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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE MOLNAR

INTERVIEWER: ANGUS BROWN

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Transcription of Interview Number 31D 7 Molnar
Dr. George Molnar

Interviewed November 29, 2006

By Angus Brown

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program, interview with Dr. George Molnar by telephone at Edmonton, Alberta on 29 November 2006. Interviewed by Angus Brown. Tape one, side one.

INTERVIEWER: Just let me ask you first of all can you identify yourself for the tape and spell your last name, please.

MOLNAR: Yes. My name is George Dempster Molnar and M-O-L-N-A-R.

INTERVIEWER: N- A-R, OK. Can you give me a little bit of background on your service?

MOLNAR: On my service?

INTERVIEWER: Well, your biography.

MOLNAR: My biography. OK. Well, I was born in Hungary. The background essentially is somewhat interesting and if you find that I am being too wordy about it you can stop me but…

INTERVIEWER: No, go ahead.

MOLNAR: My father was a Presbyterian or Reformed clergyman who at the end of World War I was commissioned by the League of Nations to check on Austro-Hungarian military equipment in Western Europe. In the course of that, he met my mother who was a refugee from the Russian Revolution, a Russian woman. And they married and eventually moved to Hungary where he was a theology professor and a clergyman. But in 1926, the family migrated to Canada at the call of the Presbyterian Church in Canada for my father to minister to Hungarians. And so the first location was near Kipling, Saskatchewan, and eventually in Windsor and Hamilton. I finished my high school in Hamilton at Westdale Collegiate Institute. And just at that point my father got a call to a congregation in Calgary but for a while I remained behind. It was the start of the war, actually a year beyond. Then I joined him in Calgary where for a year I went to Mount Royal College and at the same time I enlisted in the reserves in the 15th Alberta Light Horse. And then in the spring of 1942, in early May, I enlisted. The unit I belonged to in the reserves where I became a sergeant became, eventually, the Calgary Tank Regiment and I had an interest in serving in armour.

I went to do my basic training in Dundurn, Saskatchewan. Thereafter, I was selected for officer training. Went to Camp Borden and in the fall of 1942 we actually trained on skis with the

anticipation that we would eventually serve in Norway. That came to naught, but in any case it was an exciting time and an interesting way of going through basic training. The alternatives were that, full equipment or not, we were on skis. The alternative was we were running so that our field marches were all long runs and the like.

I became commissioned in early 1944 and was moved to Britain. Stationed at Aldershot, we were awaiting placement to regiment. At this point, based on my knowledge of languages, my mother being a language teacher in many languages – and we spoke English, Hungarian, German and French at home so I was quite fluent in these languages. And eventually my knowledge of languages led to a number of special interviews and I was selected for Intelligence Corps training. I did this at Cambridge, being actually located at Christ College with subsequent training being at Matlock, Derbyshire. Having had that training, then I was assigned to I Canadian Corps Headquarters and with them I moved in a convoy through the Mediterranean to Sicily, arriving there in late 1943. So…

INTERVIEWER: So that would have been part of the invasion of Sicily?

MOLNAR: No, it was later than the invasion. The invasion had already succeeded so that our headquarters moved to Taormina[?], which had actually been the headquarters of Field Marshal Kesselring who then subsequently commanded the German end of this part of the conflict.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes, you mentioned that you were part of the corps headquarters, not the divisional headquarters.

MOLNAR: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MOLNAR: That's right. So, again, a bit of sidelight was that on the way to Sicily, at about the level of Algiers on an afternoon, we were attacked by Heinkel 111 torpedo bombers, creating an interesting situation. I was getting my haircut and I happened to be on deck. And it was probably the most dangerous place to be because torpedo bombers flew relatively low to drop their torpedoes and we were probably, I thought, more in danger of our own anti-aircraft fire than of the Germans. But the Germans actually did succeed in sinking the ship behind us, which was a hospital ship. Later on I discovered that one of the people sunk, got saved and taken to Algiers eventually subsequently was one of my teachers in medical school. But in any case, we got to Taormina and eventually crossed over to the Italian mainland and began to work up the Adriatic coast against one line of defense of the Germans after another.

INTERVIEWER: Did you remain with the corps headquarters most of the time?

MOLNAR: I did remain there and my function was mainly interrogating German and other prisoners of war. But in early 1944, that is February, I went on loan to the New Zealand Division at Monte Casino so that I was a participant in the – what I considered the second, but what some historians consider to be the third offensive on Monte Casino. Again, I have colourful memories of this because upon arrival in my jeep with my driver, I was still a lieutenant. We came upon a

huge crater what we later found to be the New Zealand divisional headquarters. The New Zealanders had erected a wooden sign on this with clearly legible writing "American Precision Bombing Monte Casino 5 Miles."

