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FRANZ VIDOR
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AUSTRIA, 1940
AGE 21

SHIP: BRITTANICA
PORT: LIVERPOOL
RESIDENCES:
? AUSTRIA: VIENNA
? US: UTICA, NY;

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, July 16th, 1993. I am using the portable DAT machine here at the Ellis Island recording studio, and I am here with Franz Vidor. Mr. Vidor came from Austria in 1940 when he was 21 years old. Anyway, it's nice to have you here. We finally connected. Let's begin, Mr. Vidor, with you telling me what your birth date is, please.

VIDOR: I was born on January 2nd, 1919.

SIGRIST: And where were you born, sir?

VIDOR: I was born in Vienna, Austria.

SIGRIST: Do you know of any stories that your parents told you surrounding your birth?

VIDOR: No, not really. No. I don't remember anything about my early, my very early years.

SIGRIST: Did you actually live in Vienna, or were you just born in Vienna?

VIDOR: No, I lived in Vienna the whole time. Practically the whole time until I emigrated. We had an apartment in the Ninth District, if that means anything to you, which is not in the city, but sort of the middle ring of the city. And that's where I was, I suppose I was born near there in the hospital somewhere. And as far as I know that's where we lived all, where I lived all my life there.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that apartment for me?

VIDOR: Yeah. Sure. It was what they called the first floor. But it was really the third floor by our definitions here. First they have a ground level, street level, and then they had a mezzanine, and then they, the third floor level they called first floor. And we had a, I guess we had a big bedroom for my parents, then a living, and a smaller room where I lived, and a bathroom, a large hallway, and a kitchen and a maid's room. That's about the size of it.

SIGRIST: And did you have domestic help?

VIDOR: Yes, we had a maid. A live in maid. At least for the early years. I don't, I don't think we had them later on, but I just don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the neighborhood a little bit where the apartment was...

VIDOR: Yes, I do, because I've been back a couple of times, most recently this, just a month or two ago, to show one of my, to show one of my daughters.

SIGRIST: What was the neighborhood like when you were a kid?

VIDOR: Just a residential neighborhood. All big buildings right near the Danube canal. For instance there was a, at the time there was a tobacco shop on one corner, and a tavern down on the next corner, and a grocery store nearby.

SIGRIST: When you were a kid what was your favorite thing to do in the city? Was there something you enjoyed doing in the city?

VIDOR: Well, when I was a kid, what age do, referring to?

SIGRIST: I would say pretty young. Say ten or under.

VIDOR: I don't remember much about that period of time.

SIGRIST: Was there someplace that you enjoyed going to...

VIDOR: Well, I remember, well not so much in Vienna, but we, every summer we used to go on vacation and spend, and for many years we spent up in the mountains, spent, I guess a month, or maybe two weeks. I don't remember. Mountains, we took trips from there. Day trips.

SIGRIST: Did you have a place in the mountains?

VIDOR: Oh, we didn't have a place. No, we stayed in some hotel. But for the many years we stayed in the same place in the mountains. We had a little, little pond, and you could go hiking. So I, I enjoyed, I guess.

SIGRIST: You like being in the out of doors?

VIDOR: Yeah. Out of doors. Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

VIDOR: His name was Ernst. E-R-N-S-T.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living?

VIDOR: He was a, he was a director of a business called Hans, Holzhandels, A.G., A-G. It was some kind of a lumber business. I don't...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

VIDOR: H-O-L-Z, which means timber. Handels is trade. H-A-N-D-E-L-S. And then A.G., that's like Incorporated. And he, he was a director in this company. Exactly what he did I can't tell you. I don't know. All I remember is one, one he took me with him up in the, in the mountains, or somewhere in the woods. He was looking at timber there. But that's about all I can remember about his business.

SIGRIST: Well, can you describe your father's personality for me?

VIDOR: Well, he was very stern. But he was fair, and that's about it. He, I don't think he had a short temper. He, I think he was reasonably even tempered. But very firm. I remember that. And my, people tell me I look like him, and I act like him, in that, in that sense, at least. In that respect.

SIGRIST: When you say he was stern...

VIDOR: Strict.

SIGRIST: Strict. Can you remember somewhere in your childhood or youth of doing something that upset him and being punished by him.

VIDOR: No, I don't remember anything my father being upset about anything. I remember my mother being upset about something that I did. I don't remember what it was, but I remember she chased me around the dining room table. And she had a cloth hanger in her hand. And somehow or other my hand got caught in the coat hanger, and I had a scar there for years, where the hook of the coat hanger caught up with me. But that's about the only thing I remember about being punished for anything.

SIGRIST: What...

VIDOR: But I'm sure, I'm sure I was.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

VIDOR: Her name was Elizabeth, but call Lisl.

SIGRIST: And, let's that would be L-I-E-S-E-L?

VIDOR: L-I-S-L.

SIGRIST: L. And what was her maiden name?

VIDOR: Her maiden name was Brasser. B-R-A-S-S-E-R.

SIGRIST: What do you know about your mother's background?

VIDOR: Very little. She came from a town called Pola, P-O-L-A, which was near Trieste. And, but I don't know when she moved to Vienna. My father was born in Hungary, and I don't know when he came to Vienna either. And they were married in 1910, that I remember, that I know.

