VICK: She had a dangerous role in the war, too, being in the cities.

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: I said that was dangerous for her working as a nurse.

LUBBECK: Oh heck yeah. She was in Belgium and north of Germany, yeah. Yeah she was a nurse.

VICK: Did she have to—was she living through the Allied air raids on the cities?

LUBBECK: Oh yeah.

VICK: Very dangerous time.

LUBBECK: Yeah. Particularly Hamburg was awful, but she was a nurse, and her profession was, she was a trained florist.

VICK: So didn't—she wasn't in maybe the worst place to be then?

LUBBECK: Right.

VICK: So who—I think in your book you talk a little bit about this. You were captured by the British, right? As a prisoner of war? You were a British prisoner of war?

LUBBECK: The British prisons were alright, but the soldier, the English soldier who took me prisoner, he took my decorations. (Laughs)

VICK: Oh gosh. I bet that didn't make you ...

LUBBECK: I had a Luger, 8 mm. I gave that to him, but I took the pin out before I gave it. (Laughs) And I had a private pistol, which I had in my pocket. I didn't know. So when I was at the prisoner of war camp, they gave me a company there, I was allowed to wear my gun.

VICK: Well that's good. And your other pistol you had was a Spanish pistol right?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Your other pistol besides your Luger, was it Spanish? Did you have an Astra pistol?

LUBBECK: Yeah. Astra.

VICK: And you liked it better didn't you?

LUBBECK: Yeah I gave that to my oldest son. He has it. Still in the family.

VICK: When you left your prisoner of war camp, you didn't take the pistol with you.

LUBBECK: Oh yeah.

VICK: Yeah.

LUBBECK: No. I buried it, and I picked it up a year later.

VICK: And it was still good. That's amazing. Alright I want to sort of—do you have anything else you want to tell us about World War II and fighting in Russia that we didn't talk about yet?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Is there anything else you want to tell me about what it was like being on the Eastern Front ?

LUBBECK: Well the worst the part was the Russian Front. It was you or me. It was nothing else. Taken prisoner? No. So it was tough for four years. I was forward observer, and I at least held with them with my guns. They knew my background. I had one guy; he had the Golden Cross, which was next to the Iron Cross. He went at night and in the winter from our lines to the Russian lines, took a kilo of dynamite, threw it in one of the Russian bunkers, and said "Here is some German bread," took off. He came back alive.

VICK: Well, he was lucky wasn't he? Wow.

LUBBECK: I was known as a guy who knocked the hard bunkers with my fifteen centimeter, and this one occasion there was a Russian bunker, and I could see it in the winter, snow, a pile of dirt on top. I tried to knock it out. One gun went too far, one not far enough. The third one was right in. I had it delayed. I could have delayed. I called out ..., and they was right in that bunker. And they don't know how many Russians were in that bunker.

VICK: A lot. Yeah.

LUBBECK: So they added me on the blacklist.

VICK: Yes, I bet they did. Yeah. I want to talk a little bit about what life was like in Germany after World War II 'cause that was ...

LUBBECK: After World War II, food was scarce. We had rations, but they had some. Not too much. I personally went by train from Hamburg to, uh, about a hundred miles south of farm, and bought some potatoes, a sack of potatoes, so we had something to eat. My oldest sister, bless her, she was unbelievable. She went across the Iron Curtain three times with food. She knew we didn't have anything.

VICK: You were living in Hamburg at the time?

LUBBECK: Yeah.

VICK: Yeah. So you lived in West Germany, and your sister was in East Germany.

LUBBECK: Yeah.

VICK: Was she still living on your family farm?

LUBBECK: Uh, at that time, yes.

VICK: Mm hmm.

LUBBECK: But, I had to think about my future. The first thing I did was, I was a It lasted 'til the first of next year, and I would dream we could get married for five years. And we believed it, so I told my fiancé at that time, we were going to get married. We got married on the 22nd of December, 1945. Now, I had to supply my wife with food and everything else, too. It was tough. And I went out to the docks in Hamburg and found a job. I worked at the docks, and to complete my two years before I could use the college. I went to engineering college, especially. There were two types of engineers. There was electrical and mechanical. That was it. The whole college, and so I went to the electric part of it, graduated, found a job, which I didn't like, with Phillip's, selling medical equipment to hospitals and doctors, and I hated that.

VICK: That wasn't in your field was it?

LUBBECK: And then, the separation in Berlin started, so I told my wife, I said, "We've gotta get out of here." 'Cause when the war starts, I'm the first one they catch and put back in uniform because of my experience. So I applied, but its quota was filled. Then, I applied for Canada. It worked, and then we went to Canada. We spent two years in Canada, in Montreal and Hamilton. And from there I applied again for visa for the United States. This time I had it within three weeks.

VICK: Wow. That's pretty quick.

