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NASH: Today I am interviewing Walter Michael, who came to this country in 1940. He came from Germany. Mr. Michael is going to tell us his story. Mr. Michael, where did you come from?

MICHAEL: I came from Germany. To be exact, from Leipzig, a town on Saxony, where I come from a family which were my parents and one older brother. my father was a doctor on Leipzig and during the 1930s when the Nazis came to power, life became more difficult and in order to further my education my parents felt that it would not be advisable to remain in Germany, but rather sent me to an engineering college in Czechoslovakia.

However, in 1938 the Germans took over the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, so-called Sudeten Territory, and a friend of mine and I just managed to leave Czechoslovakia about one day before the border was closed. We fled to Finland via Warsaw where I remained for the next two years. This had been kind of an important escape while we were attending a technical fair in Prague, and it was on the spur of the moment that we read the news that we decided not to go back to college and to opt to go to Finland. Well, I stayed in Finland, as I said, for about two years and in the first year I didn't study on my own. Finish was a rather difficult language, but Finland is bilingual. They also speak Swedish there, and between knowledge of German and English it was possible to pick up that language quite well and to make use of their libraries and other facilities since I could not matriculate at the time. In the meantime World War II had started and Germany was at war with France, England, and the other Western powers, and they had also concluded a nonaggression treaty with Russia. When Russia started to take over the various Baltic countries, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, they also made demands on Finland, which then to the unprovoked attack by Russia on Finland in November of 1939. At that time I and many other people joined the Finish Army in order to assist that country and also quite a few Finno-Americans came from the United States to assist in that particular war. Well, no matter how well the Fins fought, and there are many stories about that, the eventual result could be anticipated. So that after three and a half months, then the Russians put more strength into their attack. A peace treaty was concluded there in March of 1940.

NASH: What part did you play in that?

MICHAEL: Well, as I say, I joined the Army, but not speaking Finnish, I belonged to group called the Osastu Sisu, which was kind of an interesting group of volunteers from other countries, mainly from the United States and all over,

including certain people from Germany who were over there. Before I joined them I was in the anti-aircraft. I had one of those observer posts in a church tower in Helsinki, but then eventually I joined that group and we were in ski infantry training near Lappa in the central part of Finland not far from Brahestad. But before we were ever able to be engaged, this short war was over, three and half months. Actually, I never did see any action other than the air attack in Helsinki. But as a result of having been in the Army, the Fins gave me permission to work so that, with my technical background and language knowledge I was able to work for a patent lawyer and translate patent applications back and forth between Swedish, German, and English. In the meantime, I had taken steps to come to the United States, and because it takes a little while for these affidavits to be obtained, to be processed and so on--

NASH: You knew people in the United States who would be your sponsors?

MICHAEL: Yes, my sponsors were distant relatives that immigrated from germany in about 1830, in the 1830s, and these distant relatives were providing an affidavit for me. In fact, my visa for the United States was available to me back in January of 1940, and the American Consulate contacted me while I was in the Finnish Army, but feeling that I was involved there, I tried to finish up that particular item, and when I reported back in March of 1940 then I had to wait my turn, and my turn came in late October of 1940. But as I mentioned before, World War II had broken out and , of course, the Atlantic was also the battle scene and all kinds of shipping, no matter where it came from, was being stopped and was being examined by both the Germans and the British. In order to minimize the disruption of sea traffic, Finland had made an arrangement with the Germans and with the English that they would provide the manifest of their cargo to both of these countries' Embassies in Helsinki and also give them a copy of the passenger list. So that once that had been cleared, the vessel would then

proceed unhampered. Well, for some reason the germans cleared me so, therefore, when the British saw me on the passenger list as a former German national, they were suspicious that the germans had been so gracious, and so they were going to strike me from the list. But fortunately, my brother had married a British girl who happened to be the daughter of a member of the British Parliament, Josiah Wedgwood, the Wedgwood pottery family. While he had nothing to do with the pottery, he was quite active in politics and later on became Lord Wedgwood. My brother, living in South Africa, whom I had contacted, contacted his father-in-law in London, he went to the Foreign Office and vouched for me so that eventually the Embassy cleared me in Helsinki. So the next thing was to get to the ship. The ship was a Finnish vessel, the Masilda Staudon, about 5,000 gross tons, and she was going to repatriate the Fino-Americans that had renamed after this short war, and actually it was just like in the 1800s, some immigrations that were coming into the United States, because as I found out later, instead of carrying cargo in the hole, they had it all equipped with hammocks, so we came over here in hammocks.