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met?

VIDOR: No, I don't. I wish I, I knew. I met, you know, I think, I was the only child, and we, we don't, we didn't discuss personal things. And I wasn't particularly interested, either, to ask questions. Now I wish I had, but, so I, I know very little about, about my background beyond names, because my mother, you ask about my, my mother. I think both her parents were dead when I, since I can remember. And on my father side, I'm not too sure, I remember my grandmother, his mother. But I'm not sure, I have a vague recollection about once, way back when I was little, meeting his father. And he seemed real old to me, both of them at the time. But that's all I remember my parents and my grandparents.

SIGRIST: You said you do you remember your grandmother on your father's side.

VIDOR: Vaguely, yeah. Because she lived in Hungary. And I guess we went visiting. Maybe she came to Vienna. I don't remember. She was sort of a big woman, fairly big, grey hair, with a bun, made up in a bun, typical grandmother style. (he laughs) But that's about all I can really remember about them.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your mother's personality for me also?

VIDOR: Oh, she was very nice. She was sweet and even tempered. She was, she was real, real nice.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever work outside the home?

VIDOR: No. No, she didn't. She was just a housewife. And...

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about school, going to school when you were a little kid in, in Vienna.

VIDOR: Okay. Well, the elementary school was maybe four blocks away, five blocks away from home. And that was four years, it was, elementary school, four years. The only memorable thing about elementary school, or the only thing I can remember was there were steps going up to the front door. And I remember one time, I wasn't looking. And I'm still in that habit, not looking where I'm going. And I fell down the steps, and I broke my nose. That I remember. And that's about all. I

don't remember anything about teachers. When I went back, couple of months ago, I noted that the building was still there. But it's not an elementary school anymore. It's some kind of special school for music for the city of Vienna.

SIGRIST: What about religious life. What religion were you?

VIDOR: I was Protestant.

SIGRIST: In what denomination?

VIDOR: Well, in Austria, they only two, two denominations. One was abbreviated A.B., and other one H.B. The A.B. is Augsburg Confession, translated. And the H.B. is Swiss or Helvetic Confession, and I belonged to the latter. And the church was downtown. Later on when I was in high school, religion was part of the instructions, but the country is predominantly Catholic, Roman Catholic. So we didn't have, we, our religion courses had to be on Saturday. I had to go downtown to the church for instructions on Saturdays. The others had, had it during school hours during the week.

SIGRIST: Were your parents religious themselves, or...

VIDOR: No, not particularly. Not, not particularly.

SIGRIST: (indicating Mr. Vidor's microphone) You might want to be careful about bumping this, because it'll be picked up on the tape.

VIDOR: That's what I just...

SIGRIST: Can you describe a holiday celebration for me? Maybe Christmas, how your family celebrated Christmas growing up?

VIDOR: Yeah. Later on when I was maybe ten, maybe a little earlier. Around that time. I used to go ice skating. Some skating rinks, you had to take a streetcar, subway to get there. And I remember very clearly, especially on Christmas Eve, which was the main day when you celebrated, on the Eve, Christmas Eve, coming back, and my parents were glad to send me skating on Christmas Eve. Then they could fix the tree and everything else. I very clearly remember year after year coming back, getting off the subway, and walking a few blocks to where I lived. And as you, it was dark at that point in time, and you'd see trees being lit up in different houses as you went by. And I remember sort of coming home, and the tree would, I suppose by the time I arrived, maybe it was a little later. But I remember we had a, we always had a big tree. And it was behind closed doors. And then they lit the tree, we had live candles, which now I think what a fire hazard. And then the door was opened, and there's the tree with the presents underneath. And that was on Christmas Eve.

SIGRIST: Is there a Christmas present that sticks out in your mind, something you got one year that made an impression?

VIDOR: No. No. I'm not too sure. I don't think I was coddled with a lot of presents. I think my parents were frugal. And I don't remember any present ever, or anything. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Tell me a little about, about high school, or what our equivalent, your equivalent to our high school would be.

VIDOR: Okay. The school, the high school, which is eight years equivalent, really junior and senior high school, it was all in one building. That was a little ways, maybe a mile, a mile and a half, and you had to walk. You could take a streetcar. I had to walk. And it was, in Austria there were three types of high schools, or middle and high schools. One was where they concentrated on engineering, mathematics and engineering type subjects. Another one was Latin, Greek, the Roman languages, and the third type was sort of in between, a little bit of both. And I went to the former. I went to an engineering type of school. And while in school there were eight, we were there eight years, I was there eight years.

I think there were small classes. I know that in high school, the last four years there were only maybe twenty or twenty-one students. And that was the only class, you know, eighth grade or seventh grade or whatever it might have been. No more than one. We had one girl in sch-- in class. The rest were all boys. One thing was interesting about the high school. I forget now what grade it was, maybe the equivalent of sixth, fifth or sixth grade. We, that particular had made arrangements and then we spent one week out in the country, and learning everything about real life out there. We had, we learned surveying out there, and it was, animals that might be crawling around. We had our lessons under the trees, and it was very nice. And it was, I think it was the only school in Vienna that did that. So, and then I graduated in '36 I think it was.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, about the political climate in Vienna at that time. Because this is, this is just sort of the beginning of the end at this point.