INTERVIEWER: Oh, dear.

MOLNAR: And I only recently read another book about Monte Casino and discovered the mystery of this somewhat successful and somewhat ill-fated biggest raid of the war. There were a huge number of Super Fortresses [*probably means B-17 Flying Fortresses: ed*], some hundred in number, the biggest raid of the war to that time, February 14, 1944, in support of ground troops. And they did their job as they're supposed to, but as wave after wave of bombers flew over the abbey, the fire and smoke and debris was such – not just there but in the neighbouring areas – that it was impossible to see. And actually their delivery of bombs was intended by visual inspection, so no wonder they dropped bombs as far back as New Zealand Divisional Headquarters, French Corp Headquarters and various other places doing what we currently call collateral damage.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MOLNAR: In any case, being with the New Zealanders was one of the highlights of my wartime experience. They were such wonderful soldiers, that, sitting exposed on the low ground while the Germans were on the high ground and directly in front of Monte Casino one felt relatively secure with these very professional, outstanding soldiers. General Freyberg, of course, a Victoria Cross winner in World War I, commanded them. It was an interesting experience. Again, I tend to remember the humorous aspect of things. New Zealand Division were promoted to a corps as they had Polish and French and other elements under their command on this very intense attack under very unfavorable conditions against the Germans with their rocket throwers and everything they had facing us in the valley.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you stay with the New Zealanders?

MOLNAR: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: How long did you stay with the New Zealand Division?

MOLNAR: It must have been three or four weeks is my recollection, but it's not very precise excepting at the end with the offensive having essentially failed except for minor progress. I mean, they intended to take the abbey and move on toward Rome but that was not to be until a later offensive. But what I remember was that there was a little hillock in the neighbourhood. And the New Zealand officers of the higher ranks, with their higher rank insignia, were photographed on top. And when it was over they came down and took off their higher rank insignia as they became a division again. So this left an unforgettable, sort of the humorous aspect, of an otherwise really pretty grim experience.

I was then, which I seem to think although I have no documents to prove, had to be about mid-March 1944 is when I was assigned to the First Canadian Infantry Division as Divisional Intelligence Officer. And I then was with them on the Adriatic coast again until that division, among others, moved in on the final attack on Casino along with the, of course, Americans, the French, the Poles and everybody else. And that one was successful. We got to Rome and then again went back on the east coast and continued the slow climb up along the Adriatic. Whether and when exactly, I was a captain by then, and at what point I became a general staff officer III intelligence for the division I can't pinpoint. General Vokes was our commander at that time and…

INTERVIEWER: That was General Vokes, V-O-K-E-S, is that right?

MOLNAR: That's right, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now, can I just ask you did you move with the division to Northwest Europe?

MOLNAR: Oh, yes, oh yes. I am coming to that. And so, eventually, we got as far as Ravenna and subsequently we were moved across to Livorno, to Leghorn, across to Marseilles and went up in a, through France, in our own transport, France having been liberated at that point, mostly. We got to Belgium and were located at a spot near Brussels, called, Heit, Heisd H-E-I-S-D [German word] in a staging area. From there we were then called into action and crossed the Rhine. I always forget the name of the place where we got across. It was one of Henry VIII's wives.

INTERVIEWER: Cleve?

MOLNAR: Hmm?

INTERVIEWER: Cleve?

MOLNAR: Yes, Cleve.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MOLNAR: Yes, it was Cleve. And thereafter we moved from Germany back into Holland and gradually moved forward as far as Appeldorn.

INTERVIEWER: All right.

MOLNAR: And a bit beyond Appeldorn, actually. And that's where we come to the, to the point of the armistice.

INTERVIEWER: OK. I'd like to come back to that in a little bit, but could you just tell me briefly what you did upon arrival back in Canada after the war was finished?

MOLNAR: Well, I was demobilized in November of '45 and started at the university in a pre-medical program in a special January class to accommodate almost 100% veterans. And after six years, in 1951, I graduated with a doctor of medicine degree. Some…

INTERVIEWER: Which university was that?

MOLNAR: The University of Alberta in Edmonton.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

MOLNAR: Now,

INTERVIEWER: So have you practiced Edmonton most of your life?

