

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Ray Buch
December 28, 1989
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PREFACE

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RAY BUCH
December 28, 1989

Q: Ray, can you, uh, tell me your, your full name please?

A: I'm Raymond Stephen Buch, B-U-C-H. It's German.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in New York City, in Manhattan, in the Harlem Hospital.

Q: In what year?

A: In the year 1920, in September 18th.

Q: Um, where did you grow up? Tell me a bit about your family and about your parents.

A: Well, my folks were from, uh, the Ukraine. Uh, my mother came from the Polish side of the Bug River and and my father was on the Russian side and, uh, they were childhood friends and they immigrated to the United States at different times and met in New York and my father was in World War I and, uh, in the infantry which, uh, I was quite proud of as you'll find out later. And, uh, he bought a farm in New Jersey and we shortly moved to New Jersey, that is the father and mother, and, uh, when my mother was pregnant with me she went to a lying-in hospital which happened to be in New York City because the railroad train went right through our farm, stopped at the house and picked her up and delivered her to Pennsylvania Station and she took a cab to the hospital.

Q: Okay.

A: There was no such facilities in New Jersey at the time.

Q: Okay. Um, tell me then a little bit...you grew up in New Jersey?

A: Yes. Yeah. Then we went back to the city for a couple of years and I got to be a, uh, street bum and, uh, kids learned how to smoke cigarettes and rammed around and got into gang fights and the usual. And, uh, at, uh, age ten we moved back to the farm because of the Depression and we were on a farm until I was inducted into the Army. I became a carpenter before I went in the Army, and that's why I was in the engineer... in the engineers. We had, uh, uh, I had the background for it, having built factories and movie theaters and different structures, houses, barns and so on in New Jersey before I went in the Army. And in the Army I picked up on that and learned a lot of new things. Learned how to blow up the things that I had built, and which was a terrible thing in my mind--when we had to destroy buildings and bridges and even trees which we blew down occasionally to, uh, to make the war effort a little more, uh, well, not useful but to learn what we had to do in service, in

combat. And it stood us in good stead because the things we learned were, uh, important to the Army and nobody else.

Q: Right. Uh, tell me about when you uh, what were the circumstances in which you were taken overseas?

A: Well, we went, we [were] inducted in the Army, in the Armed Forces, in 1942, uh, late in '42, in November, and we maneuvered in Louisiana and Texas for approximately a year, uh, a little over a year, and, uh, we, uh, then went to Texas and the plains of dry, plains of Texas near Abilene, at Camp Barkley and then we went to the desert to get desert training at Patton's desert training center, which is now a national monument. And in those days it was bleak, dreary, miles of endless wastes, and typical of North Africa where we thought we might go. However that war ended before we got there. So we trained in the States until September of 1944. And then we shipped from California to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey; and from there to England, because the 12th Armored Division had taken our equipment. We were landed in England instead of directly in on the continent. Then from England we got trans-shipped to the continent. And we landed at Cherbourg, and we started to track east towards the, uh, fighting front. And about the time we got there--December 16th, 1944--is when the Battle of the Bulge started. So we were thrown into the Battle of the Bulge, and that was our first baptismal of fire. And, uh, first couple of days we lost hundreds and hundreds of men, wounded and killed. Approximately 300 killed and a couple of thousand wounded. And, uh, from there we went to the Siegfried Line after crossing the Rhine River, and we traveled across Europe, uh, like vagabonds, thirty miles at a time. We'd stop and wait for the rest of the infantry to catch up. We were in an armored division which would go thirty miles in a day easily whereas an infantry division were lucky to go three or four miles in a day. So we were always ahead of our, uh, support units. We had infantry in our own units, which defended the people who were, uh, in spear-heading as we called it. And, uh, we travelled across Europe, uh, for, uh, weeks at a time and towards the end of the war was just a continual pack, pick-up, pack-up, dig-in, pack-up and go, go, go.

Q: Was the fighting very heavy at that point?

A: Uh, well, we had a lot of pockets of resistance. The German people, the Volksturm and the SS would drive the local farmers into shooting at us. If they didn't shoot at us, they would shoot the farmer. And they made feeble attempts at trying to shoot us naturally and the SS, uh, troops kept moving back in towards the interior of Germany, and, uh, the, well, you know, this went on a couple of months. I'm trying to talk here in a few minutes and describe, uh, uh, a couple of months of activity--it's very difficult. The, uh, thing that I remember was we started to see our men being killed and because of our men being killed, a couple here and a couple there, we would kill whole squads of Germans the way they mowed down the, uh, prisoners and, uh, their opponents. And sometimes the hillsides would be covered with bodies of the Americans, or a hillside would be covered with the bodies of the Germans, and then later on when they were trying to march the political prisoners that were in, concentration camp inmates or, uh, slaves on farms, they would, uh, march them ahead of

them trying to get them out of our way so we wouldn't see what we they had done to these people apparently. And uh

Q: Did you see any of this?

A: Yes. These bodies were lying along the roadsides where they'd fallen in exhaustion or they were shot because they weren't going fast enough and, uh, it was a terrible thing but, uh, it was practically a common occurrence in the last days of the war. From April 15th to the end of the war we saw this in many places and, uh, uh, the, uh

Q: Was that your first contact with concentration camp victims?

