

Good afternoon, my name Mark Lender. I'm an administrator and historian at Kean College of New Jersey. And with me this afternoon is Dr. Bernard Weinstein, the Director of the Oral-- of the Holocaust Oral Testimonies Project, part of the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean College of New Jersey, also a professor of English here at the college.

Our guest this afternoon is Mr. Victor Wegard today. An investment banker from Willingboro, New Jersey, but in the 1940s, in the middle of a-- what's part of a long and distinguished career in the United States Army. This afternoon, though, he's concerned with one particular part of that American military career.

In 1945 he was part of a team that assisted in the liberation of the Flossenbug Concentration Camp. And for the remainder of this afternoon, he'll be discussing that and his related activities with us.

Mr. Wegard, we'd like to begin the interview by asking you to explain to us a little bit about your background, where you were from, how you ended up in the military, how, in particular, that you ended up as part of the Flossenbug interrogation team.

I was born in New York. I consider myself a New Yorker, Eastener. Entered the army at age 18 in 1936, upon graduating from high school, for one specific purpose. Billy Rose had taught me shorthand and made a court reporter out of me. And convinced me, join the army, and off to China you go, where for \$2 a month you will have some of the most beautiful Chinese servants working for you. And the rest of your \$18 a month, you will save.

That impelled me into the United States Army, forsaking a \$3,000 a year job working in referee's courts. Except I never got to China. The boat went through the Panama Canal. And the commanding general of the Panama Canal Department in July of 1936 found there was a court reporter aboard. And he says, just the guy I need. Remained in Panama for two years.

Succession of jobs in the service, mostly with investigatory agencies-- the Judge Advocate General and the Inspector General, primarily as a reporter for these tribunals. Then on to the Army War College in Washington in 1938 as a reporter for the Army War College. And that was probably its most famous class. All the future four star generals of World War II were in that class, including general Ridgway and General Van Fleet, General Bradley, and others.

Then we were original Lend Lease in Trinidad in 1941. And were in Trinidad when Japan invaded Hawaii, bombed Hawaii. And the war, as far as we knew it, began for us at that time.

I was yanked out of Trinidad by the Judge Advocate-- Judge Advocate General of the Trinidad sector in base command to fill a slot required for a confidential aide. I was a warrant officer at that time of officer status for General Patton's headquarters. We were forming the Western Task Force for the invasion of North Africa.

I trained with the Western Task Force and accompanied the Western Task Force to Casablanca, actually landing at Fedala. Was with Patton through Tunisia. I was with him through Sicily. And there begins the travails of the rest of my Army career.

We were unfortunate to be part of a group that remained fairly loyal to the old man. And as a result, the war went on around us. The world had forgotten us. We were stranded in Sicily for 10 months, living in villas, no assignments, at headquarters without troops. The troops had been taken away from us.

After a while, boredom set in. And we tried every possible means getting out of that island and get back into the war, volunteering for paratroopers, volunteering for Rangers, whatever-- even for the Navy, anything to get out of there. That's how I wound up on war crimes. Nobody else wanted the job.

We were selected. There were a group of 18 of us that were selected from around the Mediterranean theater, back from Italy and North Africa. And I was the only one from Sicily. I was shipped back to the States for three weeks of training up in the hills of Lebanon, Tennessee at a school called Cumberland University, whose only claim to fame prior to that time was it was the home school of Cordell Hull.

And we were given day and night training in the rudiments of what we may be looking for in entering concentration camps. What to anticipate, who were the Nazis, what were the Nazis, who to look for, how to handle situations as we come up to it.

Mr. Wegard, was the first time you heard any detail about the camps?

We had heard rumors about camps. Now, for the first time, we were exposed to classified information, direct information about camps. And this is the summer of 1944. The information was mountainous. We never could go through it all. We studied as much as we could. We took it camp, by camp, by camp, by camp. The most notorious, of course, being Auschwitz-- quite a few reports on Auschwitz-- Buchenwald, Dachau. And a French camp, Drancy, as I recall.

Nothing about the camp which we later were instrumental in liberating, Flossenbug. But that's when we first learned about the camps in the detail that you referring to.

While the war was still going on?

While it was still going.

You had this kind of detail available to you.

Correct.

