Transcription: Paul Ruska

Today is Monday, May 18th, 2009, and my name is James Crabtree and I'll be interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Ruska. This interview is taking place by phone, and I am located at the General Land Office headquarters in Austin, Texas, and Mr. and Mrs. Ruska are at their home in Abilene. So with that out of the way, sir, ma'am, we'd really like to thank you for taking time today to talk to us. This interview is going to be saved for posterity so that future generations and historians will have a better understanding of your service and sacrifice in the military, and with that said sir, I guess usually where we always start in these interviews is we just ask, maybe tell us a little bit about your boyhood and your background, and what your life was like before you entered the military.

Paul Ruska: All right, I was raised on a small dairy farm in northeastern Ohio, north of Youngstown about 25 miles, and at the age of 20, I was able to get a job in Youngstown at a machine shop, and I worked there for two years. And then I was inducted in the Army the 20th of May 1942. I went from there to Biloxi, Mississippi, and then we took all kinds of tests and I wound up going to radio school, spending six weeks in Scotfield, Illinois. From there, went to gunnery school in Harlingen, Texas, and from there, went to, wound up in Boise, Idaho, as they were building bomber crews for B-17 bomber crews. We spent two or three months there and about June, we flew across to Scotland, and we spent two or three weeks getting indoctrinated to the British ways of doing things in the military, and we wound up in the 8th Air Force in Horham, England, flying B-17's. We were not in the original 95th bomb group.

Tell me a little bit, going back to your childhood in northeastern Ohio, did you have any brothers or friends that entered the service before you went in?

Paul Ruska: I had one brother that entered the service, yes, after I did.

After you had, sir. And do you remember where you were when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

Paul Ruska: I was working in the machine shop in Youngstown, Ohio.

And what were your thoughts immediately? Did you think at that point that at some point you'd be going to war yourself?

Paul Ruska: Well, you see, they were already this point system, not point system, but number system, they were already taking people in the military, so I knew I would eventually wind up in the military.

And when you finally got word that you were going in, what did your friends and your family in particular, your parents, what did they think about you going into the service?

Paul Ruska: I don't know, but at that time, everybody was going in the service, so there was nothing special about it, just personal things.

And it sounds like from what you told us, you went a lot of different places during the course of your training. Tell us kind of what you were thinking during that time as you were going from

one step to another, what your thoughts were or your feelings were about your training and where you were ultimately heading to.

Paul Ruska: After I took a test to go to gunnery school, I knew I was gonna go someplace, and probably to England, flying out of England, but at one point I was scheduled to go to radar school and after I took a physical to go to gunnery school, that took care of that. So I knew I was gonna be in the flying something and at that time, there wasn't too many B-24's, so it was all B-25's or B-17's.

So you were pretty certain that at that point that you were gonna see some sort of action.

Paul Ruska: Oh yes, yes. If you went through gunnery school, you knew darn well you were gonna get, go to start shootin' something.

During that time, did you know Mrs. Ruska?

Paul Ruska: Oh no, we met several years after I got out of the service.

OK, but she's a veteran herself, that's right?

Paul Ruska: Yes.

To ask her real quick, when did she enter the service and that sort of thing?

Paul Ruska: She's sitting here and I have to holler at her.

Oh, OK sir.

Mrs. Ruska: I entered the service in 1943.

1943, yes ma'am, and do you remember where you were when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

Mrs. Ruska: I was at home in Cleveland, Ohio.

OK, so you're from Ohio as well.

Mrs. Ruska: Yes sir.

And what were your thoughts at that point? Did you think that you were gonna enter the military, too?

Mrs. Ruska: No.

No? Tell us a little bit about how you came to enter the service.

Mrs. Ruska: I was working at Cleveland Carbon Company, soldering pitch propeller airplane brushes, and I got carbon poisoning. And the doctor said, at the factory said that I could not go from one factory to another during the war. They thought you'd be a spy. So he said the best

thing you can do is join the service, and we'll pay you a $500 bonus and your first year insurance in the service.

And so you signed up, and where did they send you to at that point?