NASH: Was it comfortable to sleep on hammocks?

MICHAEL: It was very nice because when you sleep in abed that is fixed and the vessel goes up and down, you get seasick. If you are in a hammock, it swings with the waves so it was a little bit of an advantage maybe. Furthermore, in order to avoid all the problems, they were not going to go through the Baltic Sea and the North Sea, but the vessel was to depart from the Octaci up from Piekamaki, which is not very far from Romansk, way up north in Finland. So to get there we had to take the train to a place called Rovaniemi in Lapland, and then from there it was a bus connection over secondary roads or third class roads, up to the (?). We embarked and we had not been out more than maybe a day when a German battleship came and escorted us into a Norwegian port. This was, of course, quite

contrary to the arrangements, but nothing could be done at the time. Amongst the volunteers that had been assisting the Fins, there were also some British volunteers. One of them was the brother of the movie actress at that time, June Dupre, and when he and his friends realized the Germans were coming aboard and that they might find the British passports in addition to the false passports having been given them by the Fins to make things easier for them to get back, they tore up their British passports, of course, and anyway, nothing happened. We were all cleared and we left. In order to avoid any further problems, the captain tried to go north of Iceland, but the weather was too bad. We had to turn back because of ice. In late October, early November ice had formed, so that we had to go south of Iceland and sure enough one bright morning a British battleship came up and they stopped us too. They sent a boarding party to the vessel and eventually, of course, we also got cleared and were let go except that the two or three British volunteers identified themselves and instead of having to go to the United States and then to Canada and then from Canada to England, they were taken along because the battleship apparently was going back to England in a very short time. Well, we arrived in New York on Election Day in 1940 and we were out in the bay while the election results were being broadcast over the radio announcing the re-election of Franklin Roosevelt.

NASH: How long did the entire trip take you?

MICHAEL: It took, I believe it was something more than two weeks, between two and three weeks. I think it was from about the 20th or so of October to the 5th or 6th of November.

NASH: How did you feel when you first saw the United States?

MICHAEL: Very good. Very Good. And, of course, there were all kinds of discussions

on shipboard, particularly with those who knew the United States quite well, and I was very much surprised to see at that time too, just as much as we see it today, that the prestige of Franklin Roosevelt abroad was not matched by his prestige in the United States. Many of the Fino-Americans were from the Midwest and they told me all the horrible things, economically, that were going on in the country and they did not at all favor at that time Franklin Roosevelt and, of course, I told them how I felt, like so many people abroad who knew the results of the foresight and foreign policy of the President, and it is somewhat amusing so see that over the years President Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, Kennedy, and so on, abroad they held a much higher esteem for a good part of their presidency than they were domestically. I was received by my second or third cousin, an elderly gentleman in the real estate business here in New York, and the first thing he did was, he felt that having been away from Germany for such a long time, I had yo have a German lunch at a German restaurant on Third Avenue, up in the 70s, at that time still in the shadows of the Elevator which has been torn down in the meantime.

NASH: What did you eat?

MICHAEL: Sauerbraten.

NASH: Let me just go back, when you got off the ship did you have to go through any kind of procedure or what happened to you?

MICHAEL: Well, of course, yes. I just skipped over it because I thought it was pretty much routine, but I mean basically speaking, in the early morning hour after we had been at anchor in the lower bay, somebody came up from Wadsworth, I believe, where the quarantine station was at that time, and interviewed the passengers as to from where they came, health problems, etc. Then the Immigration people came and, of course, the visa was

cleared and no particular problems and, of course, these people then are tourists in the usual sense so they didn't bring anything of interest at customs, so that all was very quick. And actually, by the tome that we docked in Manhattan, I would think it didn't take more than 30 or 35 minutes before the first one got off this vessel. But, of course, we all were very happy to be in the United States. I think I was one of the very few who was really an immigrant. Most of the other people were really returning to the United States or similar to the British volunteers that I mentioned before, were using the United States as a transient on the way to their homes.

NASH: What happened to you after you finished your sauerbraten? How did you proceed to settle?