Did you know any of the terminology that later came to light, such as final solution? Were those terms new to you?

I don't recall that. I don't recall that. We were dealing with the harsh realities of death and persecution after the fact, that these actually occurring at the camp. The politics behind it, we hadn't gotten into.

And I don't think it was the Army's intent to indoctrinate us with the-- and I can't disagree with them-- with the politics behind us. Only that these were crimes against humanity. These were war crimes. We will be fulfilling a mission which is, as they told us, Judge Advocate General told us, probably the most significantly important mission we'll ever have in our careers in the service.

And it was the Judge Advocate's Office that conducted the training?

Yes.

Military training at this point?

Correct.

Now, at what point were you rotated back to Europe?

In September of 1944 we were sent back to Europe. We remained at a replacement depot in England in the Midlands. And then shoved into Holland, working on claims against the United States. We filled in as claims officers with clear instructions to be on the lookout for any potential war crimes activities in the area.

Well, we were in friendly areas. We were in Noord-Braobant in Holland, south of the river Mass. It was already liberated by the British and the Canadians. I think we were the only Americans up there. And we would be flitting about the countryside, settling claims for three guilder. Some Dutch farmer would walk 20 miles in [DUTCH] file a claim for an accidental death of a cow when one of our paratroopers in landing killed a cow. Needed some fresh meat. We would quietly settle these claims right on the spot.

As the war was winding up in the last week in April, we were pulled out of Eindhoven in Holland and rushed to Paris. And for the first time now we were given the designation as War Crimes Investigating Team 68-32, at the Majestic Hotel in Paris. And we identified eight or nine other teams there. The same type of digital designation-- 68-31, 69-32, so on and so forth. We were 68-32.

We were given an assigned area of responsibility in operations. All of Bavaria, from the river-- from the town of Hof in the north to the River Danube. Below the Danube, I believe was 68-31 territory.

Approximately how many people were, say, in 68-32?

We were four officers and 12 enlisted men.

And that was strictly the investigatory unit though?

Yes, strictly investigatory.

And with that you can draw on infantry support, for example?

Oh, yes, we have Carte Blanche to draw on-- we had the-- we could command logistical support from any engineering, any quartermaster, any infantry, any combat, non-combat units in the area, primarily through the program Marshal in the area or whoever the commanding officer may be.

At this juncture, when did you receive your first orders that sent you toward a camp?

We had received orders to proceed into Nuremberg to help secure the Palace of Justice for the oncoming-- for the forthcoming major war crimes trials. And at the same time to find a headquarters for our own team operation.

And while we were in Nuremberg, we received word from our headquarters back in Paris to attach ourselves to the 91st Infantry Division going to take Flossenburg. And the keywords were that it is believed that Admiral Canaris, the Chief of the German Abwehr, was incarcerated at Flossenburg and may still be alive.

The abwehr was Chief of Military Intelligence?

Yes, the head intelligence honcho in Germany. A prominent-- many prominent Ecclesiastes were also there-- editors, Schuschnigg of Austria was there-- to liberate the camp, assist in liberation of the camp, and bring Canaris and any of these political prisoners we find there back to our military, to Wiesbaden as quickly as possible.

So for all intents and purposes, you thought your job was military intelligence and doing--

At that time--

--something for military intelligence.

--we had a specific mission to perform there.

I'm supposing then that a unit the size of yours did not proceed on the camp alone.

Oh, no, Infantry proceeded us.

And you expected that there may well be fighting in the situation--

Yes.

--of the war still going on. Can you describe to us your approach to the camp? What was it all like as you moved in?

Was there fighting? Was there not?

The fighting had abated almost entirely by the time we got to the camp. We got there late in the first day of the liberation of the camp. There was still some fighting inside the camp, mainly by the flushing out of some kapos or some Germans that were hiding within the camp.

The camp was full of quarries, many places to hide. And on the outskirts of camp, beyond the electric fence, very thick forested area. We believed that our mission was accomplished when we broke into the camp and we learned that, from the prisoners themselves, that Canaris had been hung, had been executed just three, four days before we got there. All of the priests and other Ecclesiastes there were executed. Schuschnigg was still alive. And other people were found there, including a cousin in the camp.