Mrs. Ruska: Well, I signed up and asked 'em if, they said what do you do? And I said I was a bookkeeper, before working in the factory, and they said OK, we'll send you to Washington to be a bookkeeper, and I ended up in Pensicola, Florida as an aviationist mate.

And how did, and I know this is kind of jumping ahead a little bit, but how did the two of you ultimately end up meeting?

Paul Ruska: We were both working in a department store in Cleveland, Ohio, so that's how we met.

So after the war is when you met.

Paul Ruska: 1947 or '48 we met.

Yes sir, what department store was it out of curiosity?

Paul Ruska: I don't know, anyway –

Yes sir. Well sir, I guess going back to your time then as aboard the bomber crew, tell us a little bit about the men that you were with when you went through training, where they were from and any friendships you might have formed during that training and that sort of thing.

Paul Ruska: Well, when you are in a bombing crew, you're not just friendships, you are a family, and the pilot was from Ohio, the central part of Ohio, Cambridge; the copilot was from Indiana; the bombardier was from California; and the navigator was from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and of course I was the engineer was in let's see, oil fields of Iowa, anyway.

So you came from all sorts of diverse backgrounds.

Paul Ruska: The tail gunner was from West Virginia. One of the men, waist gunners, was from Kentucky. Another waist gunner was from Louisiana, and ball turret gunner was from Wisconsin.

Wow, and how long were you together training as a crew before you went over into action?

Paul Ruska: From January 'til we got shot down which was July 10th, 1943. This is all 1943.

Yes sir. Tell us a little bit if you would sir about what your training was like, in particular from day to day, what things you would do in training to prepare yourself for going into action.

Paul Ruska: You mean as a bomber crew?

Yes sir.

Paul Ruska: Well the most important thing was to get the pilot and copilot to know how to run the plane, and the rest of us didn't have anything to do other than like getting in touch with the radio and we were asked to learn the jobs of each one of the crews if we could, so we just kind of, it was like a vacation while we were in training. We would fly around some night flights, some day flights. Most of them were day flights, just getting the pilot and copilot to know what they were doing. Most of the accidents were caused during the training. That good enough?

Yes sir. I was gonna ask, too, during the practicing training, when you would do missions, would you actually on practicing, would you go out like it was a full-out mission?

Paul Ruska: Oh yes, and we went out, yeah. We would -

Would you live ordinance, or did you use simulated stuff like flower bags and things of that sort?

Paul Ruska: Oh no, no, just, we were just flying around doing this and doing that, and of course I had to keep in contact by radio with all these people, you know, and tell the pilot what's going on. Of course they had headphones on. They could hear, too, anyway. It was just like a mock-up mission.

What was the hardest part about your job in particular?

Paul Ruska: I had a good time. I didn't have any problems.

Yes sir, so you didn't find any of it challenging for you.

Paul Ruska: Only to listen to, of course it was all code, you know, it wasn't voice, and keep practicing, keep up with the listening and practicing code.

So during that time when messages were coming over in code, would you be writing out the code and deciphering it simultaneously?

Paul Ruska: Yes, oh not so much the code, but writing out, you know, the translation of it. We had to pass 20 words a minute, and it wasn't, we didn't copy code, we translated.

Yeah. Tell us a little bit about what it was like the first time you guys left the United States as a bomber crew and headed over into the European theater.

Paul Ruska: We really didn't understand what war was about until we got, this was all like a vacation – we were flying here and flying there, you know – we flew our plane from somewhere up in – no, anyway, across over to Scotland. We were just as happy as could be, you know. Nobody, we didn't know what was going on until after we went on our first flight, and then things kind of changed drastically.

Yes sir. Tell us a little bit about that.

Paul Ruska: Well, you were tense. We were flying 20,000 feet, cold as could be. You know, we had to plug in all our stuff, our flight suits. Of course we had to get up 4 o'clock in the morning to go to breakfast and get all the stuff, instructions, and you know, it was about six hours, or four or five hours before we even got off the ground. And then get up to 20,000 or so feet and it was cold as could be, and always on the lookout for enemy fighters. And of course

that's when you were just as tense as could be, you know. Everybody was lookin'. Nobody said – of course we had radio silence, so there was nothing, all we could do is to look.