MOLNAR: No, no. I did an internship in '51,'52 at the University of Alberta hospital and then I applied for, and was successful in getting, a training program at the Mayo Clinic. I had been the gold medalist of my class having won the surgical and medical gold medals. So then, after four years of training at Mayo in internal medicine and endocrinology, I also did a scientific study and earned a doctor of philosophy degree in physiology at the University of Minnesota. And then I was taken on this path of the Mayo Clinic and remained there until 1975. Academically, I became, through instructorship, lectureship, assistant and associate professorship, a full professor in the graduate school of the University of Minnesota and the newly devised Mayo Medical School.

Then I was advised by my alma mater to come back to Edmonton as chairman of the department of medicine, which both my wife and I welcomed. Although, up to that time we thought we were to be forever at the Mayo Clinic, which was a very happy and productive experience both clinically and in research. I became an endocrinology, but especially diabetes, researcher and it's based on my academic productivity that the University of Alberta sought me out. And it's been a very happy move back to Edmonton since 1975. I stayed the chairman of the department for 11 years and then in retirement I continued, and still continue as, originally director and then subsequently co-director of the, the Muttart Diabetes, and Muttart is M-U-T-T-A-R-T

INTERVIEWER: Good.

MOLNAR: Diabetes Research and Training Centre which I helped establish. It's among many of the useful products of this undertaking as being the so-called Edmonton protocol pilot transplantation for pancreatic diabetes. Which is still quite a successful thing but by no means the only field in which we're working. I no longer do active research but I'm still administrator leader, co-director of this centre at the University of Alberta. Now, in 1947, 59 years ago I married the former Gwendoline McGregor and we have two children, Jane in Toronto and Charles in Victoria and seemingly are living happily ever after.

INTERVIEWER: (chuckles) Well, it sounds like a very full and active life. Can you tell me, basically, what you did as a divisional intelligence officer?

MOLNAR: Well, I was, of course, not alone on the staff at the division in intelligence. But I still continued to do interrogations. But increasingly I was involved in shifting the information and advising the – my various staff colleagues – in what we could figure out about enemy situations in terms of identification of the enemy tracing us, in as much as possible their plans, their strengths and weaknesses.

INTERVIEWER: What would you say would be your main sources of information? Would it be interrogation reports?

MOLNAR: Interrogation reports and background information of knowing really a lot about the German army.

INTERVIEWER: So you would keep track of their order of battle?

MOLNAR: Exactly. Yes.

INTERVIWER: Did you ever have any difficulty with the Germans at the beginning of your interrogation? Did you have a command of the colloquialisms, for instance?

MOLNAR: Oh, that I did, yes, yeah. I was really very fluent in German based on the fact that my mother, although Russian from a wealthy family, had a good part of her education in Germany, even in peacetime. And she made sure that my confidence in German was good and in terms of the grammar and writing. I, of course, took some courses in this, as a child and later as a student. But certainly the language competence was very good. My mother's technique in teaching languages was, in fact, to teach people to speak more than to learn grammar and rules and the rest. I was certainly one of her successes and I have an enormous amount to be grateful for to her.

INTERVIEWER: Was it difficult at all when you began to pick up the local jargon that perhaps German military personnel might use?

MOLNAR: Well, this, of course, is, was, what my studies in Britain at Cambridge and Matlock were all about. And they had very competent staff to teach us and we practiced on actual German prisoners of war who were, of course, by this time bored to tears of one group of novices after another practicing on them. But they tolerated it reasonably well. The people there were from the Afrika Corps, and German navy, German air force and the like. So we were practiced up and I really didn't find much difficulty. Later when we come to talk about the armistice and its follow up, I'll mention a few things

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MOLNAR: That were,

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you before we get to that. Approximately how many interrogators would you have at the divisional level?

MOLNAR: Well, I seem to remember – and I don't remember it all that well – we had a couple. And one was a very interesting individual, a British officer by the name of Ken Cottam who was an Oxford don and language specialist who had actually been with the division during the Sicilian invasion. Got the military cross. And subsequently became Major Cottam who was quite an important figure in arranging the food delivery to the starving Dutch, at least in negotiations leading to that.

INTERVIEWER: Is that C-o-t-t-o-n, like the fabric?

MOLNAR: C-o-t-t-a-m, yes

INTERVIEWER: A-m, yes. Tell me, did you do most of your interrogation by going forward or did you interrogate prisoners as they were brought back to the divisional cage?

MOLNAR: Both, both. So that I worked at the brigade and sometimes battalion level but that was not common. But it did occur when, for instance, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment was in the front line in Florence on the south side of the Arno. And I remember being there and doing some of my work and met Colonel Stone [?] who was a very revered commander of the Loyal Eddies. I remember being, at an interesting point in time, at the 1st Brigade headquarters: at another time when, for a brief period – oh, the famous Canadian writer was the…

INTERVIEWER: Farley Mowat.