A: Was, was in April, about the 15th of April, yeah, we started to see the where they had been marched ahead of us because, uh, in because of the nature of the spear-heading, the 11th Armored was a part of Patton's 3rd Army which you see here on my cap, this is the 11th Armored Division, and I was in the 56th Engineers, and that's this little insignia right here which is our uniform insignia. And the 11th Armored patch was ordinarily worn on your shoulder and, uh, there there were several armored divisions. We were one of them. The 4th Armored was a sister division, and we were leap-frogging ahead, uh, in spurts as it were until and then we'd rest for a day or two until the infantry caught up to, to, uh, contain the lands that we had just over-run. And that's when we would see these prisoners who had been walking ahead of us for a couple of days. We'd catch up to them and we'd see the ones who had been, uh, uh, had died along the roadsides. And by the hundreds in some cases, and then just here and there and then they tried to bury some and they were, made half-hearted attempts because they took too much time to bury them. They were trying to hide the, the ones that had died and then there were so many of them they just left them after a while.

Q: All right, tell me if you would where you were as you were about to approach Mauthausen? How did you get there?

A: Well, uh, we were in a combat command. And Combat Command A is the one I was in ordinarily. Uh, we were down in...in Linz. We were, we forked out. A combat command, one would go to the left, one would go to the right and sometimes a third combat command called "CCR," or "Reserve," would take a central point. And there would be three prongs of us armored, uh, divisions spanning out and covering as much territory as we could; and taking it in and and opposing and and mowing down the opposition with our heavy guns, our 75, uh, millimeter guns and three-inch guns on, uh, tank destroyers. And, uh, we kept going and going and until we got to Linz. That was CCA, but CCB went, uh, to the north of us

Q: Excuse me. Translate. What is CCB...?

A: Combat Command B. There are three combat commands in an armored division - Combat Command A, which is, uh, composed of select troops depending on a situation from the

main body of the division which of 11,000 men, and, uh, CCB would be another group of men, engineers and tank destroyers, uh, or artillery depending on what we thought we needed, medical men and of course supplies always brought up the rear, following the trains--they called it division train. And then CCR was a reserve command of troops ready to go to the aid of CCB or CCA whichever was needed. In most cases they were always in the back. But when needed, they would be shifted to the front, or to relieve the pressure of one group that was in the front. For instance, CCA was stuck in the, uh, certain section of Siegfried line for a couple of days and couldn't get through and had some casualties, so they took them back and CCR replaced them. That's the, that's the, there's three parts--they call it a triangular division, and those are the three parts.

Q: So you were moving toward Mauthausen

A: Right, and CCB, uh, were the ones that found the camp. They, uh, the doctor--that's, uh, Doormeyer (ph), I believe it was, he had gotten a Red Cross, uh, official and they came down the road and with a Red Cross flag flying on their, uh, Volkswagen, and, uh, our men spotted it and the one fellow, uh, Sergeant Albert, uh, J. Kosiek,¹ uh, was able to speak Polish and so did the doctor that was in this, uh, uh, vehic..uh, Volkswagen. And, uh, he said, "We have a camp. They're ready to surrender. We want you to come and take the...the Germans prisoner." And they came down to meet us; so they took us right to the camp. And, uh, the fellows were greeted with cheers and the SS troops had already evacuated because they knew what was going to happen to them, and they only left the ordinary German soldiers there who were guards. And these, uh, German soldiers, uh, had of course thrown all their weapons in and now the people had them. And they were ready to shoot all the soldiers, but, uh, we kept them from doing that and, uh, but they did hang some of the worst, uh, guards, some of the ones that had treated them the worst--the, they took care of them before we got there actually. They were hanging on the fences, uh, butchered and, uh, desecrated; it's no worse than what they had done except here you saw an able-bodied man now hanging on an electric fence and, uh, cut apart and they they were paying back a little bit you know of what they had gotten.

Q: Okay. Let's back up a minute. You are about, you are approaching the camp. You have your your doctor in front of you?

A: Yeah, this doctor went, went, uh, took us right up to the camp and right to the main gate and, uh

Q: Describe that. Describe entering the camp. Tell me exactly what you saw.

A: Well, uh, let let me put this, uh, let me get you straight on this. I had gone with CCA to Linz

¹ Officially, Staff Sergeant Albert J. Kosiek. Platoon leader of First Platoon, Troop D, 41st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized.

and we had, uh, taken over two tons of dynamite off the Adolph Hitler Bridge, my squad and I, because we don't want nobody else there because if, if there was booby trap we overlooked, it would have blown the whole bridge and ourselves to bits. Meantime this was going on at the camp. I'm telling you what Albert Kosiack told us, when we went back in 1975 and he had, we had, uh, we went over by plane and we went, we were together for a week or so, and we talked this thing over and, uh, I feel as if I were there. And, uh, well the people just hugged them fellows; they just, they--it was indescribable. They were so happy. They were screaming and they were trying to touch them and, uh, fellows and, uh, he said he'll never forget it and of course the doctor who was, uh, who could speak Polish was, was, the doctor told, uh, Kosiack told the doctor to have the people who now had the German machine guns and everything to please stack them up and, uh, we'll take care of them. So they set fire to them. So that the people wouldn't have the guns because they would be going down in the countryside shooting everybody, so to keep them from doing that, they stacked all the guns and then they set fire to them. But the, by the time we got near, the people knew the war was over because airplanes and radios, they had, somebody had a radio--they had one radio in the camp--and they knew the war was almost over. It wasn't over until the 8th. We got there on May 5th, three days before the war was over.