LUBBECK: Because my background in electrical engineering, my age, and my background with the army, I had no problem. I had five jobs lined up in Cleveland. (Laughs)

VICK: Very popular. (Laughs) Can you tell me what it was like for you—in your book, you talk about this, the first time you and your wife crossed the Iron Curtain, you said she was allowed to go, but you were not.

LUBBECK: It was the second time, and the last time, I went across the Iron Curtain. They caught us, and they put me in the farmer's house. They left me there without protection, so I ducked out.

VICK: I don't blame you.

LUBBECK: We were all soldiers.

VICK: (Laughs)

LUBBECK: And then in the woods, I knew approximately where I was, and they used submachine guns behind me. That didn't bother me.

VICK: You just kept running.

LUBBECK: I was in war for five years. Then early morning, the next day, I met up with my wife. I know where she was.

VICK: And then you went back?

LUBBECK: And then I went back across the Iron Curtain.

VICK: Wow.

LUBBECK: And never went again. That was certain.

VICK: Do you remember what it was like when you heard about the Berlin Airlift? Do you remember listening to that?

LUBBECK: Well, like I said, I personally was afraid to get drafted again with my experience, so we took off for Canada.

VICK: What was it like when you moved to Canada? Because you came to Canada by yourself.

LUBBECK: I had job cleaning electric motors, taking motors apart, stuff like that. They didn't accept my degree. The Canadians don't accept German degrees, I don't know why. At that time. So when I came here to the States, they accepted my degree, and I went up fast.

VICK: Yeah, and I saw in your book, you made a comment about how you and your wife were amused by the fact that you had a son who was born in Germany, your daughter in Canada, and then another son born in the United States. Right?

LUBBECK: Right. United Nations.

VICK: (Laughs) So, was it hard to adjust to life in the United States after being in Germany?

LUBBECK: No, it was—I spoke English. I had six years English in high school. I didn't have any problems. Partly French in Quebec, I spoke all French there. I was used to travel. I had no problems.

VICK: That's good. You had enough to deal with earlier. Did you go back to Germany after you moved to the United States?

LUBBECK: I went every year, once, except two years ago I quit. It's too much. Nine hours in a plane. I'm a afraid I'll, get a blood clot somewhere. It's too dangerous.

VICK: Right. So, did you get to say goodbye to your family before you left for the United States?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Did your family know—did you get to tell your family bye before—your extended family, your mother—goodbye before you left and moved to Canada? Because they were living still in East Germany.

LUBBECK: They were living in Hamburg for three or four months. I paid for the journey. I came over with a little freighter. 1500 odd tons. It was like a cork on water. We hit a hurricane. The captain couldn't hold his ship. He turned around, went back again for a while with the hurricane.

VICK: Yeah, I bet you were seasick on that first trip.

LUBBECK: Hmm?

VICK: I bet you were feeling seasick when you were out there on the ocean.

LUBBECK: Literally yes.

VICK: Yeah. Oh gosh. Alright, well I know that we're sort of running out of time we usually run at about two hours, and I think we've got about that.

LUBBECK: Do as long you want, I'm here.

VICK: Okay, well what would you like to tell us that we haven't talked about? Either about growing up in Weimar, the Weimar Republic I should say ...

LUBBECK: What?

VICK: What could you tell us about growing up in the Weimar Republic that we haven't really talked about? You know, a lot of people say that the Weimar Republic was so interesting because there was a lot of political issues taking place during the time, and then of course, you have the Nazi era come in in the 1930's. Were you aware, growing up, of things like Kristallnacht and, um ...

LUBBECK: Oh, yeah. I was there. I saw it the next morning. Yeah.

VICK: Can you tell us what that looked at?

LUBBECK: Well, I was in Lüneberg. I was in Lüneberg, and I couldn't figure out why they did it, because we, and I'm talking about our family, actually had business connections with Jewish businesses. My father sold apples to Berlin, to a Jewish company. I remember that we had no problems with Jews. None whatsoever.

VICK: Yeah.

LUBBECK: Kristallnacht, that was bad. I know only one shop in Luneberg where they smashed the windows. I saw it, but I couldn't figure out why.

VICK: Right. And that was in 1938 or so, right?

LUBBECK: Yeah, 1938.

VICK: Mm hmm. So, in your book, when you begin, you were escaping from Fischhausen and moving back towards the Reich when ...

LUBBECK: The what?

VICK: When you were trying to get home, and you start your book off by telling about how you and your comrade were moving towards Germany, and you saw, in the distance, a building that was being set on fire. Can you tell us what that was?

LUBBECK: That was on a little peninsula. I don't know if it's on here. (rustles papers) Yeah, it's right here. This peninsula here. (points to map) We went through there, and it was night, and there were low buildings, barracks that were on fire. I said to the guy next to me—he was a soldier—I said, “What the heck is this that has no artillery or anything?” “Oh,” he said, “it's a—” uh, what do you call it?

VICK: Is it a concentration ...

LUBBECK: Where they would put the Jews.

VICK: A concentration camp?

LUBBECK: Concentration camp. He said, “That's a concentration camp.” I said, “What the heck is a concentration camp?”