MOLNAR: Farley Mowat was the brigade divisional…

INTERVIEWER: Brigade intelligence officer.

MOLNAR: Brigade intelligence officer, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Now did you – I assume when you were in the forward localities that you were looking for tactical, immediate intelligence. Is that correct?

MOLNAR: That's right, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And so, farther back, when you were interviewing people at the divisional level, what sort of information would you be looking at? Mainly order of battle information?

MOLNAR: That, and you could find out if anybody might know about which disposition, reorganization of troops into so-called battle groups and the like, information about weapons or anything else that you could find out. Which, of course, was not all that easy because fundamentally the Germans knew very well that it's name, rank and serial number that they're supposed to give. But under circumstances you manage to get more information and there were some prisoners of war who were by way of disgruntled minorities. I even came across some fairly unwilling Hungarian troops who were very small in number but were functioning at that

level. Very occasionally a captured air force officer, pilot or otherwise, so there was a variety of that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you tend to specialize at all in either officer or other ranks?

MOLNAR: Not at all, no.

INTERVIEWER: So, you did the whole rank level spectrum.

MOLNAR: Took them as they came. Mind you, I had a fair amount of time attending the, the conferences of the sort – planning sessions for offensives and the like – some at brigade but mostly at divisional level. Vokes was still our general there and eventually, of course, Harry Foster took over.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, in December, I understand.

MOLNAR: Right, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved at all in the collection or interpretation or translation of technical intelligence?

MOLNAR: No.

INTERVIEWER: So there was a special group that did that.

MOLNAR: I believe so, I believe so. Of course, we had behind us a very competent organization, the 8th Army intelligence group with the famous Brigadier Williams. He was named, he was Bill Williams but he was called Kill Billions. Another officer don and several minions of his. I rather remember, of course, I had to write reports and the like. And in one particular session. While still at corps, I remember coming across a Major Sherlock in that 8th Army intelligence section who took me to task for my sloppy writing. Not the orthography but the way I wrote it. And it was a very good educational experience which I probably did not appreciate sufficiently at the moment. But in the long run it stood me in good stead.

INTERVIEWER: Good.

MOLNAR: So they were a very, very impressive group as were the various other support elements of the 8th Army, the South African Air Force which supplied the air to ground support, and many other elements that I remember having been duly impressed with.

INTERVIEWER: Now, as an intelligence officer at the divisional headquarters you must have had fairly close contact with the divisional commanders.

MOLNAR: Oh, yes, indeed.

INTERVIEWER: Could you give me your impressions, your personal impressions, of General Vokes and General Foster.

MOLNAR: Well, Vokes was more of a down to earth blustery type who impressed me as being a very good soldier. He seemed to be going up to the front when he was needed and appeared to be doing a very good job. Foster, whom I liked very well, was more of a hard drinking type but right on his toes at what he needed to do. We had a very able – a GSO I – I don't have his name at the tip of my tongue, but anyway. And at one point Darcy Kingsmill was our GSO II. He subsequently moved to corps. And many other interesting people, interesting in terms of current affairs. I had occasion to meet – mind you that was around the time of our move, or a little earlier – I met a very interesting officer, a captain in a highland uniform at that occasion who was called Iggy Ignatieff who was a Russian count and the, the current political contender's [*Michael Ignatieff: ed*] uncle.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, of course, yes. Were you exposed to or did you meet on occasion the corps commanders?

MOLNAR: Yes, I had met Lieutenant General Burns when he commanded the I Corps.

INTERVIEWER: Did you form any impression of him?

MOLNAR: He was a very dour and kind of sour fellow who acquitted himself, I thought, very well, although he was replaced in that command. He did very well after the war, as you know – Palestine and other parts of the world. No, I, I thought he was

INTERVIEWER: How about his successor?

MOLNAR: Well, him I knew a little bit better and I thought he was a pretty dry fellow, too.

INTERVIEWER: This would be General Foulkes.

MOLNAR: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: F-O-U-L-K-E-S

MOLNAR: A very knowledgeable person, you know, such meetings as we had, especially the sort of at the getting acquainted level. He usually displayed [indistinct], sort of cultural level, you know, beyond his being a sort of a salute and click your heels kind of a situation.

INTERVIEWER: Now, just before – I've got a little bit of room here before we have to flip this tape, so I wonder if you could briefly describe for me the move of the corps from Italy to Northwest Europe.