Q: When did you physically get to the camp?

A: I got into the camp about May 10th, when they called for the engineers to come with bulldozers. I was in the engineers as I explained before, and my friend Al Salzman (ph) from Massachusetts was a bulldozer operator so, uh, I was helping him and, uh, taking movies and black and white pictures, slides. I had all the film I needed because, you may think this is funny, but I had a lot of girlfriends and these girls were sending me film from the United States, and I had all the movies that I took pictures everyday of combat. When I wasn't being shot at I was shooting with movie film and with, uh, black and white. And I have hundreds and hundreds of feet of movie film which unfortunately didn't all get home. It was x-rayed. It was, uh, lost. It was stolen. It was buried. One, one, in one time a ___ went right through my knapsack full of Battle of the Bulge pictures. The 35 millimeters, most of mine was gone.

Q: Okay. Let's let's get back, we're back from the film.

A: Yeah, right. Well, I'm just trying to tell you why I got the film in the camp. I had all film and I'm sorry I don't have all of the film that I did take. But anyway

Q: I want to see, for the purpose of this tape, I need to ask you if you would to describe the scene at Mauthausen when you, Ray Buch, first went through those camps.

A: Okay. We came up through the town and, uh, it's on a steep hillside, on the top of a mountain and a quarry is, uh, next to it which is below them and part of the mountain which the camp sets on, if they keep on quarrying there the camp will fall down into the quarry. Uh, as we approached it looked like a high prison which we have back in the States. And that's exactly what it was. However, inside the prison walls and in back of them were, uh, compounds

consisting of barracks, which held a couple of hundred people and these were in the main part of the camp, on the top part and here we saw double electrified fences. Uh, uh, people were by this time sunning themselves, and a lot of people were nude because they had no clothes: they had been worn off or torn off by those who were stronger and, uh, people were walking around nude because they didn't have enough clothes at the time. Uh, we had, uh, as I said there were other visitors coming. In fact I think the Russians came one of the days and they of course they started then to bring troops in from the Russian front, from the American side, (cough) excuse me, and from the German civilians nearby we started to get those people to come up by the truckload and we told them to dress in their Sunday best, and then we made them dig graves, and, uh, we wanted them to see what was going on and then we had them carry the bodies, load the bodies in the wagons. We took wagonload after wagonload of bodies out to the grave site, which was the soccer field or the sport, uh, they call it the Sportplatz. And, uh, we made the Germans handle, load them up in the wagons from inside the camp, take them down to the the, uh, graveyard, the grave site, and unload them, put them down in the graves, side by side, by the hundreds--would be a hundred and fifty people or so in a row--and side, practically on top of each other. They were such, they were all skin and bones and it was--I have pictures of them and movies which you'll see later, but the, uh, uh, bodies were so emaciated that that you you couldn't possibly understand how those people were alive and walking around. And, uh, some of those walking around looked better than the dead, of course, a little better than the dead and some of them looked worse, and they're still alive depending on their resistance or whatever--I don't know. But it was incredible that they were still walking in many cases. The walking dead we called them at that time.

Q: What was the reaction of the German civilians to having to bury the dead? What did they . . . ?

A: They, they all they just shook their heads. They were crying. They said, No, nein, nein--we didn't know--we knew they were a camp," but they didn't realize what was happening to all the people because they had, uh, a quarry with a railroad--they ran, uh, stone out you know on the train down below. On a lower level there was a railroad track to take the train, uh, the quarry stone out to different building projects throughout Austria. Went to the main railroad, down along the Danube. And, uh, they didn't realize that the there would be carloads of, uh, uh, clothing going out from all these people, would be going out by the carloads to be reprocessed into new blankets and German Army uniforms or whatever, uh, from the people who had died. And they didn't incinerate any of the clothing the clothing because, uh, it was bad enough burning up the bodies that they burned, and, uh, the German people were were, knew there was a camp. They knew people was going to it but I don't thing they knew how bad it was. It's a similar situation in the United States--now we have newspaper reporters that get in and we tear our jails apart. We know what's going on because we're an open free public, but under a dictatorship, I believe that most of those people did not know and they acted as if they didn't know. And they cried. Of course we did too. I can cry right now thinking about how terrible it was and, uh, I had an empathy for them because, uh, I was of German descent. My parents spoke German and, uh, but however they didn't teach it to me

because it was taboo in World War I and I knew my English and only knew a few words, mostly cuss words in German. When my father would get mad, he would say, _____ . Uh, that, that's my imperfect German but that's what about the extent of my German. However I picked it up over there and I was able to interview a couple of the girls. I picked on girls because they were pretty as, as you, as I said before; I don't know why but the these girls always did me favors and this one girl said that she had been marched ahead of the German troops from Silesia and coll... and the story confirms what I had said earlier about marching them from the ea..western front towards the center of Germany and from the eastern front towards the center of Germany, and they had marched all these thousands of people in, uh, to Mauthausen from various camps around the east and west and this one girl was, uh, been marched for about a week she said ahead of the Germans. She says better to with the Germans than the Russians, because they were raping the girls and the women and it was pathetic. We had a line of demarcation, the Steyr River; the Russians on one side and the Americans on the other. And it was bedlam over there - screaming and killing and shooting and tearing the place apart. They [the Russians] would send the toilets back home and the sink...the running water, they, forgetting that they needed running water. And they were just a bunch of wild animals, the Russian soldiers.