VICK: You didn't know.

LUBBECK: I didn't know. And that was the end of the war.

VICK: Right, that's 19—that's late in the war. 1945.

LUBBECK: Most of Germany didn't know.

VICK: Yeah. So, they kept it secret.

LUBBECK: Yeah.

VICK: So you were just thinking, what's going on here?

LUBBECK: Right. We didn't know what was going on.

VICK: Yeah. That's unbelievable. What was maybe the most frightening experience of the war for you?

LUBBECK: Well, the worst one was the last week, when we got clobbered at Fischhausen. (points to map) Right here. Down here, it's not on here. No, I'm sorry, Fischhausen is on there. It's right here, in East Prussia.

VICK: Mm hmm.

LUBBECK: Artillery, mortars, rockets, jet fighters, bombers, all on a little village, and I had my whole company right in the middle. We were pulling back.

VICK: So you were totally encircled. That was probably the worst moment of the war for you?

LUBBECK: The worst part, yes. I had only eight left, and then the regiment commander told me to go back to Germany. And I still have eight soldiers. I felt sorry, but like in the German army, an order is an order, so I had to go.

VICK: Right.

LUBBECK: It saved my life.

VICK: Yeah. Is there a moment—we've talked a lot about sort of the horrors of being on the Eastern Front and how horrific that was. Was there a time where you were thinking, "Okay, we haven't fought the Russians for awhile," so you had some downtime that you could kind of remember what life was like before the war, where you could kind of relax a little bit? Did you have any time to—not much, it was constant.

LUBBECK: Except, like I said, three weeks, and sometimes four weeks at the most, on leave. That's all.

VICK: Right.

LUBBECK: They had people, like, singers or dancers or whatever, behind the lines, and some of the units—I was aware of they send people down there, but not in our company.

VICK: And one thing I thought was interesting was you said when you were in Russia, you learned how to ski.

LUBBECK: Hmm?

VICK: You learned how to ski while you were in Russia, right?

LUBBECK: That I what?

VICK: To ski. You said it was earlier to ski than to walk.

LUBBECK: It's the Baltic Sea. We couldn't go anyplace.

VICK: (Laughs)

LUBBECK: There was the Baltic Sea, and there were all the Russians. They were right there.

VICK: You're totally—yeah, you were stuck.

LUBBECK: I was stuck.

VICK: How cold do you think it got? How cold do you remember it being at the coldest?

LUBBECK: Cold?

VICK: Yeah. How cold did it get?

LUBBECK: Fifty-five below zero.

VICK: Wow. What did your winter uniform look like?

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Your winter uniform? Did you have an insulated ...

LUBBECK: It was a regular uniform and later on that winter, we get some clothes with filled—now, what do you call it?

VICK: But, did you have the white uniform? The snow camouflage?

LUBBECK: We used bed sheets.

VICK: Yeah, and one thing, too, that struck me is that you talk a lot about lice in the book and ... (laughs)

LUBBECK: We had so many lice [that] every morning and every night, if we could, we would (?) the lice, and get 'em between the two, thumbs and, like this, and kill them.

VICK: Ew. Yuck. I bet you couldn't get rid of all of them though.

LUBBECK: No. Before we went into Germany, proper Germany, you had to be deloused. You went to shower, and all your clothes went through a steam bath, so when you came out of there, you were clean.

VICK: Did you get a new uniform after that or was your uniform was cleaned?

LUBBECK: Uniform—everything. Everything was deloused.

VICK: Okay. Wow. Is there anything else you want to tell us about what it was like being on the Eastern Front that we haven't ...

LUBBECK: Well, no. It was difficult, but the attitude of the German, and German trained army, was very good. Protective, but also really strong, and I don't believe they have it today, anymore.

VICK: Your oldest son was in the US army, right?

LUBBECK: He was in the US army. He was a captain in the communication unit. Yeah, he was here in the army. He was ready to go to Vietnam, but they cancelled it, and he stayed here.

VICK: I'm sure you're glad he didn't have to go. Alright, one last question I have is, we like to do interviews like this so ...

LUBBECK: I'm sorry?

VICK: Could you tell us one thing that you might want people to know about the Wehrmacht and fighting for the German army in World War II? Like, what would be one thing you could tell other people about what it was all about?

LUBBECK: We were no Nazis. We were German soldiers of German law. Nothing to do with Hitler.

VICK: You were fighting out of a sense of patriotism.

LUBBECK: And communism.

VICK: Against communism.

LUBBECK: Right.

VICK: Right. Alright, well unless Carson's got some questions, that sort of concludes us. We really appreciate you doing this for us. It's going to be a wonderful ...

LUBBECK: Well, I enjoyed your visit, but particularly the way you questioned me. That was good. That was better than all the other interviews I've had.

VICK: Well, thank you very much. I've enjoyed it myself. I really, really appreciate it, and we will make sure that everybody has access to this, and can hear about your story. Turn that off, let's see.