MOLNAR: Well, we moved beyond Ravenna by usual convoys to Leghorn. We were shipped to Marseilles and had an essentially uneventful winter trip in the Mediterranean to Marseilles where I remember the populace, although we were by no means their liberators, receiving us

very well. Going to eat or drink which is a regular occasion, but nevertheless we were offered free drinks. A very welcoming situation. Then a road trip through France to Belgium was essentially uninterrupted by any, certainly any enemy activity.

INTERVIEWER: So it was just an administrative move, was it?

MOLNAR: It really was, yeah. For my part of it, it was.

INTERVIEWER: And you said that you approached the Rhine in the area of the city of Cleve.

MOLNAR: That was – well, that was, of course, when we were into action again.

INTERVIEWER: OK

MOLNAR: And that was

INTERVIEWER: Did you concentrate somewhat before that?

MOLNAR: Yes, there was a concentration but it appeared to go well. We had not seen so much damage to the cities and villages that we passed through as there. Not that the Italian campaign was any kind of a picnic but that was pretty grim and the state of the local population likewise. So in a sense it was a seemingly harder situation. Although it is claimed by some that Monte Casino was the hardest fought battle of World War II.

INTERVIEWER: All right.

MOLNAR: And certainly in that one location the Italian campaign was really, really grim. And despite all the notion of sunny Italy, in the central mountainous part, in any case during the winters I was there, it was by no means any picnic.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Interview with Dr. George Molnar on 29 November 2006. End of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with Dr. George Molnar 29 November 2006 tape one, side two. Now, Dr. Molnar, can you describe the situation at the end of the war that you found yourself in at the divisional headquarters?

MOLNAR: Well, the resistance initially in turning our flank towards the Netherlands was still pretty vigorous by the Germans. The information I gathered from prisoners revealed the Germans had to do considerable re-grouping to man the lines. Battle groups were ever more common, meaning that individual units were no longer of sufficient strength without significant

regrouping. This, of course, I observed and got from prisoners and otherwise. So, I had daily sessions with my superiors in informing them of the information I had gathered.

INTERVIEWER: How would you rate the level of resistance at this time?

MOLNAR: Initially it was very strong, and actually it was very vigorous right to the end, although by late April '45 we were aware of the food supply to the Germans. But frankly, I didn't know that this was actually initiated by the German commanders in Holland, obviously with permission from their commanders in Germany.

INTERVIEWER: So you're referring to the shortage of food for the Dutch population?

MOLNAR: That's right, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel at the end of the war, that is to say a week or so before armistice, did you have a general feeling or sense within the division that this was coming to the end?

MOLNAR: I must confess, no

INTERVIEWER: So, unlike the First World War when there had been many rumors of an armistice for a week or two prior to it, you got no sense of that?

MOLNAR: Oh, no, no. There were some rumors but it didn't amount to the level of knowledge at my level that this was that imminent.

INTERVIEWER: OK

MOLNAR: So it has now come to describe the armistice conference and so on. You get the sense that this was a surprise to me. And, in fact, if I can come to that on the fifth of May, I had absolutely no preparation of what I would be involved in. I simply had an order the evening before telling me that – from my general – that the next morning I was to be, at nine o'clock, to meet with him. This turned out to be getting into his staff car and driving, as far as I was concerned, somewhere. Just he and myself and the driver.

INTERVIEWER: This was General Foster.

MOLNAR: General Foster, yes. And when we arrived in Wageningen, I had no special preparation but General Foster, as it were, delivered me. And then I went into this hotel, the [names hotel in Dutch] and I really still have no clear notion of what I was going to do. But when I was there – I forget whether it was Brigadier Kitching or General Foulkes himself told me that I was to interpret the preliminary conference for an armistice. And this, indeed, took place at 11 o'clock that morning. We must have arrived around 10, 10:15 or so. And this got underway and there was a German general, I….

INTERVIEWER: Blaskowitz?

MOLNAR: No, no, this was Reichelt.

INTERVIEWER: Reichelt, OK.

MOLNAR: Blaskowitz was his chief of staff with their own interpreter, a German major and there was, of course, people who were there later as well for the four o'clock final event, including Bernhardt. And, as the pictures show, I was seated on General Foulkes left, between him and Prince Bernhardt. And I simply proceeded to interpret when I was needed, which was a good part of the time.

INTERVIEWER: Can you just paint for me a brief word picture of the scene?

MOLNAR: Well, my memory of this was mostly related to the official photographs of the event.

INTERVIEWER: So, you were seated at a table, were you?