Q: Let's come back to Mauthausen.

A: Yeah. Right.

Q: Okay. You are in Mauthausen. You have started to bury the dead. Uh, were you involved at all in helping to get the camp organized? What, what was done?

A: Well, the camp, the doctors started coming in and they had already had, uh, uh, experience April 15th, uh, out in, uh, Dachau. It was one of the biggest ones we overran, which was around April 15th. So by the 5th of May when we got there, and a couple of days later when the engineers got there to, to start digging trenches to bury the dead, uh, they were pretty much, uh, they pretty well knew what they had to do to help these people, so we rushed in supplies and, uh, emergency supplies from, uh, the Army medical, uh, supplies and surplus, uh, Army uniforms and, uh, the, uh, various factories and warehouses around that the Germans had or the Austrians had were utilized to supply foo. We raided those in other words, and we, the civilian population had, was, had to go without. In fact that winter, the following winter, they a lot of them almost starved. Uh, but we were trying to to feed these people. And, uh, our division set up the, uh...and Colonel Seibel was in command, and he was in command of CCB at the time as I mentioned earlier. And he directed the, uh, uh ...the proceedings, that is, uh, the cleaning up of the camp and the burning of this and burning of that. Some of the clothes and things that we, were burned up and old, uh, latrines--uh, they were filthy. Uh, we tried to get rid of some of the things that were contagious that would spread germs and so on. So the people themselves were still dying because they were beyond help. We got there too late and they died daily, uh, by the hundreds the first few days and then they tapered off and there was a few, maybe a dozen a day, uh, thirty days later. But, uh, we were there for about thirty days, our division, and then the 26th Infantry Division took

over. In fact, some of those came in early so they could see how we were doing it. Our men stood guard to keep the, uh, people under control because some of the, the Russian prisoners were very aggressive and uh

Q: What does that mean?

A: Well, they they wanted to shoot every German that came in the place because they had been, uh, put in, incarcerated in this camp and they were skin and bones and they, they were ready to tear them apart with their bare hands, so we had to have our men walking around with guns to keep everything, keep the keep these people from uh killing each other or killing their former, uh, masters so called.

Q: What was your role in the camp?

A: Well, I was, uh, an engineer and and as I said our, my project was to, uh, help bury the dead because my buddy, Al Salzman, was on a bulldozer and I helped him grease it and maintain it and, uh, had opportunity to see quite a lot of the camp. Well, and so did he, and its amazing how, uh, you can forget details. There was so many things going on and if somebody prompts you or if you see a picture, they'll bring back a whole story just about a picture. Uh, a picture can tell a thousand words. Well, I took a lot of movies and maybe they'll be put on tape later and that'll explain some of what I'm talking about. But, uh

Q: What other parts . . . you've, you've described the burial of the dead very well and I thank you.

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh, what other parts of the camp did you see?

A: Oh I, we went through the, uh, barracks, the different barracks to see how the people were. And

Q: What was the condition of the barracks?

A: All right. The barracks were, this was, in the few days that we were there, the first few days that we were there, there were still some dead in the bunks, and we were getting the German people to take them out, and they threw them out like _____(ph)_ out in the yards, and they were piled up there. Then from there they took and put them into wagons and took them down to the graveyard. And now in the barracks where the, uh, people, where there were six hundred in a barracks, there were two and three people in each bunk. They were so skinny from malnutrition that, uh, two people could sleep side by side very easily and they, there were so few bunks they had to take turns sleeping. And, uh, uh, I took pictures, movies inside the barracks and, uh, I'll never forget these people were so weak that the ones who had, were stronger, would strip the clothes off of the weak ones who couldn't fight back and

put those clothes on themselves because they were better for instance than their own. None of these people were issued clothes. They had uniforms and when the uniforms wore out at this late stage of the war, why they were nude. And there were so many women just lying nude in their bunks they and I I felt bad about taking movies of them so I got some of them waving but I didn't make it a point to ... and anyhow I didn't get all those movies home anyhow. But I do have some in the barracks. This will explain what I am talking about. It was unbelievable. The barracks, uh, in the barracks the bunks were four to six high and had to climb up like monkeys and some of them were too weak to get to their bunks, so they sleep on the bottom one and the ones that were stronger would sleep on top. And, uh, that's where I interviewed the young lady from, uh, Sil...Upper Silesia, and you'd wonder when you see her, uh, why she looked so, uh, well-nourished. It's only because she had of her own via...volition, of her own free will, marched with those prisoners ahead of the Russians to get away from the Russians. And, uh, it was an anachronism in the middle of all this starving, starv...and starved people and these human skeletons to see someone looking as well as she did. But there were quite a few others that had just been marched in a few days before and hadn't had a chance to starve. The way, I hate to even, it, it, it's so silly when you think back on it, how these people just starved to death. They would give them rations of one piece of bread, a crumb of bread for a day, and a lot of times the bread was moldy and we started feeding them with soup and, uh, bread which we made from the flour we got downtown. We got the bakeries going and a little later on we got carpenters in, from the German soldiers, carpenters and plumbers and to get everything back in order because a lot of things were destroyed in the, by the people in fighting and then they destroyed it themselves because they were so sick of the camp--they were trying to knock down wire and everything. It was, uh, double electrified fences to keep them in the compounds and, uh, the bodies were just thrown outside the barracks into pile, into piles in the streets there. There's no place else to bur...there's no place to bury them in the camp, the upper part, until we started digging these trenches. And, uh, let's see....

Q: What else did you see in camp?

A: Well, as I said, the people were lining up, uh, uh, to, uh, go to these, uh, soup mill... or kitchens or soup pots and what always struck me so odd, the people would be walking without shirts or without pants on, and they didn't think anything of it; they were so used to seeing humans nude most of the time. They stripped them everyday and hosed them down. This is stories that they told us later. But I actually saw and have movies of people walking around without clothes on and think nothing of it. The men in particular. Uh, the women weren't that, uh, uh, aggressive. In other words they, they were more polite. They tried to hide themselves. And the women that were nude in their bunks would put their hands over their breasts and it was pathetic. Very sad. I'm, I'm glad that it, that it has never been that bad since, uh, that is that we we haven't publicized these things, but what we do know and we hope that it never happens again and, uh, if these pictures will help prove a point, I'm sure they won't happen again.

Q: Did you see the quarry?

A: Oh yes. It was, as I said, it was down, uh, uh, below the camp itself. The camp was on the highest point of the hill. The quarry was, was starting to go into the side of the mountain towards the; ultimately they, as I said earlier, the camp would have fallen in if they quarried that far. But the the staircase, they, they quarried the staircase right out of the stone of the mountain and, uh, there were big blocks of stone. It was a typical quarry. They were making building blocks for the bridges and the highways and also for stone buildings that they, uh, were putting up here and there. Uh, most of the stones were going for, uh, highways and for reinforcing underground bunkers and things like that and the people had to carry stones up the stairs, to the main camp because they built a hugh dividing wall between the quarters of the SS troopers and the, uh, kitchen and the infirmary or the hospital. They built a stone wall between those and the, uh, barracks where they had the experimental prisoners, where they they inoculated them with all kinds of, uh, germs or they froze them in vats of water and, uh, experimented generally.

Q: Describe if you would what the experimental compound looked like.

A: Well, uh, if you've ever been in an Army camp in the United States, you'll see rows and rows of barracks. Well, these were a little closer together. Uh, it reminded me of chicken coops on a big chicken ranch, and, uh, there was about seven rows of them and about ten buildings in each row. And there was about two hundred people in each one of those barracks. They were smaller than the ones down at the lower side of the camp where, where the quarry prisoners, uh, were quartered, and, uh, I don't know uh....

Q: What was the condition, what were conditions like inside these barracks?

A: Uh, well they were less crowded because, uh, they still had the bunks but they had about three high and they still had about two people in in each one, but they weren't, they weren't as elaborate, hugh; the buildings weren't as big as the ones in the lower camp, the lower section of the camp. Uh, they were smaller and only about two hundred people in each, which is almost what we had in our own Army barracks in the States. We had about a hundred and fifty--well not a hundred and...uh, the bigger ones did but we had about seventy-five men and where we had seventy-five men, they had two hundred. That's how much more crowded the bunks were on top of each other whereas we only had bunks on the floor.

Q: What were the condition, the physical condition of these prisoners?

A: Well, it was very much the same as these the ones that we saw ear... earlier who were when we first came in--the ones who were the strongest naturally had the guns and everything. And but these people that we saw were very weak. They were all starved and all trying to eat a little soup. Uh, we had already started soup kitchens, the first, first day we got there practically. Because the Army, we have so many cooks-- every one, every company has a cook--so we didn't eat. We forfeited our food and told our mess sergeants to take it to the

camp, which they did for the first couple of days until we got steady stream of supplies coming in.

Q: Did you go in to the experimental labs?

A: No, I, I, they didn't have them set up. They, uh, these experiments were going on before we got there. This is what these people were telling us. I didn't see any of, of these inno... inoculations or bathing in ice water or whatever. It's just, uh, what the people were telling us and what the records show now that from all kinds of witnesses and from the German records and so on. It corroborates...you know; it confirms the stories that we heard then. Couldn't--they were unbelievable. In fact most of the guys were in a daze--so when they got, they couldn't, they they didn't want to comprehend what they had seen. They wanted to forget it. If you ask any of the fellows about what they saw at this camp, they--it was terrible. It stunk and the smell was awful. As I said, I was brought up on a farm from age 10, and farm smells didn't bother me, uh, even the vilest, and they were vile--you know, these dead people. Some of them had been dead for a couple of days or more and then they had dysentery and their rectums were all sore and the, the skin was eaten away. These were people that are still alive let alone the dead ones, and they smelled. But I--the, the decaying flesh I was used to because on a farm we had all sorts of dead animals and it was much the same. To me, I wasn't, uh, it didn't bother me. But most of the fellows remember the smell because they were city boys. They had not, uh, been exposed to this type of thing. So and as I said, uh, have thought it since then, we were in order and we were used to it because we had seen these bodies along the road for a few days before we got to the camp and, uh, we had seen these stripped uniforms and these these human skeletons that, uh, were dead as we went by them, as we went, as we were spear-heading.