We remained there just overnight. And then proceeded back to Nuremberg with a report that the people we were looking for were no longer there. We were then told to proceed back to Flossenburg to commence-- pick up the Flossenburg camp as a case for War Crimes Investigating Team 68-32, assist in the apprehension of perpetrators, rounding up of witnesses, collation of evidence for forthcoming possible war crimes trials there.

When we got back to the camp, for the first time we learned what we should have learned immediately after we entered the camp several days-- the day prior. That there were only-- there were less than 2,000 prisoners in the camp when we got there. We had been informed that they were close to 5,000. We now learned from those prisoners who were lucid enough to talk coherently that the Germans had marched out most of the camp the day before we got there.

They started two days before we got there. And the bulk of the camp was out of there approximately 36 hours before the infantry troops broke in. They had gone east along N14 toward the Czech border. We were just a few miles from the Czech border. So the team, our entire team, was now intact. Priorily, there was just an advance guard. And now our entire team was together.

We arranged for a platoon of infantry to come with us. We started out after on N14 on that so-called death march, as we began to name it. We had heard of death marches. We were running into them now in other sectors. So we had every reason to believe we were going to be enmeshed in one right here. And sure enough, we were.

A few miles east of Flossenburg, we came to town by the name of Namering, a very quaint little dorf. Not a mark on any of the buildings, as if the war had passed it by completely. The few villages that were in the-- and the burgers that were in the street were asked whether they had seen any prisoners being marched through, or any Germans, or any military going through. [GERMAN], saw nothing. Look around you, the war passed us by here.

We got a hold of the burgomaster. The same thing-- we're peace-loving people. We saw nothing. We heard nothing. You must have us mistaken with some other town. Yet, we knew N14 was the only clear route between Flossenburg and the Czech border.

So they would have had to have passed through those areas.

They would have to go through there. We felt they were lying, but what can you do? Hopped back into our Jeeps. Continued on N14 for about a mile outside of the Namering. Then we got hit with a stench to the likes of which I never want to face again-- rotted corpses.

We stopped the Jeeps. We took a look along the edge-- both sides of the highway. Fresh mounds of earth just running for maybe 100 yards. The old man got out, pulled the shovel off the rear of the lead Jeep and began digging-- the Colonel began digging.

Your commanding officer?

Yeah. He's now uncovering hands, arms, and faces in 3 feet of soil. The rest of us get out of the Jeeps, began digging. Wherever we landed a shovel, there was a body there. And the blood was still oozing from some of them. You could see

it was-- these were fresh wounds. The heads were stove in or their heads were partially blown off with machine gun blasts.

At this point, after several hours of this, we could take it no longer. Someone came up with the bright idea-- we had radioed back to 3rd Army, let them know what we had found. And we were given instructions, or at least Colonel [? Matze, ?] our team commander, his recommendation was approved to round up every man, woman, and child back in that town in Namering, and haul them out and let them see what they didn't see.

In the bodies that you found, were there women and children as well as men?

In the bodies that we found, we found no children, no. We found very few women. They were mostly men. And most of them Ecclesiastes-- Czech priests, French priests, political figures we've never been able to identify.

They continued the digging. We dug up 1,803 or 1,804 bodies there. And the 3rd Army ordered a proper burial for them in the adjacent to the Namering town cemetery, in land that they very willingly granted for that purpose. Let's hope they're still there. And we left. We took pictures of this.

And frankly, we've been criticized for some of those pictures because we forced every man, woman, and child today, and every man, woman, and child to get down close to those bodies to be sure they can't mistake the notion that those are bodies, things that they said never happened, were not there before.

What was their reaction when they were--

They were very stolid. A couple of the women were emotional, very emotional. But other than that, they--

Was there ever any admission from the citizens of the town that, indeed, they had seen these prisoners come through?

Would you believe that to this day, I can't recall any of them admitting or changing their story that they saw nothing, including the burgomaster. We mind our own business. They may have come through, but we're busy with other things. We didn't hear it. We didn't see it. They were quiet. I can't see how they'd be quiet. There were artifacts all over the world. 3,000 people on a march creates some kind of a racket.

And they were marching. They were not in trucks. This was a forced march.

A march, oh, yes. And you can visualize guards barking, people being shot if they didn't keep up with them all along the road. Because we found isolated graves along that road on our march back-- on our trip back to Flossenburg, as we began looking closer.

And as your team and its escort came through-- I'm just trying to put a time frame together from what you've been telling us-- it sounds like these people missed being liberated by no more than a day and a half or so. Is that about right?

That's correct. That's correct.

Did you ever find out why those inmates whom you met in Flossenburg, why they were not taken as well? Was any reason ever given? Was anything ever explained to you?

Yes, we had asked that reason. And we found that common ordinary laborers-- I don't want to use the term-- the so-called lower classes were left behind. The Germans still felt, really still felt, I believe, that they were bringing scientists, and technical people, and people that they can still continue to utilize in their labor forces out of the camp for future use.

They really believed in that march. It wasn't supposed to be a death march. They thought they were fleeing to the new Nazi redoubt somewhere in the hills. Their orders were confusing. They were just told to evacuate as many prisoners, be very selective in your prisoners, out of the camp. But very fortunate for us, they killed very few that remained behind, maybe just a few hundred, that's all.

Which takes us back to the nature of the camp itself. You mentioned earlier that the most notorious, of course, was Auschwitz. Flossenburg itself was not nearly the size of Auschwitz.

Right.

Could you describe both the physical nature of the camp as you saw it, and as you later proceeded it, the purpose of that camp as opposed to a camp like Auschwitz?

Well, I don't think there's much of a resemblance to, as I visualize Auschwitz. To me, Auschwitz was more of a permanent brick building, a barracks type set up. Flossenburg was a quarry town. And I would presume was a quarry town before it became a concentration camp. And that it had transient workers in the area.

So the buildings there, as I recall, they were all of wood, more or less temporary structures, wooden Quonset huts, so to speak, if there could be such a thing. The only buildings that were concrete, that I recall, that were there were the administration building. One of the crematorium was out of wood, another one was out concrete. There were two of them.

And there, let me make a remark. They bragged-- the Germans at Flossenburg bragged about their gas chamber, which I'd like to show you a picture of. They felt-- they claimed it was the most perfect gas chamber ever made for the Germans, much more efficient than Auschwitz, much more efficient than Dachau. And really, it looked like a bathhouse, with tile floors, tile walls, a massive bathroom, shower room, a very modernistic, very efficient looking room. And they had only recently in their existence begun using it.

So this became a source of pride for them?

Yeah.

But it clearly was a death camp.

Oh, definitely. They killed-- we didn't-- were not aware of it to any great extent in 1945, but in our in-depth research back in 1985, back at the camp, we now learned that they killed thousands upon thousands of Russian POWs there. The Russians were evacuated from other camps and brought to Flossenburg strictly for elimination. No records kept whatsoever. So that the next of kin of those Russians will never know the they died anywhere.

Do you know whether initial selections were made, as were made at Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Treblinka, and other places?

I don't believe so. It was more of an orderly fashion than here. To the best of my knowledge, approximately 100,000 total were eliminated at Flossenburg, a relatively small number for a major concentration camp. Its importance stems from another direction. That's where they built the Messerschmidt, whether they were aware of it or not. The Messerschmidt was built underground.

The 262.

Yeah.

The jet.

Yes, at Flossenburg. We were aware of it. We couldn't bomb it. It was a camp.

Using slave labor from the camp?

Correct.

When you approached the camp, coming in, knowing that there was still some danger, that you had expected fighting, that there was still an occasional shot being fired, how did the prisoners greet you? What was their condition, was their reaction as you came through?

Very emotional. They almost tore us apart. They were so happy to be with us that-- to them, a liberator was someone sent from heaven. An American liberator was God himself in their eyes.

The prisoners you first saw, who were they? The Russian POWs?

No.

Jews?

We saw very few Jews. Very few-- there were very few Jews in the camp, even though I found a cousin there-- very few. There were mainly French, Lithuanians, Yugoslavs, a great number of Greeks. Out of the 3,000 or so that still remained at the camp, I would say that 1,000 or so were Germans, political prisoners. Members of the White Rose group, for example, were there in Flossenbürg.

What was the White Rose group? Can you explain that one?