MOLNAR: But more recently in many, rather April 2005, Radio-Netherlands, the Dutch radio television, sent me a video which essentially was about Prince Bernhardt's life. In it I saw myself live for the first time. Essentially, it was like a newsreel. And so I saw the situation live for the first time. Because, prior to that people asking me was I aware of all the press that was present and everything. And I had to say, I had no memory of that whatever. I was so intent on concentrating on what I had to do. I was, after all, 22 years old, the youngest person there. And the consequence now, sad to say, the only survivor. But…

INTERVIEWER: As I recall from the photos, you were on one side of the table and the German delegation on the other. Is that correct?

MOLNAR: That's right, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And this was in a fairly large room, obviously.

MOLNAR: That's right, yeah. It was sort of a main conference room of that little hotel at a long table.

INTERVIEWER: What were your personal impressions of the Germans?

MOLNAR: Well, they appeared tense but intensely professional. And now, in retrospect, one forms various after impressions, specifically that when you think of the total situation of the Germans. Here they were a) escaping being prisoners of the Russians b) even prisoners of the Canadians. But one certainly didn't see any sense of relief on the part of these people. I particularly agree with an interview I later heard from Brigadier Kitching describing these officers and Blaskowitz himself as being a) professional soldiers and b)having been through six years of a really grim and surely, to professional military, a very frustrating experience because one, one has to say due to Hitler's interference they badly conducted war. So…

INTERVIEWR: It must have been a very difficult experience for them, do you think?

MOLNAR: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. It's a grim and, one would think, to professional soldiers a somewhat shameful experience.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have, did you….

MOLNAR: Compared to how high they were flying in the early years of the war.

INTERVIEWER: Of course. Did you form any impression of the attitudes or feelings that the Canadian delegation may have had, collectively or individually?

MOLNAR: Well, I think, knowing the people involved, I had the feeling that they appeared to be quite satisfied and pleased with this turn of events. But, again behaved very professionally and competently at all of these events.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

MOLNAR: I got a better impression of the Germans during the post-armistice involvement I had with them, but this was a brief and for me a very, very intense experience. I can't say that I enjoyed it particularly but I certainly wouldn't, it certainly was not a painful experience.

INTERVIEWER: As this meeting went on, and in subsequent dealings, did you find that there was any kind of relationship or rapport that was built up between the two opposing side?

MOLNAR: No.

INTERVIEWER: So it stayed truly professional throughout, did it?

MOLNAR: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, the idea was the idea was that you were not to salute, not to shake hands. But the Germans certainly saluted and this was re-emphasized to me when I saw the video of it, especially in relationship to Blaskowitz who came for the four o'clock final session.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Can you describe, sort of in general terms, the messages that were passed back and forth?

MOLNAR: Well, essentially, the English was an unconditional surrender situation. But at several points – and I cannot remember the specifics of this after all these years -- the Germans did protest on some points. But General Foulkes very curtly dismissed any protests and reminded them the situation was unconditional and they seemed to acquiesce.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Now, there was a general rule that the Germans would keep their own soldiers under control. Is that correct?

MOLNAR: Yes. Well, we'll come to that.

INTERVIEWER: Go ahead then, please.

MOLNAR: Fine. I talked about the contacts that followed the armistice. Just to say that at four o'clock that afternoon, I have no recollection of the interval. I presume I ate a lunch of some kind. But in the next session there again was some protest by Blaskowitz which again was declined. And Prince Bernhardt made some comment. And the particular thing, of course, that remained unforgettable to me [was] that I was strictly doing my job, a very junior person at a very high level event. And, obviously, no one congratulated me or patted me on the back when it was over, but Prince Bernhardt did. And he was very gracious, a very charming man who commented on my good German.

INTERVIEWER: Presumably he was fluent in German as well.

MOLNAR: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Presumably the Prince was fluent in German as well.

MOLNAR: Well, I mean not just presumably, but for sure. And I knew this in retrospect. I joked to myself and anybody I would be talking to that I could facetiously have commended him on his German. But seriously, he was in a Dutch general's uniform and displayed an impressive presence to me. He was the only person who virtually chain-smoked through everything. It's amazing how long he lived and how well from a medical point of view. He only died in December of 2004. Of course, he had a very fine and useful career blemished only by one some kind of a lapse that I don't really fully know about.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MOLNAR: But certainly an impressive figure and unforgettable from my point of view.

INTERVIEWER: So, tell me. After the second meeting, how did the situation unfold then?

MOLNAR: Well, it was really very much the same.

INTERVIEWER: Well, let me interrupt you and ask you one question: did you do all the translating or interpreting or did somebody else help, or were the Germans providing translators as well?