VIDOR: Yes. That's right.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember specifically about that.

VIDOR: Well, I remember, that goes even, back, further back than that. I remember in 1927. I spent part a of summer in some kind of a, some camp not far from Vienna in July. And while I was there they sort of a, I wouldn't say typical, but they had a little revolution. And the Justice Department building was burned, burned down. I remember that. So that was a little political upheaval at that time. That was '27. And then, well during high school, you mean --- you ask about later on. I don't, I wasn't particularly politically interested in politics, but there were, well, let me back up a little bit.

My father was in the First World War, and he was quite a strong monarchist, even afterwards. He, he, he was, I guess he was in the reserves, because I remember I have a picture of him in maybe 1920,

'21, which was after the first world war, being out there in the, in the palace in front of some troops, with his saber and all that stuff. So he was a monarchist type. But I remember in the '30's, there were several political parties. One was the one, I can't think of the name now, but one was were Dolphuss was the chancellor, and he was I suppose, well, calling him a dictator is a little bit strong. But he was a strong person. And I think that's the beginning of the end of Austria. Because af-- he was assassinated. I don't know when, but in the mid '30's maybe.

And then the chancellor became a man by the name of Schuschnigg. And it was during his regime that the Germans then came in. But Schuschnigg, well, both of them were fervent nationalists, Austrian nationalist. But then there were the other parties that were, some were Nazi parties, some were communist, communist parties. They had some that they were sort of a military, more military oriented. And, well, that's about all I remember. I want to go back about something else, speaking about, it relates to political parties.

In Vienna we had since the end of the Second, First World War, we had a lot of what is called here public housing, housing for low income families. I think most of those years, we had a social democratic regime. So that would fit. And huge projects and building all over the city. But many of them were put at strategic locations, like at the head of bridges. Near bridges. So in case of an uprising they could control the approaches to the city, or strategic points. And they were designed so they had like a parapet, parapet on top. And I remember, I'm not sure whether it was in 1927, or maybe there was another little uprising in '33 or in the early '30's where they used those buildings for that very purpose, the military. And I remember seeing the results of artillery shells going right through from one end to the other, across. And they had court yards with arches. And they would go right through and in one end and out the other. So I remember that. That has a little bit to do with political parties.

SIGRIST: Was this a scary time to be living in Vienna, or did you just kind of...

VIDOR: I was, I was, I, no, I don't think it was particularly scary. I didn't pay much attention to it, to tell you the truth.

SIGRIST: What did your father think of all of this?

VIDOR: I don't know. I don't think we discussed it much. I was, I was sort of oblivious. I was young and oblivious to all that was going around me, really. I wish now I hadn't been, but...

SIGRIST: It's a very important time in history.

VIDOR: It was an important time in history, and, but I was just doing my thing, and that was that. And I was in school all those years.

SIGRIST: Now did you get a job when you got out of school?

VIDOR: No. When I got out of school, of high school, I went to an engineering college, technical college, for one year. And that was '36 to '37. But at that point in time, the political situation got more shaky, and we had conscript-- conscription in Austria. I guess ever since the end of the First World War. And I don't know at what time they called you at service, eighteen, I guess. I don't think I was eighteen, but if you're, if you're finished, if you're a high school graduate, you could volunteer and get it over with. And you could also choose the service you that wanted to be in. And would you believe they had a navy even in Austria on the Danube. A couple of ships. So in '37 I, my parents thought it'd be best to get the damn thing over with, because it looked pretty bleak. So I, I signed up in O.C., the equivalent of O.C.S., Officer Candidates School.

And you serve for -- you're supposed to serve for a year. And I was assigned to a engineering battalion, building pontoon bridges. And that's where I was at the time March 38th came along, with, when Hitler took over. And I was in service, in the Austrian army. And my service ended sort of dramatically or suddenly. We had to show German officers that came by to inspect all the time how we built bridges, pontoon bridges. And all of, all of us in the service there, being sort of young and stupid, we, we, we demonstrated how to build the bridges, but that was long before mechanized equipment was around.

So you had to carry all the parts, component parts of a bridge from where it was stored to the water. And some of those beams they use on which the planks are laid on top, they are all heavy, so they had huge holes in them to lighten the weight. And the way you carried them from where they were stored to the water is they put a hole, a big long pole through a hole up in front of the beam and another one through a hole in the back, and on each end of the pole there would be one man. And the pole would be lying across your, what do you call this here inside of your arms. And that's the way four people carry one of those huge beams down to the water. And it was a little ways to the water. And so we, we made believe we were playing airplanes, pilots. And sort of banking around the curve, you know, (he laughs) walking. And the, the beams started to slide. And when it got to my arms, I let go. And it, it fell on my foot, and I had several multiple fracture there. So I ended up in the hospital, and ultimately I got a military discharge. So that ended my military career.

SIGRIST: But probably at a good time...

VIDOR: Probably at a very, a very good time, because that enabled me to be able without any particular problems to get out of the country.

SIGRIST: When did you first want to leave the country?

VIDOR: Well, I had no particular, I really, it wasn't my idea. It was my parent's idea. And...

SIGRIST: They'd been thinking about this all along?