What was it like for you the first time you saw an enemy fighter plane in action?

Paul Ruska: It wasn't very pleasant, I'll tell you that.

Yeah.

Paul Ruska: At that time, we had no fighter escort, so this was early in the war. So we were depending on what position you were in the formation, on how safe you felt. When we got shot down, of course we were on the right hand, way out and the last plane on the right in a "V," you know, triangle, so the FOK Wolf 190's could just go right by and pick us off slick as could be.

How many missions, sir, were you on before your crew was shot down?

Paul Ruska: This was my fourth mission. The crew, I went on another mission with another crew one time to St. Nazere. We bombed the subpens, the German subpens. Later I found out that it was useless to go there because the subpens, the concrete on top was 16 feet thick.

Yeah, and you got to penetrate that, sir.

Paul Ruska: Just a waste of a lot of energy and a lot of time and a lot of gasoline and a lot of – for nothing.

What was your feeling after you completed your first mission and returned back to your base?

Paul Ruska: Well, we didn't go very far into, we were bombing mostly plants, and so we just went in, dropped our bombs, came back, you know, and that was it. Nobody, we didn't see any fighters, so that was great, you know.

Did your bomber, did you have a certain number of missions – I've always heard this and I think maybe sometimes it was a bit of a myth, but did your crew, say like after you completed so many number of missions, would they send you home at that point?

Paul Ruska: At that point, it was 25 missions.

25. And was that something that most of the men kind of kept a conscious track of, how many missions they'd been on?

Paul Ruska: Absolutely. You didn't want to hang around when somebody was shootin' at you.

Yeah. Did you know any men at your base that were getting close to their 24th or 25th mission that maybe were superstitious about things?

Paul Ruska: Very shortly. We were, we probably were there two weeks at the base, and I'd keep telling people, we were there, the wrinkles in my clothes didn't even get straightened out by the time I got shot down. We didn't even, the only people we knew were the crew who slept next to us, and one of the members of the crew that slept next to us wound up in Stalag 17, and he remembered me, but I didn't remember him.

Wow. Tell us a little bit then if you would sir, if you don't mind, what your last mission was like.

Paul Ruska: That's the one we got shot down.

Yes sir.

Paul Ruska: Well, we were supposed to go to bomb LaBouchet in Paris, the airport, and it was socked in by bad weather, and the secondary target was Laharve, and on the way, somewhere about halfway between Paris and Laharve, we were attacked by a group of enemy fighters, and being way out on the far right edge of the formation, they came by there head on. They didn't come from the side or the back, they came head on and you could see 20mm shells coming at you, and wondering where they, looking around to see where the holes were, but they were shooting at the engine. The engines caught on fire and when that happened, I could see right through the – right behind the wing of the airplane, because that's where the radio operator was – I could see right through the wing of the airplane because it was all burned out. Finally we went into a dive and things got, we weren't, centrifugal force kept us in the plane. You couldn't get out. And finally over this little town of San __ de Bois, right over the center of the town, the airplane blew up and blew everything out. The four engines went in four different directions and the tail section went in one section, and the wings and everything went in different directions, and I got blown out and after being free of all this force that kept me down, I pulled the ring of the chute, I had a chest chute on, and nothing happened. So I started grabbing and taking the thing, tearing it apart to see, make sure the thing opened, and this was about 1,500 feet, so there wasn't too much time before I was able to turn around, and when I did, there was a church steeple staring me in the face, and I missed the church steeple, but I landed farther on into a pasture. I landed very, very heavy, and tore up my left leg. I didn't break it, but all the way from my ankle, all the way through the back, I was one big sore and I couldn't walk for three months. That is the reason why I was not able to get back to England through the underground. Two of the men, the copilot and the engineer, were able to, they were picked up by people there in the village and taken to the underground and they finally got back. The tail gunner was wounded and they took him to the doctor, and of course the doctor had to report everything to the Germans, so he became a prisoner immediately. And nine months later, I wound up in the same prison camp with him.

Yes sir. Once you were on the ground, I'm sure there was a million things racing through your head, but what was the first thing you thought to do or needed to do at that point?