MOLNAR: The Germans had their own translator but essentially that was some German to English and mine was English to German. As I recall it, we had about equal shares, although perhaps since our people spoke more I did somewhat more than the other side. But this is a purely subjective impression that I can't really…

INTERVIEWER: Of course. OK, go on and tell me how things transpired after that.

MOLNAR: Well,

INTERVIEWER: From your point of view, of course.

MOLNAR: From my point of view. The next day was really the most exciting and interesting one because again I had word from General Foster that I was to meet him the next morning again. Again, no information whatever what I was to do, or what we were going to do. But, essentially, we got in to his staff car and went from our headquarters, which was not Wageningen, through the German lines. We flew the General's flag and some kind of another flag on our cars. We were met by German military outriders on motorcycles and they conducted us through the German lines to Rotterdam, a trip of, I would guess, close to an hour. And it was just most exciting because, for an intelligence officer to be going through enemy lines, especially under such circumstances, was truly a unique experience.

INTERVIEWER: I can imagine. Now, this was going to Headquarters XXX German Corps?

MOLNAR: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And, of course, all the German troops in situ were still armed?

MOLNAR: Oh, absolutely. And so we got to the outskirts of Rotterdam and were taken to a private home that was requisitioned by the German general and met a different German general there. A very fine and impressive gentleman to my remaining impression and that was a General Kleffel who was a General of the Cavalry, which is essentially the same rank – no, one rank below that Blaskowitz had as colonel-general which is just one step below a field marshal.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MOLNAR: I would digress for a moment to a very interesting point that I only learned about 10 years ago. And that was that Blaskowitz at the start of the war was also a colonel-general and actually the person in command of the entire German forces invading Poland.

INTERVIEWER: Really.

MOLNAR: Yeah. The subsequent very interesting event was the explanation why, at the end of the war six years later and after having won some, or perhaps most, of the highest decorations available to the Germans including the Knights Cross and the Iron Cross and so on. Blaskowitz was still a colonel-general. During the Polish campaign Hitler, of course, declared the Polish prisoners of war would not have the Geneva Convention applying to them. And it is a matter of historical record that Blaskowitz put his foot down and said, "Not for troops under my command."

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

MOLNAR: And so he defied Hitler. And Hitler's revenge was never another promotion. But he nevertheless was employed in the Western Front and the Eastern Front and eventually in command in Holland. He was, of course, accused of being a war criminal, which is probably

justified on all the terrible things in Poland. But at least, in some regard, he displayed his mettle as a proper Prussian general.

Anyway, meeting General Kleffel now, in Rotterdam, again accompanied by some of his staff and a German interpreter as well. We had a very useful discussion between General Foster and General Kleffel on the points of how the armistice affected the Germans. This involved their laying down their arms, German officers retaining their side arms for the purpose of maintaining discipline, and the basic plan that they were to conduct their own exit out of the Netherlands as expeditiously as possible.

And the Germans, the general in particular, had one major concern and that was how to protect his troops against the obviously angry and vengeful, or potentially vengeful, Dutch population. This was a point I mentioned earlier that I failed in my interpreting. It's really the only time, and it was – he used a German term, or seemingly German term, thinking or saying that if the Germans had behaved like, using the German word, "uluganaan". I had no knowledge of that word and it was at that point that the German interpreter stepped in and said, "hooligan." So he was worried what if the Dutch population decided to commit atrocities, quote unquote, against his troops. Our response was that the discipline of the Canadian troops and the behaviour of the German troops will have to be the guarantees against that. And he, whether he really was satisfied or not, he had no further objections.

And it was also made clear to him that the XXX Corps, which he commanded, would in fact be under the command of the Canadian division and he would take his orders from General Foster. So thereafter we returned to our headquarters, eventually to move into the Netherlands and to our own headquarters in or near Rotterdam. There were some public celebrations which, again, I only remember because there is a photograph showing me with General Foster on the balcony of the Rotterdam city hall with the mayor and various underground resistance personalities that displayed their jubilance over the happy turn of events.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you now, are there now ongoing orders and directions or communications flowing now between XXX German Corps and 1 Canadian Division?

MOLNAR: Very much so. I was assigned to liaise with XXX Corps headquarters. I had around this time the curious message from corps, originating at 1 Canadian Army, of whether I knew of any generals with a clean enough record who might replace General Blaskowitz. Of course, the only German general that I knew in command of troops was Von Kleffel so that I said that. And I had the curious feeling as if I had put Kleffel in charge of all the German forces. I didn't, but I had a very small advisory part in that.

INTERVIEWER: So did General Kleffel then take over from General Blaskowitz?