VIDOR: Well, I suppose so. But while I was in service, of course, there wasn't anything that could be done about it anyhow. Well, it was a combination of things, I suppose, that motivated my parents. One was the economic situation. It hadn't been very good anyhow, all along. And it was still sort of the end of the Depression at that time. And then the military situation, or the political, no, the political situation wasn't all that good either. And by the time I was in service Hitler had already invaded the Sudetenland, and earlier part of the Saar in France, and it got hotter all the time. So I think my parents thought that this was not a good place to be.

SIGRIST: Did they have relatives in America?

VIDOR: No.

SIGRIST: Then why America? Why did they want to come to America?

VIDOR: Well, I guess you should know. Everybody wants to come to America, I suppose.

SIGRIST: Yeah, but...

VIDOR: Well, the opportunities.

SIGRIST: Some people were going to South America at that time, and...

VIDOR: Well, I suppose. I don't know. We had, well, we didn't have any relatives here, but somebody, maybe you can call him a relative, I had never heard of him before, some very, very distant somebody. And so they contacted him, for, you had to have an affidavit to, that you would not become a public charge, to get a visa. So they got that through him.

SIGRIST: When you were a kid growing up, what did you know about America? How did you perceive America?

VIDOR: Nothing. The only thing I, you know, America is gangsters, or, or Indians. That's about all. I didn't, I didn't think much of one way or another. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: The movies colored your view of America. (he laughs)

VIDOR: Well, I'm not even sure about movies. I think it was more books.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

VIDOR: But, no, I had no particularly feelings one way or the other. But I, I know now especially that my parents were right, that there was no future there. And I do know that it was difficult. And if you had a job you better hung onto it for the rest of your life. And that wasn't too good an idea.

SIGRIST: When, when the decision was finally made to come to America, was there a long gap of time while they were trying to get papers? Of course, this is a rather tumultuous time.

VIDOR: Yeah. Well, it was. I think I applied for the visa as soon as I got out of the army, which must have been in the late spring or early summer of 1938. (he pauses) And it got, politic, the climate got worse at that point in time. And we found out the visa wasn't available yet. You had to wait. So in September, I think it was September of '38. That's when Hitler went into some other country there -- maybe the rest of Czechoslovakia or someplace. So my parents decided we better, you know, better get out because they were calling up more men for the service. So I went to, to Budapest where I had cousins. My father's brother lived there and his family. So I spent three months there. And, and the situation got even worse by that time. And I guess my uncle, and maybe, probably in consultation with my parents decided it was better to go out, get to the western world, to England. And I had some friends in England.

But the only way you can get from Budapest to the western world without going through German territory was by boat through Italy or, or across some other countries into France and what have you. And, of course that was all German dominated, some of those countries. So, and I think I could-- they wouldn't let me stay in Budapest longer than three months, the authorities. So I spent a short time in Zagreb, in Yugoslavia. I don't remember anything about it other than having been there. And then, what I now think was in the nick of time, took a train, it was through Italy, I think, into France. And then I went on to, to England. And I don't recall exactly when I came to England. But I stayed in England until 19, February, 1940.

SIGRIST: So this is taking a span of time that...

VIDOR: Yeah, it was taking a span of time. Yeah, about a year, maybe.

SIGRIST: Now was the intention to meet your parents in England? I mean, were you intending to all travel together to this country?

VIDOR: I've been asking myself that same question. I think the answer was no. I think my parents, I'm not aware of it, but my parents I think felt they were too old to go all this adventure, and they preferred to stay there. That's what I think. I don't think we ever discussed it. And I don't recall ever, anything about meeting my parents someplace or other. So...

SIGRIST: What do you remember about this, this trek across Europe, being on the train, and, I, this, this is quite an adventure.

VIDOR: The only thing I, yeah. The only thing I remember, really, is leaving Vienna on the train for Budapest. And I had sort of a, after the train left, I sort of really felt lost. All by myself there, going into an adventure. And I felt very sad and lost. But after that, I was

sort of on my own, and I don't remember too much about any emotional thing.

SIGRIST: Were you in communication with your parents during this whole process?

VIDOR: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, at least, at least until the war broke out in, in England in 1939. And then we were still in communication through some friends I had in Switzerland. That way.

SIGRIST: When, when had you booked your steamship ticket?

VIDOR: Well...

SIGRIST: Did you wait till you got to England to do that, or was that already...

VIDOR: I, no, I had, no, that's a good, I don't, I don't know. I don't remember anything about steamship ticket. It may, it may have been through some refugee organization. And probably in England. I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of luggage you were carrying, or what you were bringing with you to America?

VIDOR: No, not really. All I remember was I had a, I had a photo album, and I had a stamp collection. (he laughs) And I had twelve dollars. And that's about all I remember. So, I'm sure it wasn't much. And I remember those things.

END OF SIDE ONE BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: ...How long were in? Were you in Southampton? Is that where...

VIDOR: No, I was in, I was in Maidstone, England, which is in Kent. I, I spent, well, it must have been early '39. About a year.

SIGRIST: Where did you live while you were in England?

