NAME: FRED MERCER

INTERVIEWER: KAETHE SOLOMON

CAMP: BUCHENWALD

DATE: JUNE 8, 1980

Q: My name is Kaethe Solomon. I am interviewing Fred Mercer at Emory University on Sunday, June 8, 1980. Mr. Fred Mercer lives at 308 Evergreen Street, Warner Robins, Georgia 31903. His date of birth is August 25, 1922. His age at the time of liberation was twenty-tw6, and his prospective occupation at the beginning of the war was nothing clearly defined. He enlisted in the Army. His present occupation is barber. His military unit at the time of the liberation was Company B, 69th Signal Battalion, XXth Corps, 3rd Army. His rank at the time of liberation was Corporal, and he was involved in the liberation of Buchenwald. That gets us down to some of the questions. Fred, how did you first hear about the camp?

A: Part of my unit, the XX Corps, liberated the camp itself. On approaching the camp, they had just opened the gates and let the inmates out. They were streaming down the autobahn in an endless line, still of course in their striped camp uniforms.

Q: Do you remember the date?

A: No, I don't, but somewhere you could find out where the date was. I might have it in this book here.

Q: I see you have a book of your own. *The Ghost Corps*. Is that the name of the book?

A: Yes.

Q: *Through Hell and High Water*.

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A: It was put out for the members of the XX Corps with that letter to each one of us, if you would like to read it.

Q: There is a letter in this book. Are we going to be able to have this book or a copy of this book or can we copy this? I see you hesitate. I assume you want to retain ownership of the original.

A: Yes, the originals. If I could have some guaranty that I would get these things back, because I have lost the negatives. There is no way on God's green earth that I can replace them. This book here, I don't know whether you have noticed the signature.

Q: I did not. Oh, General Patton Jr., the general's signature is in the book. Now this is his actual signature?

A: Yes. Of course, there he is.

Q: And the picture of General Patton.

A: And this is the XX Corps Commander, General Walton H. Walker.

Q: Now this would be a very valuable....

A: Not only has it the information, here is the complete route that we took from the time we left South Hampton until we ended up in Linz, Austria. This is all the towns that we stopped in, and the dates that we were there from the time that we entered France.

A: So this is actually an entire history of your Corps and not specifically in terms of liberation of the camp.

A: The camp is mentioned in there.

Q: I will take a quick glance at it after we finish the interview, and then make the determination as to whether or not we really want to take the responsibility of keeping it here. You went in a day after it was liberated, because you were sort of a second part of your Company that went in?

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A: The tanks went in first, the infantry went in and cleaned up, and we as a signal unit would reestablish communication where they were knocked down or whatever. So we were the third outfit into an area after it was liberated.

Q: Did you expect to enter there?

A: No. As a matter of fact, when it was liberated, General Patton himself was surprised that it was there.

Q: And that information you got where?

A: Just through the grapevine type of thing.

Q: So there was really no awareness.

A: That's right.

Q: What was the mood of the unit as you approached this camp?

A: We were just going across Germany. I talked to some of the people that were there that lived in the little village that was close by, but they said that they did not know what was going on in this camp. And the village was about a quarter of a mile down the hill.

Q: Did you believe them at the time?

A: Well, it was hard to.

Q: Why?

A: Because of the odor of burning bodies, if nothing else. Because I have pictures here of them burned. I have pictures in here of the bodies in the ovens.

Q: Take out your pictures now so we take a look at them.

A: So they had to know it.

Q: There was no way that you could not question the odor is what you're saying.

A: I don't know whether you have smelled the odor of a human being or not, but it is a whole lot different from an animal. It's a very pungent, tangy odor. In other words, to be perfectly blunt, it opened your sinuses.

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Q: As you talk about that odor now, can you still smell it in your memory?

A:, Oh, yes. This right here is Omar Bradley. This is Walton Walker. These are some of the dead bodies, as you can see here. Now this is General Patton right here.