MOLNAR: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

MOLNAR: That's right. So I had a very favourable impression of Kleffel. He was a thoughtful, mysterious man, nevertheless with an occasional twinkle in his eye and displayed admirable intelligence and competence to my level of impression and understanding. I…

INTERVIEWER: Did – sorry, I was just going to say, did the move of the Germans from Holland back into Germany go smoothly from your point of view?

MOLNAR: Yes, very much so, very much so.

INTERVIEWER: And why would that have been? To what do you attribute this smoothness?

MOLNAR: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: To what would you attribute this lack of problems?

MOLNAR: Well, even then and especially subsequently, I had the impression that the Germans felt overall relieved in a) having survived the war, b) in not being prisoners of war, especially not of the Russians, and also a desire on their part to, what might be called showing off, how well they could take hold of a situation

INTERVIEWER: So to be professional to the end, is that it?

MOLNAR: To complete it. Now, the Germans always prided themselves, militarily or otherwise, in being competent, thorough and their particular word: correct. In other words performing up to standard and, shall we say, impeccably. And that they did. I had several further occasions, of course. I had meetings several times each week with Kleffel's chief of staff, a colonel. And at one point I had an interesting offer of, would I join the general for lunch? Now, I had strict orders. No, we didn't salute, we didn't shake hands. I mean, this didn't seem right. So I asked my superiors and they came through, "By all means, go." The idea was any information you get is still very useful.

So I went to lunch with them and had a very gracious, extraordinary experience of being in a high ranking German officers' mess, had very decent food and pleasant conversation. They enquired about how I got my German. There was one particular repartee. The German general told me, "You just wait. You may very well be joining before very long in fighting the Russians." And I relatively politely indicated to him that I thought this was just Nazi propaganda. But he bet me that within 10 years we would be at war with the Soviets. And he offered no greater risk than exchanging postcards in 10 years and I willingly agreed to that. In effect, of course, nothing of the sort happened. I never heard about him or his staff after the war. But we did make this bet.

There was one other, no actually two more, events. One in particular when I was to accompany the general and his staff from Rotterdam to a German seaside – no, a Dutch – seaside resort called Shraydam, no Schreviningen [?]. It's sort of fun trying to say that in Dutch. It's a seaside resort and my jeep and my driver followed the German general staff car going through, along the

route from Rotterdam to this resort on the sea coast. The Dutch population were pretty loud and noisy but really didn't do anything of any harmful nature. We had Canadian outriders as well.

We arrived at this resort in the casino of this seaside palatial resort. And it was a fascinating experience to see a German staff conference because this conference involved the commanders and staffs of all the German troops in Holland. That's 120,000 in number. And so not just German army, but navy and air force were also present. And the general marched in ahead of me and my driver with his staff and we followed. We had a small table next to the general's table and I saw, for the next hour or so, the German command conference proceed. I, of course, had experience in the Canadian context in Italy as well as in Northwest Europe. I found that General Kleffel was very much master of the situation. He obviously was highly respected and dealt with this staff and their questions, dealing with the exit from the Netherlands, detailing the plans. Essentially, the troops were to march on foot. As much transport as they had went along with them and only some engineering and naval personnel would remain to clear minefields and mines in the sea and the rest. It was especially surprising for me to see that near our table was another table who for all the world looked for high ranking British naval officers. But of course they were German navy. Whether the German admiral in the Netherlands was there or not, I can't remember.

INTERVIEWER: Was the withdrawal of the German troops accomplished quickly and professionally?

MOLNAR: Very much so, very much so.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any major problems?

MOLNAR: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Were there any major problems of which you were aware?

MOLNAR: I only note in written records that there was some disturbance in Amsterdam with the Seaforth Highlanders.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MOLNAR: And so. But there's none other and the Canadian troops were well disciplined and well behaved and so were the Germans. And they marched out so that by June they were out of the Netherlands. So this was a short period of time when you consider that the armistice was on the fifth of May.

INTERVIEWER: Right. There was one gesture from a German officer that you mentioned?

MOLNAR: Which one was that?

INTERVIEWER: That was about the pistol.

MOLNAR: Oh I see, yes. By the eighth of June the Germans had, for practical purposes, left. And upon reaching the exit point at Den Helger [?] from the Netherlands into Germany, General Kleffel's chief of staff, a colonel whose name I'm sorry I can't remember and haven't been able to retrieve, sent me his pistol. He gave it to one of my fellow officers at the border point with a little personal note indicating his appreciation for the courtesies and professional conduct I displayed. And it's this sidearm that I recently transmitted to the War Museum for their keeping.

INERVIEWER: Oh, that's a great story, a great story.

Interview with Dr. George Molnar on 29 November 2006. Interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS