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Interview no. 46

Erno Torok

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Erno Torok
INTERVIEWER: Leon C. Metz
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 22, 1969
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Intelligence officer in Hungary during WWII.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; experiences during WWII on the Russian front; emigration to the United States.

Transcript; 24 pages.

Mr. Erno Torok
Interviewed by Leon C. Metz
September 22, 1969

LM: What does Torok mean in Hungarian?

ET: Turk.

LM: Are your ancestors from Turkey?

ET: Turkey occupied Hungary for about one hundred-fifty years and the Turkish people's names got mixed with the Hungarian names. There are villages named Torok Szentmiklos and Torok Balint.

LM: Where were you born, Erno?

ET: In a border town up near the Rumanian border in Hungary.

LM: How is it spelled?

ET: M-a-r-m-a-r-o-s-s-z-i-g-e-t. It is near the Carpathian Mountains.

LM: And when were you born?

ET: In 1908, January 8th.

LM: Did you live on a farm as a youngster or was this a big town? How big was the town?

ET: It was a bordertown of about three or four thousand. I lived in a town, not on a farm. My father was a lawyer.

LM: Was he in private practice or was he a government official?

ET: He worked with the government.

LM: What about your mother, was she just a housewife?

ET: Yes, she was a housewife.

LM: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

ET: Two sisters.

LM: Are they still living?

ET: No. Elvira and Lenke. They were older than me.

LM: With your father being a lawyer in this town, I imagine that you were among the elite or better class.

ET: In the better class.

LM: How long did you go to school there?

ET: I was only four years when we left. We moved to Budapest, my mother and the children.

LM: Your father didn't go then?

ET: No.

LM: What did your mother do? What supported you in Budapest?

ET: Well, she had money and for awhile she worked in an office.

LM: What are your early memories of Budapest?

ET: Oh, we moved there when I was four. When I was five, I went to elementary school, you know. Then I went to high school and then to the dental school. At the same time, you learn a trade. Then I had to go to the army.

LM: Coming back to Budapest, what kind of schooling did you have?

ET: There were six elementary schools. You could drop out there or go on to high school; most went on to high school. They had an option. You could go into trade or go to the university. I went into trade. The only thing was, I had to go to school, the dental school, for three years.

LM: Why didn't you become a lawyer like your father?

ET: I didn't like it; I don't know why. I'm a straight man.

MDT: Besides, I think his interests were sports.

ET: Yes, I was mostly interested in sports.

LM: Well, did you go right into dentist school or did you participate in sports?

ET: I did both at the same time.

LM: Let's get the dental thing first. What made you decide to be a dentist?

ET: I had a good friend who had an office and he asked me if I wanted to learn that trade. I watched him and I liked it.

LM: How old were you then?

ET: About nineteen.

LM: For a man who likes sports, it seems like a rather slow occupation.

ET: No, in Europe you want to be a good tradesman and a good sportsman at the same time.

MDT: And professional sports are not really like they are over here. It wasn't really self-supporting. You had to go into some kind of trade. Every boy was expected to go into a trade. And his sports was just something extra. That is how it worked. So he had to go into a trade; and as he said, he was kind of interested in working with his hands because he has good ability with his hands.

LM: What else would you have done if you hadn't gone into dentistry?

ET: I probably would have stayed with coaching.

LM: How many years did you study in the dentist trade?

ET: Three years.

LM: Was it that complicated? I mean, I don't know anything about it.

ET: It was just straight dentist work.

LM: Did you work on people or just make plates?

ET: No, it was all--anatomy of the head, functions of the teeth-- like a dentist.

MDT: As far as I can see, it was just like a course for dentists.

LM: And yet, you were not a dentist?

MDT: And yet over there... Tell them about the status of a dental technician

over there. You could work in the mouth whereas you can't over here.

ET: You take an examination and get a dentist's title. If you go to the dental college, you are a doctor. And if you don't go to the college then you are just a dentist. The only difference was, I went to trade school for three years and the dentist college was four years; just one year was the difference.

MDT: So you were called a dentist over there, not a doctor?

ET: But not a doctor.