We knew about a group of Germans, and we were told that we could rely upon this group to some restricted purposes, who were dedicated to destroying the Nazi form of government and will cooperate with the American forces. We never saw-- never saw them in action working for us. We always found them as prisoners somewhere else. There's much to be written about the White Rose group. They were decimated as we understand it.

As you came in, the men with you, your commanders, yourself, do you recall your feelings as you came into this camp? This is your first exposure to the real thing. Can you remember that?

Very well. I don't know whether we were emotional or not. We'd been inured to a lot of this. I think the shock of the first sight of humans in these camps is a blow. Thereafter, quick recovery is required. And you've got to require-- you've got to recover from that. Can't let it get to you. The stench that came out of that camp is unbearable. It stays with you forever.

There were no sanitary facilities there at all. In the evidence at the subsequent trials, we have photographs of the latrine facilities at the camp. And we show open pits that will accommodate approximately 30 people, men and women at the same time, for a camp at 3,000, the only latrine facilities. We will show hospital facilities consisting of a medicine cabinet, an operating table, and various and sundry tools for a camp servicing thousands and thousands of people. Inadequate, everything inadequate in the camp.

Now, we can write reams, we can talk endlessly about our reactions to what we found. But we have to strike on-- and we have to dwell on what struck us the very-- just as you said, the very moment we hit the camp. The first thing that hit my mind and that's stayed with me ever since was it was as if a specter of death was floating through the air and ready to strike us all. That's what-- and strangely enough, that was in my mind. And the old man, Colonel [? Matze ?] at dinner one evening said, you know what struck me the moment we saw that camp? And he came out with the same thing.

He used the specter of death phrase?

Yeah. We don't know what's going to happen. We envision that we're walking away from there carrying all kinds of diseases, plagues, and God knows what else. And remember, we circulated among these people.

Was it your unit's responsibility to make recommendations at all on how to handle the newly freed newly liberated prisoners?

No, sir. That was the responsibility of the Commanding General of the 91st Infantry Division. Our mission was to strictly, straight line, go after the perpetrators, round up witnesses, collate evidence, present evidence of crimes having been committed to be remanded towards the trial. And we took off after, physically, through the woods, after the guards.

When the death march had terminated, once they killed everyone on the death march and buried them, and they had finished their grizzly chore, just a few hours before we came upon them, so they were within an 8-mile radius of Namering. And there we caught Max Koegel, the commandant of the camp. We call [? Hans Zudrup ?] adjutant of the camp. We caught dozens and dozens and dozens of them, high and small, including a number of women guards, and a surprising number of Ukrainian guards. They had a lot of Ukrainians there.

And these were SS? The Germans, at least were SS?

Well, I don't think we had one of the two or three Totenkopf SS there at all. We have some Waffen SS. Others were Wehrmacht.

For our audience and the tape, explain the difference between the Waffen SS and the others that you had to deal with.

The Waffen SS is a combat unit, just like our infantry, but consisting of so-called elite. You pass special examinations. You pass special physical examinations. And up to a certain date in the history of the German Reich, you volunteered to go into the Waffen SS. After the attempt on Hitler's life, and certainly after the break out in Normandy, they began drafting soldiers into the SS. That was the Waffen SS.

The judgment at Nuremberg is that if you were a member of the Waffen SS prior to that date, you could ipso facto be a declared war criminal. Then we have the Totenkopf SS, concentration camp guards. Then we have the Allgemeine SS, the standard bearers, Hitler's personal bodyguard. And we have the Standarten SS. They were found in the halls of the Reichstag in the black uniforms, all giants, all mostly for show, all wearing their little-- cute little daggers and all kinds of medals. We don't know of any major war crimes that they committed, but they're declared war criminals.

And when you caught them, and here you had this unit, you had come upon the massacre, and you spent some time running to earth those that you could catch. Can you describe that procedure? They were brought in?

Well, we had a-- we had set up an internment center at 30 [PLACE NAME] in Nuremberg, basement of our quarters, where we took turns, depending upon how many we had there at one time-- we tried to avoid having more than two prisoners there at any one time. If we had as many as two, then we devoted the better part of 24 hours interrogating them. And making some type of decision whether to throw them in a PW cage as suspected war criminal or send them on down to Dachau as a believed confirmed war criminal.