Q: Did you take these photos yourself?

A: Oh, yes, I took these photos myself. And these photos are so well done that there is no grain in the picture because I took them with aerial photography film. When General Patton was standing up here and he said to us...and you can see how close I was standing to him....

Q: He was in a jeep.

A: That's right, he was in a jeep. I'll tell you something else about that later. It was in a movie I saw not too long ago. I am going to quote what he said, so if I shock you don't be surprised. He said, "You can see what the Germans do to people. Don't capture a one of the sons of bitches; kill all the bastards." That was his exact words when I took this picture.

Q: These are valuable pictures.

A: This is General Eisenhower. As you can see, I waIked right up to him and took the picture. Here he is here.

Q: And this is looking at the camp.

A: Yes, this is some of the camp, some of the barracks in the camp.

Q: That's Buchenwald.

A: Yes, that's Buchenwald Camp. When I first saw him, he was about back here. I could see just the top of his head. And there's a friend of mine -- I'll show you his picture over here -- and I said to him, "Who in the hell is that up here with a garrison cap on?" Of course, he [Eisenhower] takes about two more steps and I said "Well, I guess its all right seeing it's him." And this is Omar Bradley.

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Here are the bodies, as you can see. The surprising thing about these that I can't understand, unless they were hypnotized or just did not care any more or what not, is that they have a little hole right in the back of their head where they had been shot. They were obviously shot with a small caliber pistol because their faces weren't blown off. And they were laying as you see there. This is the gallows where they hung some of them.

Q: When you say they were hypnotized, what do you mean?

A: I've got just hundreds of them, laying around the ground. How could you get that many people to stand still that long to be shot? And it is quite obvious that they shot them and left them lay where they were, because they weren't drug there or anything of that nature. See this one is burned. See the part of his skull here. These were grown men weighing about fifty or sixty pounds. They were just piled up in a pile. There is where the odors came from here. This was the German soldier. He was at the front gate. He was one of the guards. They just killed him and walked over him. See the little holes in him? Somebody meant for him to die, because there must be twenty-five or thirty holes in him. This is the very front gate. This other fellow I was telling you about has got a picture of that front gate, of which I didn't get. It is a big archway-type gate, but this fellow was laying right in front of it. Now this one here was in a lab, partly dissected. This is one of the mass graves. They just dug them with bulldozers and covered them up. If you walked around there you could see maybe an arm or a leg or something sticking out from there. But on this gallows they used a wire, not a rope. Of course as they kicked them off here, they'd dropped down, and they were decapitated all at the same time. See these burned here? Here is your double fence in the Buchenwald prison. See here, the yard was just full of them. When I took this picture, I stepped right across and walked right into that

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building right over there. These here, they had already started getting some of them ready for burial. See the rib cage in the oven?

Q: I sure do. You have some absolutely..I've seen many pictures but you have some...

A: Have you ever seen a picture with these people in these locations?

Q: No. Not any locations.

A: See General Patton standing there? See the 3rd Army patch right there on the cap? That right there is a *Life* photographer and a reporter. I don't know why I have never seen any pictures. They must have them put away somewhere.

Q: Yes. They have them in their national archives in Washington.

A: This guy was a reporter for *Life* magazine. There is yours truly standing right there. And this is Eisenhower's jeep and here is Patton's and there they are right there in the background.

Q: If we could have some copies of these, it would be great.

A: You can see there is Bradley, standing right here. The rest of these pictures are personal pictures and things of that nature.

Q: I would really hate to have the responsibility of holding on to these pictures.

A: There is yours truly at twenty-three years old.

Q: Oh, my. Way back when. Let me say this to you. I know you don't get into Atlanta that often and that's a problem.

A: This right here. We are unloading the boats onto the LST's to go on Utah beach. This building right here no longer exists.

Q If we could keep those pictures here and send them back to you registered mail, return receipt...

A: I got [unintelligible] as a result of that building.

Q: Oh, really, that's the Purple Heart.

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A: Yes. There's my [unintelligible] and there's my dog tags, rifle....

Q: As a result of that building. Now you're going to have to give me a short explanation of why you got a Purple Heart.

A: I was in the building directly across the street and the way the Army regulations read any projectile hitting a member of the Armed forces that has to be taken care of by a medic or a hospital is entitled to a Purple Heart. In other words, some of the debris from this building is what wounded me.

Q: Let's refer to those pictures a little later on. Here are your....

A: XX Corps patches.

Q: Patches, yes. Gee, I see my uncles coming back when I look at those patches, when they came back from the service. Your pictures would be very vaIuabIe to us. I'd Iike to taIk a little bit more about how we can possibly copy them, which we have done in the past-- copy photos -- but certainly without jeopardizing your own photos. Lets go back to your arrival at the camp. Take us back to what you saw there, what you remember seeing, the sights, the sounds, the smells.

A: The first thing actually was seeing the inmates themselves, just walking endlessly down the autobahn. They were out. They had no idea where they were going. They couldn't care less. They were out. They just started walking in the opposite direction. Of course we were going east and they were going back west where we just come from.

Q: Did anybody come towards you personally? Want to hold your hand, want to hug you?

A: No, because we were in vehicles, moving along the autobahn, and they were, of course, walking. There was one incident that I remember very well. The Germans were surrendering in droves at the time.

Q: Were there any soldiers left at the time you were moving in there? Were there

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any SS ?

A No.

Q: Any other soldiers?

A: Yes, but they were surrendering in groups. They would just throw down their weapons, come out with their hands on their head, and want to to surrender. And we would tell them the compound is there, walk down. They'd open the gate and they'd walk in. The war was winding down. And there was one particular soldier, a German soldier all by himself. He probably obviously dropped his weapon out in the woods someplace and he come walking along and there was one man. Of course you couldn't tell their ages because of loss of weight and that kind of stuff. I had no idea. They all looked like they were one hundred years old. And as he came walking up the highway, he had his hands on his head and he was going "comrade, comrade." But this inmate stopped, kind of looked around, and found a stick laying on the ground. It was about four feet long and about that big around. He picked it up. He just stood there and this soldier walked on up near him and he just stood there and beat him to death.

Q: The inmate beat him to death.

A: That's right. He was taking out his frustrations. We didn't bother him.

Q: You didn't stop him.

A: No. No.

Q: Describe that paraticular inmate to me. What did he look like? Emaciated?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: So he was still able to walk?

A: He was still able to walk. As a matter of fact when we got into camp, there was some still in the camp that was still alive. And there was one that was so weak that he was just standing up in a corner. And every GI that went in there had

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given him some food-- C rations, K rations, whatever, but he couldn't eat it. The room where he was standing was about the size of this one. He was standing right on the corner, leaning up. He was too weak to stand. He was just leaning in the corner. There was enough food in that room to feed him for the next six months and he couldn't eat it because his stomach just wasn't....

Q: But that inmate that was of the starvation stature had enough strength to pick up that piece of wood and beat this German soldier.

A: Beat this German soldier to death. And there was another one just a little bit further down the road that was just a little bit further gone, because he walked along and all of a sudden he began to stagger and he dropped down and his mouth dropped open and he began foaming at the mouth, obviously dropped dead right there. He had gotten out and that was as far as he got. Just walked a few miles down the highway.

Q: Were these mainly men that were still left?

A: Yes.

Q: No young boys.

A: Like I said, you really couldn't tell the age. There was no women as I saw.

Q: First of all it was predominantly men.

A: Yes, and these were all men. The ones that you saw in the pile there. They wouldn't have weighed more that sixty to seventy-five pounds.

Q: What was your reaction when you saw the first inmate, this emaciated...?

A: I was young. I was twenty-two years old. Back in those days nothing bothered me. I went through the war and it just never dawned on me that when it was over with I wouldn't be back. Did you have that feeling over in Vietnam or were you scared to death?