MDT: So there's a subtle difference. In other words anyone over here who is a dentist is also a doctor.

LM: But you could work in people's mouth, pull teeth and fill them?

ET: Everything but operate.

LM: Where was your job in economic standards? Did it pay well or was it just average?

ET: It paid well.

MDT: Then after you took the examination, you opened your own lab where you made teeth, didn't you?

ET: Yes.

LM: Did you have people coming to your office?

ET: Not there, I didn't have time. I was playing soccer at the same time and I had my business.

LM: What year did you graduate?

ET: In 1927.

LM: When did you start playing soccer?

ET: At four.

LM: Apparently everybody played soccer.

Southwestern In Focus

Former Hungarian Soccer Player, Soldier Now Lives Quietly In EP

By LEON METZ

Written Especially for Sundial
Erno Torok looks like a lightweight Jack Dempsey. The facial features are similar. He doesn't walk across a floor, he glides with the confidence grace of a champion. The arms are muscular, the chin is strong, the eyes are deep set. All that belies this slugging description is a friendly smile that reflects more sunshine than a freshly waxed car top in the Southwestern desert. Yet



in spite of the freezing weather. He taught them that a sabotaged train always tilted one way or the other, then hesitated before turning over. The pause gave those with fast reflexes an opportunity to scramble to the opposite door and jump.

And this is the way things went until the end of the war. Advance in the summer. Retreat in the winter. Through

ET: Just like kids play baseball here in America. Sometimes we didn't have a ball, we would make it. We would make it out of old socks, anything that was round so that we could kick it.

LM: Did the schools have teams also?

ET: Yes, they had teams; we played friendly games with each other and then with other schools like the high schools here.

MDT: You have to remember that Erno's growing up years were during the first world war. He was born in 1908 and the war was in 1914. So you see, he was just a kid and things were very, very hard in Hungary because they were a defeated country.

LM: Do you recall anything about the war?

ET: I can remember in 1918 when the Communists took over Hungary.

MDT: The Communists took over Hungary for three months.

LM: Was this Communist Russia or just the Communist Party?

MDT: The Communist Party, in 1918, they took over the year after the Russian Revolution, apparently. Then what happened?

ET: Then the Hungarian people formed a white army and threw them out. Then the Horthy government came in.

MDT: Was the Horthy government Socialist?

ET: No, it was not Socialist.

MDT: Was it monarchy?

ET: No, it was between them, you know.

MDT: A democracy?

ET: Almost a democracy, with a president.

MDT: What was his name?

ET: Horthy or Horthy Micklos.

MDT: In Hungary, your name, first name is last. Like Erno would be Torok Erno. That's why he said Horthy Micklos. That was the regime they were under.

LM: Coming back to soccer, did many kids want to go into professional soccer, or were you an exception?

ET: In Hungary, there are over 50,000 teams. Every town has three, four clubs, you know. I imagine that Budapest has about five thousand teams.

MDT: What happened, did you just play amateur until you were good enough to play professional?

ET: I started like an amateur and then the manager came to me, if I wanted to play in a big club. I was just a youngster. Every team has a Junior, a second Junior, first Junior and first team, and second team. If you were good enough for the Juniors, then they put you in the first team. Only thing, the player cannot play in the Juniors anymore. I played good enough and they kept me.

LM: How long were you on the team, how long did you play?

ET: About three years.

LM: Where did you play?

ET: Everywhere in Europe except England. We went to France, Germany, Italy, Poland. We didn't go to Russia.

LM: Then you were injured?

ET: I was injured and I had an operation on my knee.

LM: What year was this?

ET: 1931.

LM: Then you became a coach?

ET: Right away I went to coach in Utrecht, Holland.

LM: How did a Hungarian team get in Holland?

ET: It wasn't a Hungarian team; I just coached in Holland.

LM: You coached one year and then what?

ET: I came home and the army got me.

LM: Did you open your office?

ET: My office was open. I had somebody working there.

LM: Did you start working again?

ET: I came back to my trade and then the army got me again in in 1935.

LM: Did you do dentistry in the army?

ET: No, I was in the regular army. And then after two years, I got off three months. Then I was called back for occupation. We got back the territory that before belonged to Hungary--the northern part and the southern part.