We had that element of responsibility. Those that were selected as possible war criminals were put into a major internment camp at Herzberg, Germany, just outside of Nuremberg. And we had as many as 3,000-3,500 in there at one time. I have no doubts that during the time we were in operation there, we had prisoners in that camp, like Mengele, Barbie, Alois Bruner, quite a few of them that are still at large and sought for as war criminals.

Men that you picked up early on [BOTH TALKING]

Men that we picked up early on or other investigatory agencies, like the CIC or Army Intelligence picked up. We all use the same internment camp, you see. We were responsible, I would guess, for about 1,500 of them directly, but that mostly guards out of Flossenburg, out of Dachau, out of the various camps.

You remember, our area of jurisdiction was Bavaria. If a case was out of Hanover, but the prisoners were, or the accused were in our area, then we assumed jurisdiction over the accused. We apprehended him, kept him-- we confined him at Herzberg or at [PLACE NAME] or the [PLACE NAME] in Nuremberg or at Dachau, then released them to Hanover.

During the process of interrogation, was there a standard attitude among those people being interrogated or did they all

respond in different ways to interrogation? Were some eager to give testimony while others were defiant?

They were not exactly defiant. Arrogant, yes, not defiant. They would gladly testify against their neighbors. But they never-- very few of them that were under our jurisdiction ever confessed to the commission of the crimes that they were charged for. We had a tough job of proving.

Did they claim knowing nothing?

No. No, and the-- with one notable exception. We had captured and we were responsible for Joachim Peiper, who conducted the Malmedy massacres. He readily admitted it, but he denied that he committed a war crime. He says under war crime, battle conditions, we're in wartime, in direct combat conditions, impossible for us to physically carry prisoners with us. We had no recourse. We must use our judgment. And we executed them. He admitted it.

For our audience, would you just give a little bit of background on Malmedy. This is Battle of the Bulge, American troops involved.

These troops, American troops, were captured by German SS units, mountain units, in December of 1944 during the break out from the Argon forest-- or to the Argon--

The Arden forest?

Right. The Arden's break out. In the very first few days of the so-called Battle of the Bulge, these Americans were captured. There were approximately, that we recall, 25 or 30 captured in one day by an SS unit commanded by Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper, SS.

They were a rapidly moving unit. They had been told before they ever started out on their missions, which was to harass the enemy, mainly us, they cannot take prisoners, they are not to take prisoners. That much we believed. They showed us those orders. They could not take prisoners. And they didn't take prisoners, they executed them, principally on the spot.

As to whether this unit-- we tried to prove possibly that this unit had committed more than the one atrocity. And we firmly believed they did, but we have no evidentiary proof of that. Colonel Piper did commit a war crime in our judgment. He was a wanted war criminal. And he was captured in November of 1945 hiding out near Ansbach. And we kept him for two days. Then we brought him to Dachau.

He was tried. I believe he was eventually turned over to the Germans and tried. Given 20 years. Served his 20 years. I believe he pleaded guilty, given 20 years, served 20 years. Moved to France, married a French girl. Bought a little shop. Was subsequently recognized by a member of the French underground, not too long ago, maybe three, four years ago.

Not too long ago.

Who walked into his shop and shot him dead.

This was somebody from the Maquis.

Yeah, I believe so.

As your time went on, you obviously had contact with a lot of individuals like Piper. The duties you assumed as the war ended and as it came time to bring individuals, such as Piper and the camp personnel of Flossenburg and other institutions to justice, your duties then changed then, didn't they? You were assigned a peculiar--

We're concave and convex.

And could you go into that for us?

We're very flexible. Since our area of operations, and I repeat again, was between Hof and the Danube. Therefore, when the Dachau war criminals trial came to pass, as defense counsel they had to pick someone from outside their geographic area. And they picked on us. Our team in total was wrapped up in the defense of the war crimes or the war criminals of Dachau, from the commandant of the camp right on down.

That kept us busy for quite a few months. It was quite a show trial. I think it was more heavily attended by visiting junketeers from the States than the major war crimes trials going on in Nuremberg.

Why was that?

Hmm?

Why was that?

The revelations coming out of there, the atrocities at Dachau-- Dachau seems to be-- Auschwitz was a relatively new word, and it was still a new word in the annals of death in 1945. Dachau, the oldest of the camps, was the epitome of what one can anticipate finding at a concentration camp. And that's why I believe they flocked to it.