RUSS JARVIS: I was petrified to death.

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A: You see, I wasn't. I don't know why.

Q: I would like to clarify something here for the tape. We have a Mr. Jarvis. Is that your name?

RUSS JARVIS: Russ Jarvis.

A: Russ Jarvis who is here with Fred Mercer today. Russ is a veteran of the Vietnam War. So in the process of this tape you will hear a little bit of cross conversation between the three of us. I just need to clarify that for the purpose of the tape. Thank you.

A: But like I said nothing seemed to bother me. I would just roll with the punches and went right on through the war. You got to a place after a while that you go [raspberry sound with tongue]. "You missed me."

Q: That is survival armor probably that....

A: And the fact that you knew that everybody was around and you were more or less protected and I don't know just what gave me the feeling. Now I get a hangnail and I wonder if I am going to end up with cancer.

Q: The difference in the age. You saw these inmates. You were in a vehicle at the time when you saw the ones walking. You didn't step out of the vehicle.

A: At no time.

Q: So you didn't have an an opportunity to give any food or to really talk to an inmate or talk to anybody that was....

A: Not until after I got into the camp.

Q: Tell us what happened when you got into the camp.

A: As far as the conversation is concerned, it was thirty-five years ago. But there was a guy with me that spoke Yiddish. He translated and we would just carry on conversations back and forth between the inmates. Like I said, it has been so many years that it's hard to remember it all.

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Q: The man that you were with spoke Yiddish. Obviously he was a Jewish man.

A: Well, no, he was a member of the armed forces.

Q: And spoke Yiddish, and was not Jewish.

A Now that I don't know.

Q: The probability is that...

A: I say he spoke Yiddish or Jewish or whatever, because he was able to talk to them and translate.

Q: It wasn't German that he was speaking.

A: Oh no, it was not German.

Q: Do you remember his reaction?

A: No. It seemed that it was one of these things of being in the right place at the right time, I guess, and I just happened to walk up to the guy and he was talking to the inmates and I just more or less fell into the crowd and just listened. And as we moved along I just tried to stay close to him.

Q: You went into the camp. What happened when you went into the camp? Did you do anything there? Did you have an assignment there?

A: No. As a matter of fact Eisenhower says to me, "What are you doing here?"

Q: Eisenhower spoke to you.

A: Yes. He says, "What are you doing here?" I said " I'm just looking around." Until this day I cannot understand his answer, but he says," Enjoy yourself." The the only thing I can think of that maybe was enjoy yourself and thank God that ain't you. Or maybe that he had met so many people in a receiving line that the first thing that popped into his mind is what he came back with.

Q: That's very interesting to hear that.

A: But I mean that was his words. He says, "Enjoy yourself."

Q: Eisenhower was there. Apparently there were many other top brass there as well.

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A: The four. Let's see there was Eisenhower who had five stars. Patton had three. Bradley had three, and General Walker had two. Now that was very surprising to have that much brass that close to the front lines in a group. It didn't used to happen, because the possibility of one hand grenade could have practically annihilated the entire command in Europe.

Q: Exactly. Do you have any idea as to why these men found themselves in the same position at that time?

A: They were surprised that we found the place and they wanted to see it.

Q: So news got back to them that that existed.

A: That's right.

Q: And they all came at one time to see Buchenwald.

A: They all came at one time.

Q: Did you ever hear any conversation between these men?

A: No. The only thing like I said was what Patton said to us when he was standing up there in the jeep. They [Patton and Eisenhower] were standing around like what you saw in the pictures carrying on conversations back and forth. But that conversation I didn't hear.

Q: When you went through the camp, you were with somebody else. You were with this young man.

A: His name was Tom Knot. He was in Detroit, Michigan.

Q: Do you still hear from him?

A: Yes. We exchange Christmas cards every year. We have for thirty-five years.