Q: Was there anything else about Mauthausen that strikes you in particular?

A: Well, the the security they had: they had the, they built another stone wall between the double electrified fence which was the original partition between the, the German officers' quarters; they had a double electrified fence with this trench in between with barbed wire on the ground over the trench and, uh, the the security that they had to provide for themselves to keep these people from climbing over the wall to get at them. And, uh, they had machine gun nests at every corner of the walls overlooking the compound, and, uh, the other thing I couldn't get over was how the people were all out in the sun trying to sun themselves because they were confined in the barracks a lot of them and they weren't even out working anymore. They were just kept in the barracks and they'd feed them with a few crusts of bread and it was a real mess. Everything was smelly. There were no latrine facilities and, uh, they were doing it out in the streets in you know their bowel movements and so on--such as they had, which wasn't very much. And I was a medic and I was amazed at having been in, having taught first aid before I went in the Army and being a medic at times in the Army on maneuvers, I was a medical aide, corpsman we called them. Uh, I was quite stricken, uh, stricken I should say by the fact that the genitals, or genitalia of the men and the women were the last things to apparently go because they looked normal. The women's breasts had

shrunk quite a bit, but their nipples and, uh, and looked normal. And the men's penises and testicles were about normal. And the rest of them were absolutely bones and, uh, with skin stretched over them. And that's the one thing that I'll never forget is, is the condition of, of the things that are needed to reproduce life. They're the last things to go, as far as I could see. In other words, Mother Nature was trying to save the reproductive organs. It was the one thing that struck me out of looking at all these thousands of dead whenever we buried them. And as I said, we had these, uh, they couldn't dig the graves fast enough so we got our bulldozers to dig the trenches, push the dirt out and then was a, uh, was a token for the Germans to get shovels and start to shovel the dirt back into the trenches. Well we'd have been there for another two weeks burying them if we had to do everything by hand. We did dig a few trenches by hand, but we then used the bulldozers because there were so many. They had them stacked up by the hundreds waiting to be buried. They couldn't dig the graves fast enough by hand, so that's why we got the German, uh, civilians in there to, uh, handle them. They put them down in the graves and laid them side by side and then they would throw a few shovels of dirt in and I'll never forget as the bulldozer, as Al pushed the, uh, stone and sand back into the trenches, you would hear a stone crunching the ribs and the bones of the poor bodies down below. It was, because this was backfill for the soccer field was made out of backfill and _____ from the quarry and there were a lot of hard stones mixed in and when they pushed the stones in they further crushed the poor things that were laid to rest in that, uh, area. After the war they said that they moved the bodies to the upper camp--see this was down at the lower level, the sports field. Then there was another lower level down around on the quarry level and, uh, there's now a third graveyard up on the top where the, uh, the old barracks used to be for the experimental prisoners in the upper part of the camp. The stone wall is gone now that was in between, the electrified fences are long gone and shortly after we got most of the people into medical tents away from the camp even. We moved them out into field hospitals; we burned the buildings down because they were that smelly and filthy from all the you know unclean--there's no place, no la...no facilities for latrines. They had these ditches in the streets, and when the rains came, it would wash everything down the hillside. So all that's gone now and it's, it's a graveyard. They said they moved the bodies from that sports field or soccer field but when I went back in 1975 the trees had grown over it already in 35 years. I went there 35 years later and, uh, the, it was so changed. It was a big museum now. Where we had seen all these barracks there were only; they left three of, uh, in the first row, I think there were three, no four left which were now made a museum. They showed, they had those on exhibit. But the huge barracks down below--they had six hundred to eight hundred people in them were all gone, used up for other purposes. But we did burn most of the barracks in the upper part. We left a few in the front which apparently were the cleanest. And, uh, we went back in 1975 and the Austrian civilians had a dinner for us. They provided us with, uh, a chauffeur and a limousine and they, uh, it was unbelievable how they treated us. We were like heroes. And the people, when we went back were hugging us again and trying to touch us and they were grabbing souvenirs and we were giving out little buttons like I have here from my various outfits. These are unit insignia. Here's the 41st Cavalry which happens to be the unit that was the first ones in the gate. And this Michael Green who was in the 41st Cavalry is going back to Europe this, uh, in 1990 for the 40th Anniversary, 45th Anniversary and, uh, he's bringing