MICHAEL: Well, at the time that I arrived in the United States I was 21 years old and had an interrupted education, and I did not quite complete my engineering college training so I certainly would have liked to go and complete that. But the fact of life was that I wanted to be as independent as possible regardless of the very kind attitude of my relatives and so the first thing was I was looking for a job. And that had its amusing sides too. I rented a room in the West 70s up between Columbus Avenue and central Park West, in one of these rooming houses, and from there started to look for a job, partly with the assistance with these relatives. Because of my engineering training, I wanted to stay with the air-conditioning, ventilating, heating, etc., and in the course of my search I was referred to the York Ice Company in York, Pennsylvania. That was my first trip in the United States. I took a bus down to York, Pennsylvania and had my meeting with a gentleman who had invited me to come down for an interview. It just so happened that he also was a chairman of the local Rotary and when he heard where I came from and when he heard about the Finnish war and all these sort of things, he was very interested because his niece was junior

reporter on the local paper. So he took me to lunch and he invited his niece to come along and so she interviewed me about the war in Finland and all these other things. That was about a month after I had arrived and for some reason the weather had been unduly warm that November in New York and, of course, it was rather humid. So in the course of my conversation, being asked how I liked it in New York, I mentioned that I wasn't quite used to that humidity because in Finland, even though it gets to be something like 0 degree Fahrenheit in the center of the country, it is very dry and one doesn't really mind it. But the humidity was something new for me and I was commenting on it. Well, I didn't get the job because of all kinds of reasons and I returned to New York and about a week later I got in the mail a copy of the newspaper in which the interview was written up and the picture was in there and all these nice things. But the newspaper particularly was, everything was the way I mentioned it, there was one sub-headline in this article which said, "Does not like the weather here." Apparently, referring to the fact it was too humid in New York. Well, eventually I did get a job with the New York Camera Company and what I did was I assembled certain sub-assemblies for cameras, a job that I did for about three and half to four months. In the meantime my relatives were very pleasant to me and I got to meet one after the other. One of them was a Wall Street lawyer, a very, very learned gentleman who had me up for dinner about once a week. So one evening at dinner he was asking me what my living conditions were, and I explained to him my situation with the rooming house and also that it was very convenient, that it was near the 72nd Street Express Station so that I could take the Express down to 23rd Street where this camera place was. But for breakfast, I couldn't eat eggs and I commented on the fact that at that time breakfast was very cheap, it was 10 cents. You got a glass of orangeade, you got a cup of coffee and you got two daughnutes.

NASH: Daughnutes, you mean donuts?

MICHAEL: Well, that is just the point because my relative perked up and said, Daughnutes, what do you mean by daughnutes?" And I said, Well, you know, those round things with the hole in the middle." And he said, "Oh, you mean donuts," and I said, "Is that what it is?" Then he thought for a moment, and he said, "Well, it is not really so wrong. It is rough and it's tough, actually, why should it be donut?" So, this was one of the many occasions when I found out that my English really wasn't all that good. But then this camera job, of course, was just a short-term arrangement in order to get my feet on the ground and then I saw that I was of draft age and I had just been in the Army in Finland, I felt the best thing I could do was to discharge this responsibility first. So in May of 1941 I volunteered for the draft in order to get my 18 months service in. Well, as everybody knows, we got involved in the war and my 18 months became five years. But it was not an uninteresting time at all. I first was in the anti-aircraft and spent some time down in Georgia training, and then when the war broke out my unit provided anti-aircraft protection in Washington, D.C., the shipyard in Norfolk, and eventually, shortly before the battle of Midway, all the anti-aircraft was pulled over to the West Coast because there was fear that the Japanese might attack the West Coast. That was my lucky break because when I came to Seattle in May of 1941, I, of course, tried to socialize with some of the natives of that town and happened to meet a young girl in June whom I married in August. And thus it happened that she also was born in Germany and had had a similar experience as I, her parents having come from Germany via Russia, Korea, and Japan and settled on the West Coast where they had arrived. So we got married in August and about a month later I was sent to what was then called the Army's Specialized Training Program which was a university program to take advantage of those servicemen who had some skills either in engineering or in languages and further their training for use in military government or in certain engineering facilities. That brought me to the University of Idaho in