Q: Please leave his name with us. He may be interested in being involved in our project.

A: I'll have to send you back his address.

Q: I would appreciate that, thank you so much. Did you exchange any reactions

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with each other as you walked through the camp? Do you remember talking about it at all?

A: No, about the only thing I can remember was just the fact that we were just walking around looking at these people and there was very little conversation between the two of us, as far as that was concerned.

Q: The camp at that time had obviously a lot of people in it, as you were talking about the brass that was there.

A: And of course there was a lot more GIs besides ourselves that were there.

Q: And did you see any reaction between the GI's and the inmates? There were still some inmates left besides the inmates that were on the road.

A: Yes. Just like this conversation that I was telling you about. They would ask them questions and get the best reaction they could with the language barrier.

Q: There was no rush. There was no physical contact.

A: There was no physical contact. No "I'm glad to see you" type of thing.

Q: Did you see any food being exchanged and actually eaten by a inmate?

A: No. The food was there, but I didn't see anybody eating anything.

Q: What was the general feeling in this real milling around?

A: Surprise is about the only thing.

Q: Just a surprise as opposed to shock?

A: Yes. This reaction of how one human being could do this to another has always been foremost in my mind, because I can't do it to an animal much less what these people had gone through.

Q: You saw a lot of death around you during the war outside of this death in the camps. I don't know if you remember thinking about it at the time, but did you have the same reaction to this death in the camps and the death you saw during the war in terms of combat death?

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A: Oh. no. It was different for us. We [Russ Jarvis and I] were talking about that coming up and he was talking about a party that they were having at Christmas time. He was actually in combat, and the people that were stationed over there were having a party. And fewer planes were coming back than had left on the raid that night and the other people were getting drunk and he was worried to death because his friend wasn't coming back.

RUSS JARVIS: We were stationed on Guam. We were flying B-52 's out of Guam [unintelligible] and back. We were actually flying into North Vietnam and back to Guam. People couldn't understand that we were dying and they were having a Christmas party.

A: Well, there was one time in France. One of the guys came up to me in my capacity as the company clerk. I kept all the service records, made all the payrolls, did all the correspondence between company, battalion, home, and Washington D.C. So anytime anybody had any change of status in my company it came to me. But this fellow walks in one day and he lays down a photostatic copy of a birth certificate and he said "Fred, my wife just had a baby." So I filled out the usual forms. He signed them, changed his allotment. Therefore he was getting more money for the baby and so forth. So I said to him, "When your wife has another baby, let me know" and I said I'd make out another form. He says to me, "She better not have another one until I get back home." Three days later I made out his death certificate.

Q: The horrors of war. So then the death in combat was a much more traumatic thing for you to be part of since it was a friend, somebody that was a buddy of yours and close, as opposed to going into a camp.

A: Just like the night that I got wounded. It was about two o'clock in the morning in [unintelligible], France. We had been shelled every night for several days and

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each shell was big enough that it just completely annihilated a building. Each building here was gone. They found out where the shells were coming from. It was a World War I Big [unintelligible] and they mounted it on a railroad car and they had it up in the side of a mountain. They would load it, run it out, fire it, run it back into the side of the mountain. General Patton said “I’m getting God damn sick and tired of this. Find that gun." And I said I was going to use the language so he could...in other words this is the way he talked.

Q: Oh, sure, General Patton was notorious for his vocabulary.

A: So, he sent a patrol out, they found it. They came back. He gets on the radio and calls back to the 9th Air Force in England. He says "I want that gun destroyed.” Gives them the location. One P-47 with one bomb came over and he dropped the bomb, scooped it into the mouth of the cave, and that's all there was to it. No more shelling.

Q: Pinpoint bombing.