LM: What is this, you said something about regaining some captured territory? World War II hadn't started yet, had it?

ET: It started right there. After World War I, Rumania got a part from Hungary, the Czechs got a part of Hungary, and the Yugoslavs got part of Hungary. In 1938, we got the northern part back from the Czechs.

LM: Did you take it back by fighting?

ET: No, no, we just got it back through negotiations with Hitler. Then we got it back from Rumania and finally we got it back from the Yugoslavs, the southern part, old Hungary, you know. And when this was over (about 1941 in the spring) that fall of 1941, I got drafted again and sent to Russia.

LM: You got out of the army in 1941?

ET: Yes, for a few months, then I was called into the army and went to Russia,

LM: They drafted you again into the army?

ET: Not really drafted, they could call you back into the army any time they wanted to. It was like the reserves.

LM: At this time had Germany already declared war on Russia?

ET: Yes. I got in the army in the fall 1941.

LM: Did they send you to a camp for more training or what?

ET: In Hungary, the group belongs to a unit and they know what they have to do. After we were called up we had two months to get the whole company together and they sent us to Russia.

LM: Where in Russia did they send you?

ET: To Kiev. That is close to the Polish border.

LM: Were you part of a German outfit?

ET: No, that was separate; this was a completely Hungarian outfit. We were sent to Brest and Pinsk and Minsk. They are all Russian names.

LM: Did you do any fighting here or was the fighting that close?

ET: No, we were following the Russians and moving back, and they were moving so fast we couldn't catch them.

MDT: Moving back to Stalingrad?

ET: No, to Kiev. The fighting started above Kiev, at Gomel, Kharkov, and finished up to Stalingrad.

MDT: Was it just the Hungarians that were pushing the Russians back?

ET: No, not just Hungarians, Germans, too.

MDT: Pushing them back to Stalingrad?

ET: No, to Kiev, Gomel and Kharkov and the Rostov and then Stalingrad.

MDT: You were taking care of the partisans about that time, too, weren't you?

ET: No. They organized after the occupation, the partisans.

LM: Where was your first combat?

ET: Above Kiev.

LM: What happened there?

ET: There was about twelve hours fighting and then the Russians disappeared.

LM: What did you do in the battle?

ET: I was with the armored tank division. Panzar.

LM: Was this with the German division?

ET: No, Hungarian.

LM: Switching around a minute, did you have any feelings about the war, the right or wrong of it, or the Germans? Or the Russians?

ET: No. When you are up there, a soldier is a soldier and you do best what you can for your country. There is nothing politically. In the army you are not a civilian. It's two different worlds when you're in the army, you're an army man. The civilians cannot touch you.

MDT: So you didn't think as a civilian?

ET: No. When you are in the army, you are in the army.

LM: So what happened at this battle above Kiev?

ET: The Russians moved back, disappeared.

LM: Were you firing a rifle or a cannon?

ET: Each group has a commandant with four tanks. I directed the four tanks.

MDT: What were you, sergeant?

ET: No, I was a lieutenant with an intelligence stripe.

LM: After the battle of Kiev, did it get tougher, the advance?

ET: No.

LM: Where did you go from there?

ET: To Stalingrad.

LM: I don't recall when that battle at Stalingrad was.

ET: 1943-44.

LM: What happened at Stalingrad?

ET: I don't know too much. I was only there three days.

LM: In the town?

ET: Two or three miles outside. I got another assignment because I knew pretty fair German and I became a courier. If the Germans had a plan, it had to be co-ordinated with the Hungarian army and that was what I was doing.

LM: What transportation did you have?

ET: Anything that was moving. I went with the train. If you have an open order paper, you can use any army vehicle. I went on anything going.

MDT: Tell them about your experiences on the train.

ET: This was the first time going on a train. The train was going I don't know where, Kiev... We were going five or six hours and the train got blasted, dynamited, I was in the third car from the engine. After that, when I had to travel by train, I never sat close to the engine. I would sit at the end of the train and most of the time it was a freight car. I would ride with the troops and I would say, "Okay, boys, open the door." You know, they have big side doors. They ask me why. I said, "You know when a train gets blasted, the cars start piling up. Most railroad tracks were up, with water or a swamp on the side. Then you watch which side is turning. If it turns to the left, you jumped to the right side."