Paul Ruska: Well the first thing I had to do was get rid of my, get untangled from my parachute, and two ladies came and helped me, and then they, not able to walk, one on each side, I howled and they took me up to a clump of bushes up behind the cemetery, and then one of them went to get their father. He was downtown where all the action was, and parts of the plane, and he came back and gave me a big shot of calvadose and I almost lost my everything, you know, couldn't even breath for about five minutes from the alcohol. Anyway, they took me and hid me. This was 8 o'clock in the morning. So they went and hid me under a little bush out in the field, and I stayed there until about 11 o'clock because at that time, over there they had double daylight saving time, and it didn't get dark until then.

So 11 o'clock at night.

Paul Ruska: Yes. Anyway, a man who also saw me come down, he was one of the neighbors, so he came over, they asked him to come over and carry me into the house, and they were very patriotic, and like most of the French people were, so they were going to do the best they could for me, and Papa George Jenisse was a retired butcher. Now in those days, a butcher raised his cattle, lot cattle, slaughtered cattle, did all the work, make the pates and everything himself, so he knew pretty well whether I had a broken bone or not by feeling, and he found out that I didn't have any broken bones, so I just stayed there, and they were not connected with any underground, so not being able to walk for three months, they were kind of stuck with me. But they took care of me very well.

And that whole time, the Germans didn't know that you were with them.

Paul Ruska: Oh no, no. The only time they knew was when I got caught.

And tell us, sir, a little bit about how that happened.

Paul Ruska: Well, I stayed with these people for five months. Somebody came from the underground and said would you like to go back to England? Sure. So I got into the underground and they moved me to another house to another little town that was on the railroad from the coast into Paris. It was a heavily traveled railroad, so they could put me on, they would stop quite often at this place. Anyway, I stayed there for a month and one of the young men in the underground, he was supposed to be, he was AWOL from a work party in Germany, but he thought he was gonna be a great hero and get in the underground. Well, he got caught by the Germans, and he squealed on about 18 other airmen who were waiting in different houses around to get onto the train to get into Paris and on the way down to Spain. And so that's how I got caught, by him, he even told 'em where I was at and he told 'em my history, how long I was there, and all that sort of stuff.

Do you think he was tortured?

Paul Ruska: No, I was never tortured at all.

No, I mean do you think the man they caught that gave you up and the other men in the underground, do you think he was tortured or threatened to be killed?

Paul Ruska: No, no, as far as I can know or heard, there was no torture of any airmen. The biggest problem was if you got shot down over Germany. Now the German civilians would probably kill you, but the military did not. They protected you.

Did you ever find out, sir, what it was that caused that one man to give you up and the others?

Paul Ruska: No, I don't know what caused it, but I think maybe he was a collaborator. He was addered, he didn't have enough brains to, you know -

Tell us about what happened after the Germans captured you. What happened next?

Paul Ruska: Well, I was taken to a small prison jail close by, and then to another jail in a larger city, and then over finally into Paris, where I was put into a cell with another American airman and an English fighter pilot and a Russian soldier, so there was four of us in the cell with normally one person occupied. I was there for over a month and taken to the Gestapo

headquarters twice during my stay there and interrogated by the Gestapo. They were very, very angry because they found out that I had been there for six months and nobody, the Germans didn't know about it.

What was it like when you had to deal with them? Were you ever worried about your own safety or what was gonna happen?

Paul Ruska: No. All the time my thoughts were very, very positive. We knew that the Germans were not going to win the war. Of course after, just a few years ago I was reading some darn thing about one of the generals in the Air Force, he made a statement if it wasn't for the P-51's and the B-47's, we would've lost the war. Can you imagine that?

That's pretty unthinkable, yes sir.

Paul Ruska: But in seeing a lot of this stuff on TV, the Germans had a whole bunch of stuff that was very superior to what we had, and we were able to do it, win the war by having, manufacturing quantities and quantities of all kinds of equipment. They didn't have all that to back them up when they got shot, when something went bad, they were just that much shorter in supplies.

Yeah. Sir, how long was it after you had been captured before your family was able to find out what had happened to you?