I know that after a while, the bleachers in Nuremberg were half empty. And they were packed in Dachau. We had built an entire building for these trials.

Square that difference just a little bit more for us. We have the trials going on at Nuremberg. And we have the other trials of everybody that was involved with Dachau. There was a level of responsibility and of activity that differentiated the two if I'm correct on this. Nuremberg was who? Dachau was who?

Nuremberg were the so-called major trials. That was the International Military Tribunal of the major war criminals. The Goering, the Hess's, the von Papen's the Ribbentrop's the, Rosenberg's the Baldur von Schirach, and the rest of them, the Julius Streicher's. And this was your government of the Reich. These were your founders of the Nazi party. This was your major show trial.

Collaterally, going on at the same time, in different locations, not only at Dachau, were lesser war crimes trials of the actual perpetrators of these atrocities. Your concentration camp guards, who the cases were relatively too small and too- and too many to fill the dockets at Nuremberg. Nuremberg was set up just for the one major series of trials.

So that the less-- so-called lesser trials were conducted by 3rd Army, and by 7th Army, and by 5th Army, under their jurisdictions. But principally, at Dachau, which was a major terminus for witnesses and prisoners and interrogation center. And at Dachau, while we had a number of trials, the most notorious trial was the trial of the Dachau war criminals themselves.

Yeah, so just to clarify this, if we can hypothesize for a moment, if a Demjanjuk, say, had been brought to trial in 1945, he would have been brought to Dachau rather than to Nuremberg.

If a Demjanjuk, and we had many Demjanjuk's tried in 1945, they would have been thrown in with some other group that came to the bar five minutes after the last group came to the bar, and would have been disposed of in one hour. We were grinding them out by the hundreds, by the thousands. We needed the help of the new German government at that time to take over these cases.

For you, it must have been quite a feeling. You'd been there almost at the liberation of one camp. And then from the south, from Dachau, the jurisdiction in which Dachau lay, you suddenly received word that you were assigned to the defense of the perpetrators who had done these things.

I had one hell of a job explaining that in letters back home.

You had no lead time on this at all. You just showed up, and your orders?

We received a phone call. If you fellas have no objections. And when the general's voice is on the other end, of course we have no objections. You've been assigned as defense counsel. Orders are coming.

Which general's voice are we talking about here? Is this 5th Army?

This would be-- no, no, this would be General Truscott.

General Truscott.

Lucian Truscott, who was then Commanding General of 3rd Army.

A major individual.

Yeah.

Were there any--

It was up and away then. You were uprooted. And how many of you?

The entire team.

The entire team.

And would you believe, we carried on this mission in addition to our other duties. We still continued--

You continued to investigate for your own jurisdiction.

We were working day and night at that time. As I believe I explained to you, perhaps we should discuss it here, the famous Thanksgiving dinner that we had in Nuremberg. We were working around the clock then and also entertaining VIPs.

At the time, we brought Peiper to Dachau, we had in the front seat, keeping US company, with Peiper handcuffed to the back of the seat, United States Senator Claude Pepper, was on a little trip from the States, who wanted to bypass the big trials in Nuremberg with them. He wanted to see what we were doing in Dachau. He heard lots of things about our trial. It was great.

So Claude Pepper and Peiper.

That was the Pepper-Peiper show.

Can you tell us any particularly outstanding memories you have of the Dachau cases?

Not very pleasant. All sorted. All the allegations I think were true. Every person-- you got to know these people pretty well. You're interrogating them. You're cajoling them. You're asking them to cooperate because we're trying to protect their lives.

And I must back up a little bit. Our function, we've been asked, in fact, we've been accused of accepting this role for one purpose only, to be sure that they were convicted. Your neo-Nazis in Germany today are printing that in newspapers. In fact, we are named in the press over there.

That it was a kangaroo court?

Yes. And I even hate to remind myself of the experiences we went through back at that time. We not only were warned, but we didn't have to be warned to be cautious in providing the best possible defense for these people. Consider them as if they were your fellow Americans. Your job is not to lie for them or to lie to them. Your job is to be sure that the prosecution fairly presents a probative case against them. And that we made sure of.