VIDOR: I had some friends, and, in Maidstone. That's why I was there, and that's where I stayed with them. And, and I, as an alien I couldn't work, but I did some, I did some work right after the war broke out, I did volun-- I'm not sure whether I volunteered or whether they paid me, but I worked in the blood transfusion center. Sort of a war effort.

SIGRIST: Did you speak any English?

VIDOR: Well, I had English in school for a number of years. English and French. French, actually from probably eight years in school, maybe more, and English four or five years. I spoke some, but I learned it more there.

SIGRIST: What other recollections do you have before breaking out in England? I mean, what do you remember, if anything, did you see anything first hand, or...

VIDOR: No. But, of course, you were shocked, really, I was shocked by the war. Shocked, yes and no, I mean, it was expected. No, I mean, the only thing I remember is blackouts, and various, I'm proud of the fact that I don't get lost. Good sense of direction. But I remember in one of those blackouts I visited somebody, took a bus to the end of the line, and I, it was in evening. And I tried to remember exactly when I got off the bus to go straight and not turn left and so forth, so that when I come back to the bus I know. It was pitch black. But I know, all of a sudden coming back to the bus I got lost, and I found myself in front of a tree. (he laughs) But I heard the bus later on, so I followed the sound.

SIGRIST: Of course this is a scary time in England.

VIDOR: It was a scary time. And it was dark, blackout, and it was wintertime, anyhow. It was dark. So. But I don't, where, in Maidstone there weren't any air raids or any, anything of that sort that I remember. I'm quite sure there wasn't. I was also quite involved in the boy scouts, both at home in Austria and in England, and I made a lot of friends that way.

SIGRIST: Because you were Austrian, did you experience any kind of prejudice in England, because of the war and any kind of...

VIDOR: No. No, not at all. No. I guess maybe the people who I associated with, they, who they associated with were all quite liberal maybe, or something, I don't know. No. But the answer to your question is no.

SIGRIST: When you say were, because you're what, twenty, at this point, right?

VIDOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So, you say you were associated with the boy scouts. What were you doing, because that's sort of old to be a boy scout, isn't it?

VIDOR: Well, I was, I was boy scout, well I started out as a boy scout at home, and then became a boy scout leader, scout, troop leader, and that kind of thing. And I went to international jamborees and, but I participated in, the only thing I remember about scouts is, in England, was I went to some summer camp, or some camp. Must have been summertime, and camped there with them. I don't recall any, being involved too much in any, with any particular troop or anything.

SIGRIST: Do you miss your parents and your home in Vienna, or are you still pretty much caught up in the adventure of it all?

VIDOR: Well, I think, the older I get the more I miss my parents. I really miss them more now than I did. No, I'm not, Vienna I don't miss at all.

SIGRIST: But when you were in England at this point.

VIDOR: Oh, in England. I suppose I did.

SIGRIST: You said you were communicating with them then.

VIDOR: Yeah, I was communicating with them. But I suppose I did. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you realize, you may not know the answer to this, but when you were in England waiting for all of this to leave, did you realize that they weren't going to be coming with you?

VIDOR: Well, I think I began, that began to sink in a little more, especially with the war having broken out, that it was virtually impossible at that point in time. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So when was it that you finally went to the, to get the boat?

VIDOR: In February of 1940, when, I remember going. At first, I had some very distant cousins in Edinborough. So I went from Maidstone to Edinborough to visit. And then to Liverpool where the boat was leaving. That was in February, '40.

SIGRIST: Did your friends come down to say good-bye to you, or do you remember any of that?

VIDOR: No, I don't remem-- I don't suppose so. I don't remember. But I, not the ones from Edinborough. And I think the ones from Maidstone, because I didn't get back to Maidstone. I just went directly to Liverpool.

SIGRIST: Do you know what the name of the boat was?

VIDOR: I think it was, it was a Cunard, Cunard line. And I think it was Britannia, but I'm not sure about that. I don't have any records of it, either.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you slept on the boat?

VIDOR: No. I don't remember. It's, it's sad, but I, I don't remember a thing about the pa, the whole passage, except arriving in New York in the harbor and seeing the Statue of Liberty in the morning. That's, I don't remember where I slept, what we ate, anything. (he laughs) Maybe it was too exciting or something, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick maybe, or...

VIDOR: No.

SIGRIST: No?

VIDOR: No. No.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long it took?

VIDOR: No, but it must have taken five, six days, probably. And I don't re, I don't know whether we came in a convoy, probably not. No, I remember absolutely nothing. I, my kids have asked me and, and I just don't remember anything about that.

SIGRIST: But you do remember coming into New York Harbor.

VIDOR: I remember coming in New York Harbor in the morning, it was morning. Seeing the Statue of Liberty. That, that's, I remember, and of course, sure, because you don't, never forget that. So.

SIGRIST: So you probably don't remember who else is travelling. Are there other...

VIDOR: I haven't the slightest idea. Didn't know any, I don't think I knew anybody on the boat.

SIGRIST: Well, what happened then? What happened when you came into New York Harbor? You saw the Statue of Liberty. Then what happened?