Paul Ruska: I think some time, it was three months after my capture before I was able to get to, I was caught in civilian clothes and civilian ID, so I went from one prison to another, jail to another jail, and finally three months after I was caught, I wound up in Stalag 17. So at that point, they probably, the Germans probably sent a message to my parents. So it was oh, some time probably April, March or April of '44.

Up until that point, had they simply I guess been notified by the U.S. military that you were shot down in action and were missing and that's all they knew?

Paul Ruska: Right. I was a prisoner of war. I was able to send one postcard to 'em, and I think, I don't know, I think I received one from them during the 16 months that I was a prisoner of war.

Did you ever ask your parents about how they coped during that time with you being POW?

Paul Ruska: No. When she found out, she cried and the dog cried and you know, that was about it, you know. And I think most Americans were very positive about what the outcome of the war was going to be.

Tell me a little bit if you would sir about the rest of the members of your crew. How many were able to survive that crash when you were shot down?

Paul Ruska: Well, the tail gunner was, as I mentioned before, he bailed out before the thing blew up, just about a few minutes before it blew up. And he had a head injury and they took him to the doctor and he was taken prisoner immediately. The copilot and the engineer were picked up by civilians there in San ___ de Bois and they were rushed off, the engineer was. The copilot started walking immediately. He just kept walking and walking, and several days later he was

picked up by the underground and they finally made their way to Spain and back to England. Instruct as well when they got back to the United States. They were still in the military.

And then I take it sir, the rest of the crew perished - ?

Paul Ruska: The rest of the crew perished, yes.

At that point, did the Germans, did they bury them in a cemetery there in France?

Paul Ruska: They were buried locally there. Later on they were put in the military cemetery. The first time that I, my wife and I went back to France in 1973, we visited their graves at the cemetery in France.

Did you also visit the place where you crashed and where those two women helped you with your parachute?

Paul Ruska: We've been back there ten times – since '73. 1973 was our first trip and every time we would go to Europe or England, we would go to France to visit them and they would always prisoners of war, French prisoners of war always had some kind of ceremony. We've had ceremonies at the city hall in San ___ de Bois, where they invited the people and made speeches. But each time we went back there, they had some sort of ceremony when we go back there.

What was it like for you, sir, the first time that you returned back there?

Paul Ruska: Well, like old hole week, you know? No. I was very happy to return. I did go back, when I was, when they picked us up after we were liberated, we went to Camp Lucky Strike and while we were there waiting for a ship to come in, I hitchhiked my way back to San ___ de Bois, which was not too far away, but by military trucks, U.S. military truck, I got within 3 miles of San ___, so I went back and visited them for a day. I took presents that I could buy there at the PX, and went back. Cigars and cigarettes for Papa Sors and candy and stuff for the women folk.

When you were shot down and you initially were rescued by the French civilians, how did you communicate with them? Did they understand any English or did you speak any French at all?

Paul Ruska: They didn't know English and I didn't know French.

So how did you communicate?

Paul Ruska: I don't know. Everybody they knew that I wanted to eat three times and made sure I got food, and they had a bed upstairs and that's where I stayed most of the time, in the bedroom, you know, sittin' around and in pain. I was in I don't know what, you never had sciatic nerve pain?

No I haven't.

Paul Ruska: I still have it today so that's 60 some years later, but anyway, I'd put up with that, and finally after, it took about three months for me to be able to get enough vocabulary to once you did that, well, it kind of snowballed, you know, your conversation. Anything, you could

figure out the rest of it by conversation. So I was able to converse with them very well by the time I left. Each time that we returned, they would not even try to speak English. I had to speak French all the time. Even 30 years later, I was able after about a week I was able to communicate automatically without translating, you know.

Wow, that's amazing. So tell us a little bit if you would, too, about what it was like in the POW camp, how it was run –

Paul Ruska: Well, have you ever seen Stalag 17, the movie?

Yes sir.

Paul Ruska: That's where I was at. So that's pretty much -

Pretty accurate to what you experienced?