A: Pinpoint bombing. We moved so fast that we would run off maps. In other words they'd only give you a map of a certain terrain and these dates here would show you how fast we moved. And we would get into a town that wasn't on a map and didn't know where we were, really. So General Patton says that we got to have some maps so he calls back over to England again. He wants some maps. He says," How you get them over here is your God damn problem." So a guy with a P-51 came over with the maps, dropped them off to us, went back to England. When he got back, he got back on the radio and he says “Hey, you sons of bitches almost got me killed.” And the guy on the radio said "What happened?" He says "I was going back across the channel and I had to take my guns out of the plane to put the maps in. I didn't have a gun." The guy said “What did you do?” He said, “I just out flew the son of a bitch."

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Q: These are war stories. Let me tell you. That's incredible. We're going to go back to some of these experiences that you had. You had very little exchange actually with the prisoners from what you have said.

A: Oh, yes. It was more or less just walking in, looking around. I was there for about an hour.

Q: Your feelings --as you said the inhumanity to humanity. Did you find it difficult to think of these inmates as human beings?

A: Oh, yes. It bothered me along those lines. Like I said I just couldn't see how one human being could do that to another one.

Q: But were you able to think of these people as having been human being.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: There were no guards present at the camp?

A: No, they had already been taken prisoner with the exception of the one that I showed you the picture of, and of course he was dead. He had just been laying there over 24 hours.

Q: And you saw no violent incidents between survivors and guards except for that one story that you told me.

A: Right.

Q: We are going to talk a little a bit about the German civilians. I don't know how much contact you had there. Were there any German civilians around when you were there?

A: The Burgermeister of the town was there.

Q: Did you have any contact with him?

A: Somebody asked him about the situation there, and he said, "We did not know that this was going on up here."

Q: That was from the Burgermeister of the town?

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A: Yes. Well I say it was the Burgermeister. He had on a long coat and a tall silk hat and that's what the usual....

Q: Right.

A: Now the camp itself was up on top of a hill. And the little town was down below it. You could see the little town I know.

Q: If you were to describe the camp to us, what would it look like? The structure, the type of material used for the building. What would it look like?

A: Just tar paper shacks with a double barbed wire fence where guards could walk between the inside fence and the outside fence.

Q: Tar papered shacks?

A: In other words you had just the frame.

Q: A wood frame?

A: A wood frame. With covered wood and just black, as you can see in these pictures. It was just plain black roofing type of material.

Q: And were there any openings in it?

A: Oh, yes. As you can see. Yes. See the windows.

Q: Yes. I see the windows on it. And the fencing looked like what?

A: It was just barbed wire, as you can see, about ten to twelve feet high. It was a double fence with space wide enough in between where the guards could walk.

Q: You have a picture there of what looks like a skeleton on a table. That was in a medical part of the camp? Do you remember?

A: As you can see it was in the laboratory. See the table, the lights. The lights were still on.

Q: And that was in BuchenwaId camp?

A: Yes. Now this one had been partly dissected as you can see. And they were experimenting with him some way some how.

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Q: You said partly dissected. Was it dry ? Was it still wet?

A: Oh yes, it was wet.

Q: Was there a lot of blood still? I don't want to sound gory.

A: That's alright. Yes.

Q: Was anybody with you when you were taking that picture?

A: Oh, yes, this other fellow. This Tom Knott.

Q: From Detroit?

A: Yes. I imagine he must have some of the same pictures, because he had a camera there at the same time. Like I said there he is right there. I took that picture of him and he took this one of me.

Q: You apparently really focused on the experience. You were able to take pictures of it and so forth. You took pictures all along of your war experience?

A: Oh, yes. This whole album from the day I went into the service until...

Q: And your work in the service...please forgive my ignorance. The Signal Corps. Were you involved in photography in terms of your job description?

A: No. My actual job was clerical. The main function of the unit itself was telephone, teletype, and radio.

Q: So it was communications.

A: Yes. Strictly communications.

Q: So your photography, your photographs was an individual thing.

A: Oh, yes. We had all the film that we needed. You could get all the film that you needed of any description. As a matter of fact this film here, as I said, was aerial photography film. German aerial photography film.