MDT: These were just like cattle cars, open. And instead of riding first class with the officers, which was a sure way to get killed with the partisans bombing, Erno would go in the back of the freight train and tell the boys to open the doors and they would sit right in the doors. And that's why he's

living to tell the tale now, you see.

LM: So you were a courier between the Germans and the Hungarians and you rode a train back and forth between the two fronts? So, you were not in Stalingrad then to witness any of the final battle?

ET: No.

LM: What did you think of the battle?

ET: Well, what happened there, most of the time there was no ammunition, no fuel and it was bitter cold; there was sickness, you know. All these things defeated the German Army.

LM: What sickness was that?

ET: Typhus. And the cold and...what is it in English? The munitions and fuel was very slow in coming there. Everything was short in coming there.

LM: How about yourself in terms of clothing? Did you have enough warm clothes?

ET: I had enough warm clothes, yes.

LM: Did you feel that you would survive Stalingrad? What happened when the Russians won it? What did you think? Up until then you had been winning.

ET: When you are in a situation like that, you are not thinking, you're just trying to save your own life and do the best you can. It's funny that way, when you are in the Army. I was brought up that way, you are almost not thinking. You go with the other people and do what you are ordered to do.

LM: I would think that the loss of Stalingrad would have been very demoralizing to the men, they would have been despirited and cold and a shattering in morale.

ET: They were already talking about the wonder weapon in 1943-44, the atomic bomb; they say we have something, don't worry about it.

LM: They were talking about an atomic bomb of their own and they figured if they lost Stalingrad that they had nothing to worry about?

ET: They didn't worry about it.

LM: Are you sure they were talking about the atomic bomb or were they talking about their V-2 weapon?

ET: Not the V-2, they already had the V-2, they were thinking about the atom bomb.

MDT: I'm surprised that the soldiers knew about it; we didn't even know .

LM: We didn't know until Nagasaki blew up. Of course, I was just a kid then, but I recall it quite well when the big bomb went off. Well, what happened then, to you, personally. Did you retreat with your outfit? Were you still a courier?

ET: I was still a courier, only thing happened I lost my company. I was supposed to carry the message, I was looking three weeks for my company. Because you don't have anyone, you just have a number, not a name. You look for this number 330. And you have to find it. And everything was moving backward at this time and it was very hard to find. I find them almost a month later in Poland.

MDT: Your outfit?

ET: Yes.

MDT: You had already delivered your message to the German Army?

ET: Most of the time, we got the messages from the German Army to the Hungarians to know the position.

LM: So, you actually left Russia looking for you outfit?

ET: Yes, I was going from Russia to Poland. The train was dynamited. Six soldiers and I escaped into the other train and got away.

LM: What would the Russians have done if they had captured you?

ET: Probably shot me; they shot at the railroad car. It looked like a screen door. But they shoot in the bottom, not the top.

MDT: If they had caught you, would they have treated you as a prisoner of war?

ET: I don't know. Sometimes it depended on the situation.

MDT: I'm glad that I can hear the whole story because I think it's fascinating. During his army career, he fought against the Russians and never against the Americans and I think that is probably why he was allowed to come over to this country.

LM: Okay, after you escaped from the Russians where did you go?

ET: From Lodz we went to Gattenhaffen. I was looking for the Hungarian Army. But they say, "Why don't you go with us?"

MDT: The Germans said this?

ET: Yes, a German Officer says, "Come with us." So I went with them to Gattenhaffen.

MDT: What was that, Gattenhaffen?

ET: A harbor.

MDT: Was it a resting place?

ET: No, you have a place to go where you stay. Like USO, not private hotel.

MDT: And they billet you for free.

LM: Did you find the Germans were friendly to you, did they treat you like first-class citizens?

ET: They were friendly. The only thing, the Northern Germans are Germans. They think they are better than anyone else.

LM: Where did you learn to speak German?

ET: In school.

LM: So, then you were in Germany. Were the Russians closing in on you?

ET: No, no, the Russians were in Bavaria and Poland at this time.

LM: What were you doing so far back from the front?

ET: Trying to find my unit.

LM: Well, what was your unit doing so far from the front? I'm surprised that they weren't right up there.

ET: You could not find "close up to the front", everything was moving, you know.

MDT: Where did you finally find your unit?

ET: I found them in Poland.

LM: Then the unit went back from Poland to Germany?

ET: No.

MDT: Of course, they are not classified anymore, but were your movements sort of classified? I mean, were they secret?

ET: Everything military was secret.

MDT: I mean, being a courier, was it super-secret? What would have happened if somebody had caught you with these papers on you? Or did you have to memorize them?

ET: I never knew what was in it.

MDT: Did you have it strapped to your arm or something?

ET: No, no.

LM: Were you in uniform?

ET: Yes, I was in uniform.

LM: Okay, you were in Germany, what did you do then?

ET: I went to Poland and found my company.

LM: And after you found your company, what did you do?

ET: They gave me a furlough, a month.

MDT: Did you go back to Budapest?

ET: No, by this time they were already fighting.

MDT: When was the last time you were in Budapest?

ET: In 1943.

MDT: Was that on a furlough too?

ET: Yes.

MDT: So he has not been back to Budapest since 1943.

LM: So the Russians were fighting in Poland, then? Were you on the line then or were you fighting partisans or what?

ET: No, I was traveling.

LM: You were still a courier between Hungary and Germany?

ET: Yes.

LM: Were you still riding trains or were you on motorcycles by then?

ET: No, still the same, anything I could get.

LM: Can you relate some of the experiences you had as a courier? I mean, you must have had some exciting experiences when you were maybe shot at or almost captured.

ET: The most exciting was the escape from Russia. (Related on page 12.)

LM: You were hunting partisans at one time. When was that?

ET: After the train was dynamited, there was a patrol, a few soldiers. We went to the village and checked everybody to see who had muddy boots. We find a young man and we take him.

MDT: What did you do with him?

ET: Nothing.

MDT: Come on now, tell us.

LM: I would think that they would shoot partisans.

ET: I think so, we give him to the Germans. On the railroad line, they have a post every two miles. We give these people to the Germans. I don't know what they do.

MDT: That's not what you told me.

ET: That was another story.

LM: Did you ever shoot any paritsans?

ET: No, not me.

MDT: He's suddenly gotten very shy.

LM : Why would you be afraid to say you shot partisans now?

ET: I'm not afraid. I didn't shoot anybody.

LM: You didn't want to shoot them or weren't you there? I think I probably would want to shoot them if I had been there.

ET: I want to shoot them but it was not my business.

LM: Who did shoot them, the Hungarian troops?

ET: The Hungarians and the Germans.

LM: How did they shoot them? What happened?

ET: They just shoot them.

LM: Did they stand them up against a wall? How did they capture them?

ET: After the train was blasted, dynamited, they could not go far. They got caught; and since they were not soldiers, they were shot.

LM: How many were there?

ET: Sometimes twenty, sometimes ten.

MDT: If they had muddy boots, they'd shoot them.

LM: Now, these were Polish partisans, is that correct?

ET: No, these were Russians.

LM: Did you ever shoot a man?

ET: I don't know; I just shoot. I saw men die beside me.

MDT: He has a nice wound on his leg that he got on the battlefield. He just lapped it over and waited for the medic to pick him up. That was in Yugoslavia, wasn't it?

ET: Yes.

LM: How were you wounded?

ET: A bomb, shrapnel. It was 8 inches long and about 1/2 inch deep. They put a bandage on it.

LM: Were you ever really scared?

ET: Sure, I was scared. Sometimes you could hear a fly flying, it would be so quiet. Nobody would say anything.

MDT: Was that in Russia?

ET: Yes, in Russia and in Poland, too.

LM: How about the Russians, prisoners that you all captured?

ET: What we did was just send them back of the front lines.

MDT: If they weren't caught sabotaging, they were just sent back.

ET: No, no, the soldiers were never treated like partisans. Soldiers are soldiers. They understand.

LM: Did you hunt partisans a lot of times or just when they blew up the train you were on?

ET: Just when they blew up the train.

LM: You didn't spend any time, ordinarily, looking for them?

ET: No. They had special troops for that.

LM: What did they do with the partisans after they shot them? Just let them lay where they fell or did they bury them?

ET: They bury them; but most of the time, the townspeople come and bury them.

LM: Then did you encounter any trouble from the villagers?

ET: No.

LM: They didn't seem to care or, I guess, they accepted it, actually.

ET: They were afraid, you know.

MDT: What about food? Did you have a hard time getting food.

ET: I tell you I had a hard time getting food.

LM: Did the civilians ever shoot at you to your knowledge, other than the partisans.

ET: No.

LM: How about the Russians, the towns as you rolled through? Did they welcome you?

ET: Not welcome you, they don't care. During the war, they don't care.

LM: What's your opinion of the Russian fighting man?

ET: Nothing, they aren't good soldiers. Anytime it was 10 to 1, it was alright with us.

MDT: Are they better now than they were?

ET: I don't think so.

LM: Why not?

ET: I just don't think so. You know who are good soldiers? The Yugoslavs. And the Germans. The Slavic people, they defend their land.

MDT: Well, weren't the Hungarians that way?

ET: Yes.

MDT: I don't know what makes the Germans such good soldiers. Discipline, I guess.

ET: Discipline, yes.

MDT: Did you get along with them alright?

ET: I get along alright.

MDT: We ought to get on to Erno's experiences after the war.

LM: I think we're just about to that point. Where were you when the war ended?

ET: Close to the Yugoslav and Austrian border at a big village there called Konsdorf. The railroad ran from Gratz to Klagenfort. I was at Konsdorf; this was in 1945. I was there about three or four days. The partisans were on the south side but there wasn't a Yugoslav army anymore. The partisans come in the south side. West side was the English army and north side was the American army.

MDT: So...

ET: So, I went to a farmer in Saint Marxen. I ask him, "Do you have any civilian clothes?" He says, "I have some." I say, "Can I work with you?" "Oh, yes." I stayed there a month. Then the Yugoslav partisans come around and I was lucky because the Yugoslav commandant of the partisans was a soccer player. He recognized me.

MDT: It was real coincident in the war. He would have been taken prisoner except that the commandant recognized Erno.

ET: And they gave me a paper.

LM: So, they made a partisan out of you then?

ET: Yes. At the border about two miles from the farm is the bridge. No one can pass except the partisan and the English. So I have a permit and I go to Volkemart about 1/2 mile from the bridge. Up there, I met an Austrian

dentist and he asked me if I want to work with him. I say yes. So, I went there in 1945 and worked with him until 1950.

MDT: What did you do with your pistol, uniform, etc.?

ET: They are in forest, buried in the forest. I got a paper from the Austrians called a ration card, because everything was rationed. If you don't work, you don't get the little ticket. So, I get my ration ticket.

MDT: Because you were working for the dentist?

ET: This was before. Then I got the transfer.

MDT: So, how many years were you a prisoner of war?

ET: None.

LM: Why not? You crossed the bridge into the English sector, I gather. But the English didn't pick you up because you had papers showing that you were a partisan. How did you feel at the time? Were you bitter? Discouraged from having lost the war? What were your thoughts?

ET: No, at the time you are happy that you are alive. You don't think about the war; you just live one day to the other.

LM: What would have happened to you if the English had picked you up?

ET: I tell you what happen. They went from house to house. And they asked me, "You are a soldier?" I say, "Yes." "What army?" "Hungarian Army." "Do you want to go back to Hungary?" I say, "No, thank you, sir,"

LM: Why did you admit that you were a soldier? Weren't you afraid they would pick you up?

ET: I was not afraid; I was already working.

LM: I thought that maybe they resented it. I mean, at that time, tempers and emotions were still running high...

ET: There weren't tempers, maybe to the Germans but not to the Hungarians. They gave me a membership to the Officer's Club; I can go any time. The English treated the Hungarian people very well.

LM: Why didn't you want to go back to Budapest?

ET: I know what would happen.