some of these along to give to the people for souvenirs. But, uh, we were back again in 1980 and we're trying to go back every five years, and we meet the people that we released, and we meet their children, and now we're bringing our children and it's a great thing that the survivors of Mauthausen, and there were around 12,000 alive when we got there. And I guess maybe un another couple of hundred died and so there were 11,000 actual people alive when we got there, but the ones coming back are the families of the victims who died in Mauthausen. They come back by the thousands. But we were back in 1975 there were around 12,000 people there and you wouldn't know how they got there because every road was full of these big, uh, tourists bus that hold fifty people--they were lined up like, uh, cars around a football stadium in the States. Incredible where they come from Spain and Hungary, Hungaria--all the countries of Europe and, uh, we were, as I said, when they found out we were the liberators they couldn't do enough for us. They practically tore the, they wanted our hats; they wanted, they were going to tear the clothes off us. We were real celebrities. So I felt good about that and I'm; I just felt so sad about all those that were killed, over a hundred twenty thousand were killed in that camp. Or more. They're not sure. It's between a hundred twenty, hundred fifty thousand that they know of.

Q: Is there anything else about Mauthausen that you remember in particular?

A: Well, nothing except that it was made so the people couldn't get out, and as I said it looked like a prison when we first observed it, and it was more like a prison when you got in it, uh, because they don't have the double electrified fences. Our prisons have fences, but not electrified, and, uh, the, uh, condition of the people--the human skeletons walking around was another thing that impressed me. As I said the, uh, that anybody could be alive and that thin when they looked like bones, their legs, their arms, their feet looked swollen in many cases. That was the only thing that looked anywheres near normal was from their ankles down to their insteps. Uh, the rest of the bodies were, uh, skin drawn over their faces as if it were shrunk in the heat or whatever--just unbelievable. And I don't know what else to say...the smells as I said were terrible, but I wasn't too fazed by that for some reason, and I think it was because of my upbringing on a farm.

Q: Okay. Thank you. You had mentioned that some of your men were in Dachau. Were you in Dachau as well?

A: Uh, no, only after the war. Yeah.

Q: Okay. Tell us if you would please, you were in Mauthausen for thirty days roughly?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where did you go from...no, before we do that, what--by the time you left at the end of thirty days--what shape was the camp in?

A: Oh, as I said, we started to burn some of the buildings and, uh, the, uh, we backfilled the

trenches and the latrines and most of the people were gone. The ones who could walk started walking home within a couple of days. And, uh, the ones who were very sick we moved out into field hospitals and, uh, some of those that stayed were trying to help us get the records to find out and to check on how many people were killed and to keep track of everything and we had some of the people working there because they didn't want to go home. A lot of them were Russians and they didn't want to go back to Russia, so, uh, we tried to keep them, uh, working in the camp and they, because they said if we go back to Russia it will be the end of us. And it was we found out later. They were sent to the salt mines, to Siberia in other words, and, uh, that was something that I didn't think of until just now, but, uh, they were glad to be left behind. They didn't want to go back to Russia and we, they, uh, incidentally from after we let the, as I say, uh, should say, we took the demolitions off the bridge in Linz. Our group, our engineers were then sent out into, uh, north of CCB and the camp, and thousands, hundreds of thousands of German soldiers and White Russians tried to surrender to us. And we accepted their surrender, and, uh, in place, but they wanted to come into Germany you know, on our side of the line because they didn't want to be anywhere near the Russians and unfortunately our politicians had said this is the line of demarcation and all those Russians on that side, I mean Germans, will have to go back to the Russians and so a couple of hundred thousand soldiers that surrendered to us were returned to the Germans [Russians] and shipped to Siberia. But that was, that was the 6th of May. In fact it was the afternoon of the 5th, the 6th and the 7th, and on about the 8th I got to the camp, and I was there on and off for a couple of days, but the main part was when we got the the ditches or trenches dug for the graves. That was my main job there.

Q: Where did you go when you left Mauthausen?

A: Oh, we were sent into various little cities in Austria, uh, to maintain order and, uh, make sure there was no looting by the, uh, prisoners who had gotten away from the camp. They were all over. They were going to march home, but they wanted clothes. They were either stealing it from the Germans or taking it from the Germans, and they were fighting going on and we had to maintain order. It was a real madhouse. And, uh, we were sent to Schwanenstadt. And then from there we were, as engineers, we were sent out to maintain roads and rebuild bridges and, uh, electrical plants and, uh, to guard the prisoners in Ebensee, which was a camp--a concentration camp--and it was now full of SS prisoners. And these haughty bastards, as we called them, were very independent; and, uh, they...they wouldn't...they didn't want to do anything. They thought they were still lords of the universe, being SS and being used to that, uh, having control, uh, full control over civilians and full control over the German Army. They were the masters of Hitler, they were, uh, Hitler's, uh, supermen. And, uh, we now had them crawling because we didn't feed them. They were digging up worms and eating worms. They dug up all the grass. It was in May and June that we started putting them in, in late May. And they were digging up the grass. They were eating worms. I mean it. And, uh, they were waiting, praying for rain and we had a few days of rain and the worms would come near the top and they would dig them out. And so we started giving them crackers and things, give them a couple of crackers from our K-ration boxes. And we'd get a wristwatch which was worth maybe seven or eight dollars, and then we sold them to the