Paul Ruska: Yes. Environment, you know, the inside and outside were the same thing. Of course we didn't have anything to eat. That was the biggest problem. And they fed us ersatz tea or coffee, which was roasted barley and roasted grains, and rutabagas and every once in a while we might get some potatoes, but that was, most of the stuff for food, even the civilians were suffering. They had to produce, if they were on a farm, they had to produce so many eggs, if they had so many hens, and so much milk if they had so many cows, and they couldn't kill any of their livestock to survive. So they were suffering the same as we were. Of course not near as much, and the thing that kept us going was Red Cross parcels, which we were supposed to get one a week or so, but if we didn't get any, they would say well, your bombers are bombing our railroad so we can't give you any Red Cross parcel, and I am sure that they were siphoning off quite a few of them for themselves.

Sure. Did you have any news of what was going on in the outside world while you were a POW?

Paul Ruska: Yes, they had men had what, what kind of radios – the crystal radios.

Crystal sets.

Paul Ruska: Crystal sets, and of course they were able to trade cigarettes. Of course we would get a carton of cigarettes with each Red Cross parcel, and cigarettes at that time in Europe were more valuable than gold, money, or whatever you had. And of course they would trade with the guards for all kinds of things. So they had, they even traded, one or two of the people even had pistols that they had traded with the German guards.

Wow.

Paul Ruska: Every evening, they had a man, one of the GI's, would go from barracks to barracks with the news and he would tell us what the news were.

So when the day came that you were ultimately liberated, I guess you kind of felt like that day was coming.

Paul Ruska: Well, we were, visualize where Vienna is in Austria. At ___ kitty-cornered through Austria, the Kommandant, Stalag 17 was in Krems, Austria, which is a few miles, about

25 miles west of Vienna on the Danube River. When the Russians were shelling Vienna, we could see at night, you know, the shells bursting. The Kommandant was a veteran of the Russian front, so he did not want to get captured, he didn't want to be liberated by the Russians. So he moved the entire camp in groups of 500. We walked clear across, kitty-corner through Austria over into Germany, waiting for the American – let me see – the 13th Armored Division liberated us. We were waiting for those guys. So we spent about two weeks in the woods waiting for those guys to come, and they finally came and liberated us, and they brought in C-47's and they landed in a field across the river and we would, they would come pick up a group and take 'em back to France. We wound up in Camp Lucky Strike, waiting for a ship. Then it took about five days to get back to Boston. We landed in Boston.

Tell us a little bit about what it was like when you finally got back home to the United States that first time.

Paul Ruska: Well, the first thing, we tried to eat and of course we couldn't eat. For example, all the time that I was in a prison camp, I always liked milkshakes. Well, the first chance I got to eat or drink a milkshake, I was able to down about half of it and then that was it and I haven't had a milkshake since. And we were, our stomachs and our system was not accustomed to any of the rich foods that we ate over here. When we were in Camp Lucky Strike, we had a special chow hall that we went to and we couldn't go to the others because of our system not being able to cope with the other foods. We'd just regurgitate, just throw it back up. So we would get sick.

How long was it after you got home before you were given your discharge and able to actually go back home to Ohio and that sort of thing?

Paul Ruska: I wound up in a convalescent hospital in Macon, Georgia, and they couldn't do anything for us over there. During World War II, a lot of things that they're doing now they didn't do then. If you were able to breath and walk and you know, were pretty healthy, they discharged you. I was discharged on Valentine's Day 1945, not Valentine's Day, Halloween – 31st of October. And then I hitchhiked home. It took me 10 days to get back home.

So they didn't provide you a way to get home from Georgia to Ohio?

Paul Ruska: Yeah, they gave me enough money to get back on train or bus or whatever. But I had some places that I wanted to stop off to see friends in Washington DC, and the parents of the navigator in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and so I stopped off there and my parents were wondering what happened to me because it took 10 days for me to get back.

Wow. Then if we could, if Mrs. Rusk is still there, I was gonna ask her real quick – is she there?

Paul Ruska: She's coming. She's here.

Ma'am, I was gonna ask you, just a few follow-up questions about your time in the service. In particular, what it was like being a female in what to that point had been pretty much an all-male military.

Mrs. Ruska: There were a lot of females in Pensicola, Florida. Being an aviation machinist mate, I worked on the SNJ's, the pilot trainer planes, and I'd strap the pilot or he would get in and showed him the panel and close the canopy and pull the cocks and send 'em out on the runways.