LM: Yes, but it was your home; you were raised there. You had your home there...

ET: I know what would happen when the Communists took it over, if not this year, maybe next year.

LM: Then you did think they would take it over?

ET: Not think, I know.

LM: So, you figured that it was just a matter of time before they would pick you up?

ET: Not the Hungarian Army, the Russian. That's the only reason.

LM: So you worked as a dentist. Then what happened?

ET: Well, then I got a letter from the Consul and I had a chance to go to America. First, they ask me a lot of questions, what army I was in and I said I probably cannot go because I was a soldier. But they said I could go. In the meantime, I got a letter from the Australian Consul and I had a chance to go to Australia. I talk to the gentleman and he said, "You applied to go to Australia?" I said no. He said, "You are Erno Torok?" "Yes, but I didn't apply to go to Australia." What happened was someone got my army papers and applied to go in my name.

LM: Then could you have gone to Australia?

ET: Of course, I could go to Australia. He said, "You work like a dentist; only thing, you have to go to a small town."

LM: Then why did you decide to come to America?

ET: Because Australia was too far for me to go back to Hungary sometime. But the United States isn't that far from Hungary.

LM: Did you think you could live better in the United States?

ET: I took passports, one for the United States and one for Australia. One of my friends who worked for the English married an Austrian woman with five kids and he went to Australia. I almost went; they say, "Come with us." But I want to come back to Hungary some time.

LM: And what year was it that you got these letters?

ET: In 1950.

LM: And did you come in the same year?

ET: Yes.

LM: How did you come?

ET: I came on an Army boat.

LM: How did you wind up in Arizona?

ET: I had a sponsor; he lived there.

LM: Did you know who he was?

ET: I know nothing. I was staying in New York for two or three weeks.

LM: What did you think of New York?

ET: Oh, boy....the traffic, you know. I say I would not drive a car.

LM: What was your impression of the Southwest?

ET: Sand and sand and sand.

LM: Were you sorry you came?

ET: No, I forgot Austria as soon as I step in the United States.

LM: Did you speak any English?

ET: No.

MDT: I think it would have been harder for him if he had come over from Hungary; that was his homeland, but Austria wasn't. He was a D.P.

LM: D.P.?

MDT: A Displaced Person. It was my brother-in-law who sponsored him.

LM: Did they want you for your skill?

ET: Yes, they ask you, "What is your trade?"

MDT: Didn't you have a better chance than other people because you had a good trade?

ET: No, they just ask if you are able to work. The people who are not able to work cannot come in. Most of them who come here have to work and are willing to work.

LM: So you landed in Tucson, Arizona in 1950?

ET: Yes.

LM: How long were you there?

MDT: Until 1954.

LM: And you've been in El Paso ever since?

ET: Yes, fifteen years.

LM: And you don't miss Hungary? You don't have any desire to go back?

ET: I want to go back to visit.

LM: Where would you go if you went back to Hungary?

ET: To Budapest.

LM: What would you do?

ET: Visit old friends.

MDT: I wonder if you could find your soccer friend from the partisans? I think

that is the most interesting experience he had, when he happened to meet this one person. I don't think there is any doubt that if he had been sent back to Hungary, that the Russians would have taken him.

LM: What about air-raids? What was the most frightening thing that happened to you during the war?

ET: The most frightened was in Gratz, Austria, in a railroad station.

LM: What year?

ET: In 1945. I was caught in the middle of a lot when the bombing started and I landed in a ditch.

MDT: Leon, this is kind of an interesting thing. The reason Erno didn't want to go to Hungary, well, he had no family. That's true and it might have been very dangerous for him to go back. But he had no place to go back to because his apartment and office was destroyed by American bombers.

LM: How did the people live after the war?

ET: Everything was wrecked; they try to clean it up.

LM: Did you see any Russian soldiers after the war?

ET: All I see were Russians.

LM: How did Russian prisoners compare to others? Were they well-fed, scared or what?

ET: They were scared. They don't know for two or three days what was happening to them.

LM: What did you think of Adolph Hitler?

ET: He was good for the German people, because before the war started, 18 million Germans were out of work. Before the war, they get everybody working.