Russians for over a hundred. And some of the Russians later on were paying five hundred to a thousand dollars for a Mickey Mouse watch, in particular. And we were getting these watches from the SS men and then selling them to the Russians for souvenirs, because we all had watches. We could get them anytime in the PX for about ten bucks. And here we were getting a hundred dollars to five hundred dollars. And some of the fellows that were able to go to Berlin and trade with the Russians got over a thousand dollars for a wristwatch that we got for a cigarette. The cigarettes were worth money to them. They were like gold. And every soldier had a pack of cigarettes, a carton of cigarettes, a week issued. Whether you used them or not, you were entitled to a carton. So a lot of the guys learned how to smoke; and I hate to say this, but many of them are dead now because of the lousy habit. And their wives always complained, "Oh, yeah, he's been smoking like this ever since he got out of the Army, and dying of emphysema and lung cancer."

Q: Let's go back to Ebensee.

A: Okay. There we had double electrified fences for them. We left them in place. And, uh, we had guard towers and machine guns, and that's what we took turns guarding. And I hated that. I was only there a couple days.

Q: Can you describe the camp? In addition to the fences, what what did you see?

A: Well, the, the main barracks were in back of it and, uh, I just stayed, we had guard towers in a wire enclosure which we had put up in front. It was something new. We had built that. And I...I'd seen Mauthausen, so I didn't go to look at the quarters there because I figured they're all the same. And we were too busy taunting the SS men.

Q: How did you taunt them?

A: Well, by offering them cigarettes and then crushing them in front of them and then stamping on them.

Q: What, uh.... Did you make the SS do, uh, certain chores? How did you...?

A: Well, there was so many of them. And there was really nothing much for them to do. We made them build the fences, yeah, their own "corrals" you might call it. Yeah. But we didn't trust them to to do what the ordinary soldiers were doing back in camp, in Mauthausen. There, they were restoring the facilities and cleaning up and they were doing the buggy-lugging (ph) when they burnt the camp. And they were burning up anything stuff that was Nazi that they didn't like--I got a Nazi flag. I said, as I was watching it burn. I said, "Oh, I'll grab that and see if it's...." And it bur...I guess it's full of holes. I...I don't know. I've never unrolled it since I picked it out of the burning pile. And I got it in the car. I was going to show it to you, if you were interested. But that's the only souvenir that I got from the camp.

Q: The SS, uh, I assume eventually you got, uh, soup kitchen up and you fed them finally?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, as I said, I was only there a couple of days because I hated guard duty and, uh, it was just standing there watching these guys do nothing. They'd play cards and dig for worms and they didn't have much to do. There was not much of an area to dig for worms. In a couple of days the worms were gone. Unbelievable. So they were and they were without shirts, they were, uh, their uniforms were, uh, either torn off of them or whatever by somebody but a lot of them didn't have any shirts. They had pants and, uh, as I said we taunted them the way they did, uh, the civilians. They would shoot the civilians if they didn't fire at us earlier in the war and, uh, many times the people said the SS made them do it, which was true enough.

Q: Did you see any trace of the real prisoners of Ebensee, the former prisoners of Ebensee?

A: No. Uh, the camp was, I had been working at Mauthausen and most of those prisoners now the same as in our camp had, uh--well, those who were well were walking home. They weren't going to wait for convoys. And the sick ones were already in camps, uh, hospital tents with the 26th Infantry Division. See, the 26th Infantry Division later took over Mauthausen. And, in fact, I think they got the credit for taking Mauthausen. Because by the time the newspapers finally got there, they claimed--the 26th Infantry Division claimed--they had liberated the camp. They did, in a way; but not the way the 11th Armored did.

Q: Okay. We are almost finished with the tape. Is there anything else that you want to add, anything else that you saw that relates to the Holocaust?

A: I'd like to bring out a point which I don't see, uh, discussed very often. And that is the fact that I personally knew thirteen men that were killed in action, and some right along side of me. And, uh, three hundred were killed in the Battle of the Bulge in the first few days of combat. And then ultimately we lost eight hundred men killed, and four thousand wounded or injured; and, uh, these were all expended in the effort to save Europe from Hitler's Nazi terrorism. And, uh, I'd like to bring that out, that we made a lot of sacrifices and those fellows that did it did it for the freedom not only of the United States but of Europe. And it's a point that is only brought home when you go over and you walk over their graves, which I did. And you think of the 45 years, it was 40 years when I walked on the grave of my best friend, accidentally. I backed up to take a picture of Patton, his monument, which is at the head of the uh ____ Cemetery. And I backed up to get the big cross in and I put my hand down on a tombstone, and as I walked around it I looked and it was August uh Heddenbock (ph), my buddy from back home. And I just bawled. And I am sorry. I'm just overwhelmed. But that is what I'm thinking about--how lucky we are, all of us, to be here, to see the tapes, to have a free world, and even with the events happening today to see it coming to pass that our efforts have not been in vain. And that is the one thing that I would like to emphasize is that we lost a lot of good buddies.

Q: I cannot think of a more fitting way to end this interview, and I thank you very much.

A: Well, I thank you for the opportunity to express these thoughts and, and hope then as I say that it will never happen again. Thank you, Doctor, for interviewing me. I appreciate it.