Q: How did you get it? Once you went into a town....

A: Once you went into a town there was no problem of picking up anything. We were the conquerors, we liberated it, and we looted it, abusing no one. Any

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home that we went into or any place that we went into, if we stayed there over night or however long we stayed there, we left it in the same condition as when we went in there. We stayed in the best homes, the best situations, and the best conditions that you could find. When we went into any city when we got into Germany itself, not in France, but into Germany, we picked out the best section of the town, the biggest homes and what not. We knocked on the door, we said we would be here a few days, find someplace else to stay. You walked into the building, and you looked around for a bedroom, you took your equipment off, your gun or whatever you had. You threw it on the bed. That was automatically yours as long as you stayed there. Of course the first place you went to was the shower.

Q: This was according to instructions?

A: Oh, yes. Now the buildings were actually vacated by our executive officer who was a major and an interpreter. He would just walk around and figure out how many buildings we needed for X amount of men and just start knocking on doors.

Q: You mentioned Germany as opposed to France.

A: Yes. Because we were liberating France. We were conquering Germany.

Q: That's an important distinction in terms of the knowledge. When you were in Germany and you went into these homes, after you took pictures at Buchenwald, did you ever discuss any of what you saw with the residents?

A: No, because the residents of the homes were already gone when we got there. The one thing I do remember is the day the war ended I was in Linz, Austria and I was out on the street and this woman came along. I would say she was probably forty-five years old. And I said, "Have you heard the war is over?" And she said, "Thank God." But the German people themselves, the average

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person you met on the street, seemed to be very highly intelligent, very clean. As a matter of fact when you went from France into Germany the grass got greener. There was that much distinction between the German and the French people. And these homes that we stayed in were immaculate. They had silverware, linens and china--that kind of stuff. We used it. We washed it. And we put it back in the cupboard. There was nothing taken and nothing destroyed.

Q: How did you feel about the Germans?

A: I admired them, because we were not fighting the German people. They were in the same situation we were in. They were conned into this war and we went over there as volunteers and draftees. The Nazis were the ones who were the culprits. As a matter of fact, I've got a picture here--that's an SS trooper's shirt that I've got on right there. See the SS on the front of it?

Q: Oh, my, yes. What made you put on that SS trooper shirt? That's the first I've ever seen like that. Its got the lark and tiger.

A: In other words we had conquered them. What the heck?

Q: So it was your shirt.

A: It was my shirt.

Q: Better I should be alive to wear it.

A: Look at these right here. These are Hungarians. There was fifteen thousand surrendered that day and that's the way they had gotten down to traveling, because the war was winding down. They were traveling in horses and wagons and their wives and families were in with them.

A: My, those are some pictures that you have here. There are incredible. We are going to get back to Germany in terms of the civilians. You didn't have too much to do with them apparently. You had orders to protect the Germans from any possible violence.

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A: Oh, yes. We were not to bother the German civilians. As a matter of fact we had a nonfraternization....

Q: That was the next question in terms of the fraternization policy, because you were a young man yourself at the time you were over there.

A: Just like any young man we didn't pay any attention to it, really. We just tried not to get caught because it was hard to meet people face to face and come in contact [unintelligible]. We actually weren't even supposed to say hello. In other words, it was non-fraternization. You will have nothing to do with the German civilian.

Q: Did you come across any Jewish men in your unit who were involved in possibly the Buchenwald...?

A: No, although there was some Jewish fellows in my unit. There is one right here. His name was Joe Kent. He was from Chicago, but we always had pet names for nationalities. And Jews are not supposed to eat pork. Every time pork was served he would eat some. I said “Joe, you’re not a Jew, you’re a Kike. If you were a Jew you wouldn't eat that stuff." He said," Looks like veal to me." [Laughter.]

Q: And if it doesn’t look like it I’ll pretend. I am interested in terms of reaction to the experience on the part of the various ethnic groups. Obviously you didn't experience anything.