What were most of the other women like that served with you in your unit?

Mrs. Ruska: Well, the other girls worked in the office, secretaries. We were in the same building, and she worked in the office. There were about six of us that worked on the planes.

And so you were stationed at Pensicola for the duration of the war, is that right?

Mrs. Ruska: Yes, right after the war, they dismissed us, the community service.

Do you remember where you were when the Japanese had surrendered and the war was finally over?

Mrs. Ruska: I was down there in Pensicola.

OK, you don't remember if there was a big celebration or announcement or something along those lines?

Mrs. Ruska: It was long ago.

OK, I was just curious. That's one of the questions we have on our list. So at that point when you were discharged from Pensicola and you went back home to Cleveland, and then Mr. Ruska got home, and then so when was it that you met at the department store? Was that shortly after the war was over?

Paul Ruska: 1947.

1947, yes sir. And then how was it that you two came to be in Abilene, Texas?

Paul Ruska: That's a long story. We won't get into that.

But you've been in Abilene I guess quite some time now though, right?

Paul Ruska: Since 1958.

1958, yes sir.

Paul Ruska: How many years is that, 60? 50 years? 50 years.

Over 50, yes sir.

Paul Ruska: Be 51 in September.

That's great. So I imagine you've seen west Texas and Abilene change a lot over the years.

Paul Ruska: Oh yes, yes. I traveled all through west Texas from here to El Paso and Amarillo to the valley, so I know quite a bit about west Texas.

Yes sir and one thing that really impressed me about you and Mrs. Ruska, when I was talking to Mr. Defour, he told me that the two of you are still very active and involved in veteran's issues,

in helping out with veterans, and I think he said you still go to the Y, is that three or four times a week?

Paul Ruska: Oh yes, this morning, yep.

Yes sir.

Paul Ruska: My wife goes to the senior citizens center to take exercise. She was there this morning.

That's great. Mr. Defour had mentioned, too, that you've done a lot for the veterans service office there in Taylor County. Maybe tell us just briefly a little bit about some of the things you've done.

Paul Ruska: Mostly I've just contributed money to Jimmy Defour. They have buses that they have to upkeep and put gasoline in and everything like that, so every once in a while I send him a check.

Yes sir. Well I know that he speaks very highly of you and Mrs. Ruska both, and I'm really glad he was able to put us in touch with you. I know we've been talking for about an hour, so I'll try to kind of wrap this interview up, but is there anything, sir and ma'am, that you would want to tell future generations or anyone that might be listening to this interview years from now, any thoughts or things that you'd want to impart to them?

Paul Ruska: The only thing I keep telling 'em is have a positive attitude. One of the big things that we did in the prison camp, we walked around to make sure that these guys did not get down mentally, and if we did, we found somebody, we'd get 'em angry by aggravating, agitating until they finally got out of their doldrums. But a positive attitude I think works very, very favorably in any situation. All the time, I never had any qualms about not being able to get back to the United States.

Mrs. Ruska: Jimmy Defour had ___ comarshal is the veteran's.

Paul Ruska: Did you hear that?

Yes sir, I did.

Paul Ruska: Well, you talked to Jimmy, he told you that.

Yes sir. Ma'am, do you have any thoughts that you'd want to pass on to future generations that may hear this interview years from now?

Mrs. Ruska: Just be a good citizen and that's it.

Yes ma'am. Well I tell you sir, ma'am, it's a real honor for me to be able to interview you today, and I know everybody here at the Land Office is very thankful for your service to our nation, especially in time of war, and the Land Commissioner, Jerry Patterson whom you'll meet, if you haven't met him before, he'll be out there on Monday for the dedication of the cemetery, but he's a veteran, I myself am a veteran. We have a lot of veterans that work here, so for us, a lot of us, it's not just a job, it's something that we feel like a brotherhood, like a common bond, and so for

us to be able to interview you today is definitely an honor. So what I'll do now is I'll go ahead and stop the recording and then we can continue talking and so thank you very much.

Paul Ruska: Thank you very much also.

Yes sir.

[End of recording]