How were they as defendants? Did they come to trust you as counsel? Did they open up at all?

Well, strangely enough, I got along well with them, particularly when they found out I was Jewish. I was the only Jew in the group. I got along well with them, particularly with Dr. Schilling. And I hate to say this. I had a lot of admiration for him. We called him Buffalo Bill, with the little goatee.

I begrudgingly must say I had some admiration for the commandant of the camp, Martin Gottfried Weiss, only because he was an efficient machine. Other than that, he was a reprehensible individual. But they talked to us. I think they were honest with us, except when it came to the personal culpability. And there, they wouldn't necessarily lie, they'd just deny or remain obstinate.

Did any of them try to lay blame on others?

Oh, yes, oh yes. They pointed fingers all over the lot. That's one thing the German will do.

At their own cohorts?

Yeah. Except, of course, for Dr. Schilling. I say I did admire him. He's the fellow that conducted these malaria experiments. And we read about-- we actually saw reenacted at the trials, where he would immerse a person in buckets of ice, ice water, till his temperature was down to 94, 95 degrees, almost till it killed him. Bring him out of the water and put him between two naked women. And we're proving that that may be a very effective way of resuscitation. Go use that.

And this was before the war, a trained doctor of professional standing.

Dr. Schilling was a world-renowned scientist. You've heard of the so-called Schilling experiments before the war.

And I think this is important to put on the record, that he had the standing before his war.

Yes.

And yet, with his training, with his standing, this is how he used it when he had the opportunity. Of the cases that you defended-- and by the way, approximately how many cases were involved? How many are we talking about here?

That we defended? Just the one.

Just one.

23 of them, I believe, on the docket.

And how long did the case last?

From September, late September of '45 until November, I believe.

And prior to that, you'd been gathering evidence.

They were sentenced. Judgment came down in November and they were executed in January and February of '46.

Virtually all guilty then?

All but three.

All but three. And they were executed.

In Landsberg.

With the progress of the trials, as they went on, what was your interaction with your colleagues in the American military? How did they react knowing that you were part of the team-- or to your team generally, knowing that you were the team--

You're referring to colleagues in other branches of the service? Or among our investigatory personnel?

So there was no--

I mean, are you referring-- you asked what was the reaction among my colleagues in the military.

The military, correct.

OK.

Was this strictly a job in their point of view?

To us it was a job. Would I have ever volunteered for this kind of work? I doubt it. If nobody else wanted it, I would take it on. But I had no idea of the enormity and the sense of what we would uncover there. What was fact, fiction, and fantasy suddenly became real right in front of us.

And I think that those of us that were on that side of the fence, as opposed to the survivors, and our heart goes out to the survivors, I think we'll continue to be the living proof that the Holocaust did occur.

We're coming near the end of our first hour. And perhaps it's time to ask-- it's almost a loaded question, but there is, not just in the United States, more perhaps in Western Europe today, a revisionist historical school. I suppose to say school gives it too much of an organization. It's still a bit loose. But a school that says that-- well, on the extreme right, that the Holocaust never happened.

But getting closer to the center of the revisionist's school, that the Holocaust and events associated with it have been grossly exaggerated for partisan purposes. There has been a certain amount of, if not credence, at least interest in some of the scholarship-- and I use that term with in quotes in this context-- some of that scholarship. Based upon what you saw, based upon what your team became involved with, is it possible that anyone can conceivably build a case for saying that what has happened has been exaggerated?

I'm sure it's conceivable and if we don't have forums, meetings such we're having right now, it will happen. I feel compelled to-- I don't like sitting under these hot lights, but I think I'm performing--

Neither do we.

I think I'm performing a useful mission. I think the story has to be told. And I'll continue telling it as long as I'm able to. It's important. We go back to our days when we were studying Gulliver's Travels. And we know that it happened before. And it's going to happen again if we let it happen.

And as far as these revisionists are concerned, we can answer them only with the truth and with proof these things had happened. Now, with the truth and with proof, our biggest battle comes with a third party who has to evaluate between what we're saying and what revisionists are saying. And are we telling a more compelling story or are they telling it? And that's the battle we're going to have. And that's why we've got to be working with the young continuously.

We have to pause for a few moments.

Thank you, sir.