VIDOR: Then, again, I was supposed to be met by, I had a, I had several friends that had emigrated to the United States before I did. And one of them was supposed to meet me in the, at the, at the boat when I arrived. But for some reason, and I still haven't the slightest idea, I didn't get off the boat when I came to Ellis Island. And, and I remember, I asked somebody to note if somehow or other to get in touch with this guy, that I wouldn't be there, that, you know, that I would get off the, off the, the ship. And then I ended up here in Ellis Island. And I haven't the slightest notion whether this was, whether I stayed here for one hour, or six hours. I don't think it was over night, because I do remember taking a ferry boat back to Manhattan from here, to the Battery. And it was evening. But I've been with this friend of mine who was supposed to meet me. And he doesn't recall at all anything about meeting me. Even earlier when, when he should have met me and I wasn't there. So I, again this is sort of a blank. And I stayed, but I stayed, I stayed with, he, they-- he, they lived in New York. And I stayed with him for a week. His brother really was a classmate of mine in Vienna. We were close friends. But I thought his, this friend of mine, his brother was in New York at the time, but when I ask him he said no, he wasn't. So I stayed in New York for, for a week. And then I left and went to Utica, New York.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of, of being here at all at Ellis? I mean, what it looked like, or...

VIDOR: No. No. Abs, no...

SIGRIST: Nothing?

VIDOR: ...nothing. Nothing.

SIGRIST: Like the ship? It's just kind of...

VIDOR: It was, it was overwhelming. I haven't, I haven't, the more I thought about it, more recently, the more I think the reason I was here was because of my military service in Austria, but I, I wouldn't be sure. That's the only explanation I have of being here in the first place.

SIGRIST: I mean, do remember any kind of, of questions...

VIDOR: No, I don't remember absolutely nothing.

SIGRIST: Nothing. Well now, why did you go to Utica of all places?

VIDOR: Well, I got a job, I went there because I had a job there, and I think, that I reasonably sure I got through some refugee organization.

SIGRIST: While you were in New York, they hooked you up with...

VIDOR: Well, I don't know whether it was while I was in New York, because I don't recall going to any here in New York. (he laughs) And I don't recall going to any in, in England either. But, but it's more likely, and it is possible, it is possible that this refugee organization paid for my passage. And it is possible that that may have had a bearing on my being inter, interviewed, or whatever they, interrogated here in, in Ellis Island, because maybe the question was, can I support myself, or. So that's another possibility, but, but I don't remember any specifics.

SIGRIST: It's all conjecture?

VIDOR: Yeah. So I went, I had this job that was promised me there. And that's why I went to Utica.

SIGRIST: Before you left for Utica, you said you were in New York for a week.

VIDOR: Yeah, for about a...

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that week, if anything? Did you see anything in New York...

VIDOR: Oh, yeah, oh yes.

SIGRIST: ...that you hadn't seen before, or...

VIDOR: Oh, yes. Of course, obviously, all the skyscrapers and all. Yeah, oh yes, I remember, well, I don't remember, I don't really remember much, but I can just imagine that I must have been all over the place, and gone here and looked at everything. And I remember trying to make a contact with that person that gave me the affidavit. He had a, he had

some kind of a factory here in New York, in lower, lower Manhattan. And they lived on Long Island. And I think I called him, and he said come and visit me at, at my office. And I'm reasonably sure I did. And I don't think he was particularly interested in me and my future, and I was, I couldn't care less. But I do remember, I vaguely remember that I asked, that I asked him for some money, a little bit of money so I could buy a radio. And that upset him. And I think that was the last time I touched base with him anyhow. So, so then I went to Utica, on a bus. And I remember going, Utica is in the Mohawk valley, and you coming down, you see the city in the morning, it was overnight, overnight bus. And it was a beautiful day and see the city down there in the valley. It was nice.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Utica?

VIDOR: Well, just about a year. And then I was drafted in the American army. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about that year in Utica...

VIDOR: Okay.

SIGRIST: ...because, of course, you're a rather cosmopolitan person. You've lived in Vienna, and have been a lot of places, and Utica is, you know, sort of in the middle of nowhere.

VIDOR: Well, my, that's right, yeah, that's right. But it was a new experience.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the job that you got.

VIDOR: Well, the job was a very simple job. It was in a radiator factory, in the lab. And I was testing sand, before it goes in the, from the, for the foundry. And that's about all I did this year. It was nothing special. They taught me that the first day. And, but I made some contacts there. I met some nice people.

SIGRIST: Where did you live while you...

VIDOR: And I stayed, well I, at first I stayed in the Y when I arrived. And probably, I don't know, maybe a month perhaps. And having been sort of an outdoor type, I somehow or other got connected with a hiking club in, in Utica. And through that connection I moved to -- one of the old ladies that owned the house there, and offered me a room there in the house. And that's where I stayed, and she, she became sort of my adopted grandmother.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what her name was?

VIDOR: Yeah. Her name was Sarah Mayberry.

SIGRIST: Mayberry.

VIDOR: She was a music teacher. Piano teacher. And she was a real motherly type, and just what I needed, I guess. So, and I, but I did, I was, I got, again got involved with some scouts. And I got involved in church, with a church group. And so, I was involved...

SIGRIST: The same, the Helvetian...

VIDOR: Well, no, they, well, no, that was Lutheran. I mean it was just a Lutheran church.

SIGRIST: The Lutherans.