Moscow, Idaho where I spent about a year, about nine months. But because of the need for infantry and the manpower shortage that developed in this country, this program was disbanded and most people were sent into infantry replacement depots, and anti-aircraft units were converted too. And so on the eve of being sent to one of these depots from Moscow, I got some special orders which apparently had developed out of some activities I had in the Army regarding foreign intelligence. And so my orders were to stay behind. My wife, who had joined me at the university and in fact was teaching German there, was still there and pretty soon when I got my orders I was sent to a place called Camp Richie, Maryland, near Washington, in the Blue Mountains of Maryland, where people were here, with central European background I would say, Germans, Dutch, French, people who had immigrated under the pressures of the time, and were in the American, were trained to be intelligence specialists either interrogators of prisoners or translators or interpreters or boat intelligence people, etc. And then after some training there I was commissioned and went overseas to England, and then from then--this was in 1944--then to Belgium and on to Germany where my unit of two officers and four men was then attached to various units as the need arose. So we were with Ninth Army Headquarters in Holland, we were with some infantry divisions, part of the Army, and eventually detached, I went to war in the Armored to meet actually the last armored division that had been sent over to Europe as it turned out. I was attached to the armored division until the end of the war. We went through Germany all the way down to the Austrian border and wound up in Braunau, the birth place of Hitler, just as the war was at an end. Then, of course, we all reverted to various pools, that particular division, because it was the last one in and had so little action, were the first slated to be sent to Japan in order to be of assistance over there. That, of course, never occurred, but in the meantime I was attached to another armored division that was doing certain duty in Germany and as such I suddenly found myself in charge of 1,200 German

scientists and their families who had been evacuated from Serenia, and that was before we gave that part of Germany to the Russians for their zone of occupation. And they included people from Sice and Shot and all the large German factories and enterprises that are know to have domiciled there. So whatever that comes from the Germany area in the West, that comes from that area, really had its beginning in Vertenberg, in Heidelheim, where they had been placed for a short period of time. I switched over to military government then and finally, in the summer of 1946, I returned to the United States. I went back to Seattle, Washington, to my wife, and then because of my engineering training, looked for a job and found one with the Boeing Aircraft Company. But that was rather short lived. The defense contracts they cancelled one after the other, and the employees were cut back so that by February of 1947 I had to look for some other occupation.

NASH: At this time you were how old?

MICHAEL: Well, by that time I was 28.

NASH: That's a lot to happen.

MICHAEL: But anyway, just to bring you up to date, if that is of any interest, I always had known that the United States was a country of opportunity and you could start in anything if you really wanted to. So the process of elimination--I wanted to start a family and therefore not wanting to go back to college at that time, I had to decide what I wanted to do and decided on the insurance business, and in particular the marine insurance business because it seemed to be the most uncontrolled business and requiring some personal judgement and certain personal freedom. So I opened the Yellow Pages of the Seattle telephone book and looked under Insurance, Maritime, and came up with about five firms, and it just so happened that

the first one I visited had an opening and so at that time under this Veterans Administration On-The-Job Training, I started my insurance career there and stayed there for a couple of years only to suddenly be called back again to active duty in 1950. I had remained in the reserve and we had some intelligence detachment at the University of Washington which was kind of interesting. All the various professors who were in Intelligence gave lectures instead of--I mean university lectures rather than military training, so we all got quite an education out of it. But as result because of whatever I know, good attendance or something, another young officer and myself had been given, had been put in charge of certain administrative units. It just so happened that these two administrative units were the only ones called up in 1950 and so I found myself again in uniform. But, fortunately, the two years I spent in some kind of fruitful activity, as I would call it, instead of just going all over the lot. I was sent back to Camp Richie, Maryland where I had been trained before. I'm sorry, not at Camp Richie, to Fort Bragg, North Carolina where the intelligence training had been shifted to, and there I began training other people in intelligence and running a language school until I was released. In the meantime we had two children, one born in Seattle and the other one is an Army brat. She was born in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Then, of course, I returned to my company, but they switched to the headquarters in New York, and have been in the marine insurance business ever since. These days I am with the American Hull Insurance Syndicate, the American counterpart, if you will, of Lloyds of London, underwriting the insurance of ships.

NASH: Thank you very, very much, Mr. Michael.