A: No, that ethnic business only started in the last couple or ten years. In my outfit there was twelve hundred men. We had men from thirty-six states and fifteen different countries. You would refer to a man from Poland as a Pollack or a person from Italy as a Wap or whatever, but there was never any animosity or any physical contact or anything of that nature.

Q: No, my interest is in the reaction of the various nationalities to a similar

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experience. You know as an American how you would react to that. As a Jew certainly where there was so much pointed at the Jew [unintelligible]. Getting into the military aspect of coping with what you had seen at Buchenwald, was there ever any discussion-- formal discussion-- about having seen what you saw at Buchenwald with superiors or...?

A: No. It was just another town, another place that we had liberated and we just moved on.

Q: And you weren't there to hear any formal declarations on the part of the Generals?

A: Oh no.

Q: There were no Chaplains that you know of at that point?

A: No.

Q: Did you ever tell anybody about your experiences at Buchenwald?

A: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact I'm quite proud of these pictures. I've shown them for years to friends, relatives, whatever. But nobody in this type of situation.

Q: And the reactions of your friends to your experience at Buchenwald?

A: "Isn't that awful," or “my goodness.” That type of reaction. But you can’t visualize without being there and seeing that. Now you can look at those pictures and say, "My that's awful," but to step on and walk around them and look at them just laying out there it is just an entirely different feeling altogether.

Q: Does this experience become more vivid to you as time goes on for you than it was in the past when you were closer to the experience or indeed when you went through it?

A: Not really. It’s just one of the things that happened to me in time of war.

Q: No nightmares?

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A: Oh, no.

Q: No nightmares about war in general.

A: No.

Q: Did you watch the *Holocaust* TV show?

A: No, I didn't.

Q: You have a wife?

A: Yea

Q: Children?

A: Two adopted children. As a matter of fact, my son is in the Army.

Q: Did you ever share your experience with your wife and children?

A: Yes, of course you got a different reaction. At the time that I showed these to my children they were children. They could care less. They had no knowledge of it and I it was just something that I had said to them and none of them have ever asked to look at the pictures since then.

Q: Did your wife watch the *Holocaust* TV show?

A: I don't remember whether she did or not.

Q: And you don't know if your children watched it?

A: No, I'm sure the children...My son might have. He is quite a bug. Of course, everybody in our house has got a television set so we watch what we want to in each of the rooms.

Q: But he didn't come to you as a result of the TV show and say...?

A: No, but he's military oriented. Not just as a result of me. It's just one of those instincts that came along. He reads all the military books and you have no doubt seen these war games that are out now. He has got stacks of them this high and they just [unintelligible]. As a matter of fact he has got some of them with him now in the service. They just get down in the middle of the floor and spread

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them out and fight the battle of the Bulge or Dunkirk or whatever. Four of his friends went in together and they are still in the outfit the same together at Ft. Hood, Texas. And they are all tank drivers.

Q: In other words you showed them those pictures at one period and never shown them again.

A: That was it. Just like when you hear people talking about when I was your age this happened -- that's something I never did with my children. I went through the depression. My children could care less. They don't know what the depression was like. My daughter said when she was a little girl, she said, "Dad, what kind of TV shows did you watch when you was a boy?"

Q: What TV? [Laughter]

A: Well, there had been TV all her life.

Q: Even the telephone. It's so difficult for the youngsters to....

A: But I never said, " Son when I was your age I had to do this" or "When I was your age I only made 5 cents for doing this particular job."

Q: Did your father ever say that to you?

A: No, my father was never around to say too much of anything of any description.

Q: So, did you lose him at an early age?

A: No, he was just one of those guys that wasn't affectionate at all. And he went his way and my mother and father were separated at times and they would get back together. First thing I knew I was at this Grandmother's house and I was at that grandmother's house and all of a sudden I went back home. And I would have given my eye teeth for my father to have just said "Hi, son," pat me on the back, but he never did.

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