VIDOR: It was Missouri, happened to be, no, it wasn't Missouri Synod. But it was the Lutheran church. So I was involved there. And you meet all kinds of people. And I went, Utica is not far from the Adirondacks. So whenever I could I hitchhiked up in the Adirondacks and spent the weekend there.

SIGRIST: What are you, are you writing to your parents?

VIDOR: Yeah. Through Switzerland.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's right. Because it's war time. So there probably...

VIDOR: Well, that was war time over there. It hadn't, there was no, no, not here.

SIGRIST: Right. Right. But in terms of getting mail over there.

VIDOR: Yeah, it was through Switzerland.

SIGRIST: So they were actually receiving...

VIDOR: Yeah, yeah. They were receiving mail. And I was receiving mail.

SIGRIST: They were still in Vienna?

VIDOR: They were still in Vienna. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What are you telling them about America?

VIDOR: Oh, I don't, I don't remember. (he laughs) I don't...

SIGRIST: Did you want them -- did you want them to think this was a wonderful thing for you, or did you want them to think that you missed them terribly? Do you remember how you were...

VIDOR: Now you put me on the spot, because obviously I should say yes, I missed them terribly. And I probably did...

SIGRIST: Not nec...

VIDOR: I probably did.

SIGRIST: Not necessarily.

VIDOR: No. I probably did. I don't remember. I probably did.

SIGRIST: I'm just curious how you wanted them to perceive you in America.

VIDOR: I, I don't know. I imagine I just describe what I was doing. And maybe they asked some questions and I answered them. I, I, I haven't the slightest idea. And later on, unfortunately now I threw away all the letters. I had them all collected, and I threw them away. I figured, what's the use. So...

SIGRIST: So you get drafted. This is an interesting twist to the story.

VIDOR: So I get drafted. And, well, I didn't have to, I got dra-- I got my call. And since I wasn't a citizen, I could refuse it. But my chances of being, becoming naturalized later would have been somewhat less, I'm sure. And I didn't mind. And I figured, well, it's another adventure. So I was drafted, and, on April Fool's Day. April 1st, 1940, '41, 1941, yeah.

SIGRIST: Into what division of the military?

VIDOR: Into the seacoast artillery. Strictly, accident, you know, nobody ask. And if they asked, they didn't pay any attention to the answer anyhow. So I was drafted, and I went to Fort Eustis in Virginia for basic training. And then I ended up in the Harvard Defenses of Boston, and I was there on and off three, I was there, and I then I went to some special training back to Virginia and back to Boston again, and back to Virginia again, back and forth. And...

SIGRIST: What are you thinking about what's going on in your, this time, at, you know, in 1941 and '42 and '43? What are you...

VIDOR: Well, in '40, when I was, '41 when I was in the service, well, I became more conscious of the fact that the, it was getting worse and worse and worse, and war had already broken out in Europe, of course. And, but, you know, the idea at that time was you're in for one year, and, here, and then you're out of the service again. So that was, everybody was hoping, well, before April 1st, 1941, '42. And I remember that the war broke out and that, that was the end of that. So, but that didn't phase me any. But later, well, I was made a staff sergeant fairly quickly, because I think I was a little more adept at adjusting to the military situation than a lot of the draftees. So that's why I went to all those kind of specialist schools. And then I wanted to go to O, O.C.S., and of course without being a citizen you couldn't. But they changed the laws and, must have been early in '42 that if you were in the service, you were an alien and you were in the service, you could become a citizen right away. So in, in May '42 I became a citizen just about two years after I arrived.

SIGRIST: Was that always your intention, from...

VIDOR: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: So, there was never any intention that you would return to Vienna after the war.

VIDOR: No. No. No. That was definite. Yeah.

SIGRIST: You were here to stay.

VIDOR: I was here to stay. So, I became a citizen in May, and in the summer or fall I went to O.C.S. again in Virginia in Fort Monroe.

SIGRIST: Did you ever see your parents again?

VIDOR: No. Never did. And then of course when war broke out (he pauses), the communication even through Switzerland became more difficult. And I was in service, so I didn't write. But this grandmother, Miss Sarah Mayberry, communicated with them. And, but then that stopped. I don't when, but stopped. And the only conclusion that I came to was, later on when it was '43 maybe, '44, '43 I guess, that we lived not too, well, they had, my parents moved from where I had been brought up to a different part of the city. That I knew because I had, had the address. And it was near a railroad station, one of the bigger railroad stations. And my guess is that we bombed the hell out of that whole section there, and so that's, they were victims of that.

SIGRIST: I see. So it wasn't a matter of after the war you then regained communication with them. You just never heard...

VIDOR: No, I never did. And I, frankly I, somehow or other I decided what's passed is passed, and I didn't want to make any effort. Because they, they could have communicated, they could have found me through this Miss Mayberry.

SIGRIST: Sure.

VIDOR: But they, obviously they didn't. So I figured it's, it's very likely that they were bombed out. So, and what's the used of trying. I figured there's no, no use trying to figure out what happened.

SIGRIST: Did you...

VIDOR: So I sort of broke with the past.

SIGRIST: Well, now when was the first time you returned to Austria?

VIDOR: Well, all depends. During the war, at the end of the war. Well, I have to give you a little, can I back up a little bit?

SIGRIST: Sure.

VIDOR: I was in the coast artillery. And after O.C.S., they sent me to Los Angeles for, I was stationed there in the harbor defense of Los, Los Angeles. And then from there I was sent to the Aleutian Islands. And this is a God forsaken place. And I tried during all this, ever since I got out of O.C.S. to be assigned to Europe so I can do some more good with language and all that. But I got nowhere. But when I was in the Aleutians, one day my batter commander says, "Lieutenant, will you take my cat to the colonel down on the other end of the islands. He wants to mate his cat with mine." So I says, "Yes, sir." So I took a jeep and the cat and went down on the other end of the island.

And that colonel, there was a colonel down there. He had just gotten a package of food from the states. And he offered me candy or whatever, I don't remember what it was. But he said, sit down, and so I sat down, and I was a lowly second lieutenant and he was a full colonel. So we got talking though. He was very friendly. And I bitched about the fact that there I was stuck in the Aleutian Islands, when I could be better used, and I got nowhere, you know. So he said, I'll fix you up. So apparently he had a buddy in the war department, G2, military intelligence section, that he communicated with, and, oh, within three weeks I guess, I was flown out of there, back to the states. And I went to military inte-- intelligence school here for three months. And then went to Europe. So, this is back to Europe, now. Back to your question when, that is, when did I see Austria again.

SIGRIST: Is this still during the war, or is this after the war?

VIDOR: Oh, no, no. This was in forty, forty...

SIGRIST: Three?

VIDOR: Forty-three, I, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. So, right in the heart of it.

VIDOR: Yeah. I left -- left the Aleutians on February 29th, '44, I know it was leap year. It was that date February 29th that I left, came back to the states. So in the summer of '44, I went back to Europe, after having been here for three months in school. And I was assigned to Hol, Holland First Airborne Division. And the military intelligence service had a, not a, sort of a staging area in England, and, from which they assigned you to different outfits. I was supposed to interrogate prisoners of war. That was the job. And then you get attached to different units. So I was attached to the First Airborne. And we were supposed to go, so I joined the Holland First Airborne in England. And they were supposed to first go into, this was after the invasion of Normandy.

So first they were supposed to go into somewhere near Paris, or somewhere, and they were all ready to go, and then Patton got there first, and then go someplace else, and Patton got there first. So finally we did go, and went in to Holland. We were there for three months, and came back to, to England, to France, to Reims, to a staging area. And then the Battle of the Bulge broke out. And I went to

Bastogne. And then coming back from Bastogne, I was assigned to the twelfth corps, some, some headquarters. And went with them through Germany. And at the end of the war I was stationed in Regensburg, which is Bavaria just north of Austria a little bit. And the day the war ended, another fellow and I, we decided we were going to Austria and just look around.

So we took a jeep, and we had permission, took a jeep, and went into Austria, and got the lake district, Salzburg, and that area there. And spent maybe a week or so, just having a good time. And I got as far east as Linz on the Danube, but never further. The Russians were beyond that. So that was as far, that was my first re-entry into Austria, right after the war. Then I had some cousins in Prague. And some how or other I did communicate with them after the war, when I was still in Regensburg. And we met in (he pauses), where? In some town in Czechoslovakia. I forget now where. And that was, that was weird, because I had to drive through the Russian occupation, you know, all the Russian troops were there along the way. But that's, I never got back into Austria. And then the first time I really went back was in seventy, seventy-six?

SIGRIST: And you went into Vienna?

VIDOR: In '76? Yes. In '76, my wife and I, we spent a month in, in Austria.

SIGRIST: And, and in our last two minutes here, tell me what it was like to be back in Vienna, if it had any kind of emotional impact on you at all.

VIDOR: No, not particularly. No.

SIGRIST: Of course, you had seen a great deal of life since you ...

VIDOR: In fact, it had changed, yeah. I was amazed really at how little it had changed. But I looked at it with different eyes, and everything was smaller. And, and, no, but I had no, no sentimental attachment to it. And Vienna was never my great love. Salzburg and the mountains. I was always more interested in that, anyhow. So, but that's the first time. And since then I've been back two or three times. So.

SIGRIST: Are you glad that your parents kind of made the decision to send you off to America?

VIDOR: Yes, indeed. Yes. Yeah. I, I know, I don't know what I would be, where I would be, what I would do if I hadn't come here. I'm sure it wouldn't have been good or as pleasant or as nice.

SIGRIST: Do you think things would have been a lot different had your parents come here with you?

VIDOR: I don't know. Because they were getting older, and it's much more difficult to adjust. I, I mean, I don't know how they felt about losing me, their only son, their only child. They must have felt

probably worse than I did in a way. So, had they come with me it might have been easier for them. No, I just, no, I adjusted. I figured I take care of myself, and tried to do that.

SIGRIST: Only children are always so independent.

VIDOR: (they laughs) Maybe. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Vidor, I want to thank you very much for giving us an hour of your time, and letting us have you tell your story for us on tape for the Oral History Project. Thank you.

VIDOR: Well, it was my pleasure.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Franz Vidor on Monday, July 26th, 1993, at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, up in the recording studio with the portable equipment. Thank you.

EI-358/VIDOR