

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:07,904

2

00:00:07,904 --> 00:00:09,880

[MUSIC PLAYING]

3

00:00:09,880 --> 00:00:25,710

4

00:00:25,710 --> 00:00:26,920

Good afternoon.

5

00:00:26,920 --> 00:00:30,300

My name is Bernard Weinstein and
I direct the Kean College Oral

6

00:00:30,300 --> 00:00:33,900

Testimonies Project of the
Holocaust Resource Center.

7

00:00:33,900 --> 00:00:36,300

We are affiliated with
the Video Archives

8

00:00:36,300 --> 00:00:39,000

for Holocaust Testimonies
at the Sterling

9

00:00:39,000 --> 00:00:41,490

Library of Yale University.

10

00:00:41,490 --> 00:00:46,230

Sharing the interview with
me today is Dr. Mark Lender.

11

00:00:46,230 --> 00:00:49,050

We are privileged
to welcome Dr. Leon

12

00:00:49,050 --> 00:00:54,150

Bass, a liberator

of Buchenwald, who

13

00:00:54,150 --> 00:00:57,870

served with the 183rd
Engineering Combat

14

00:00:57,870 --> 00:01:00,480

Battalion of the Third
Army of the United States

15

00:01:00,480 --> 00:01:02,340

in World War II.

16

00:01:02,340 --> 00:01:07,950

He was at Bastogne, the
Battle of the Bulge,

17

00:01:07,950 --> 00:01:11,400

during the final assault
toward the Rhine.

18

00:01:11,400 --> 00:01:15,990

And we are particularly
privileged to have him here

19

00:01:15,990 --> 00:01:22,230

to tell of his life before,
during, and after the war.

20

00:01:22,230 --> 00:01:24,510

Dr. Bass, we'd like
to welcome you,

21

00:01:24,510 --> 00:01:27,090

and I'd like to
begin by asking you

22

00:01:27,090 --> 00:01:31,110

to tell us a little bit
about your background.

23

00:01:31,110 --> 00:01:34,770

Well, my family's roots

go back to South Carolina.

24

00:01:34,770 --> 00:01:37,960

It's where my parents were born,
around the turn of the century.

25

00:01:37,960 --> 00:01:41,220

My father was born in 1891.

26

00:01:41,220 --> 00:01:43,560

My mother, 1895.

27

00:01:43,560 --> 00:01:44,910

That was a very critical time.

28

00:01:44,910 --> 00:01:47,910

I think it was not too far from
the "Emancipation Proclamation"

29

00:01:47,910 --> 00:01:50,700

signing, and it was just
before, about a year

30

00:01:50,700 --> 00:01:54,253

before, the "Plessy versus
Ferguson" decision that

31

00:01:54,253 --> 00:01:55,920

was rendered by the
Supreme Court, which

32

00:01:55,920 --> 00:02:00,460

said separate but equal was the
way of life in this country.

33

00:02:00,460 --> 00:02:03,030

And so it was into that kind
of environment they were born,

34

00:02:03,030 --> 00:02:06,000

and they experienced
a great deal of pain

35

00:02:06,000 --> 00:02:08,860

in trying to survive
during that period.

36

00:02:08,860 --> 00:02:09,600

But they did.

37

00:02:09,600 --> 00:02:12,300

They managed somehow.

38

00:02:12,300 --> 00:02:15,050

How did they earn a living
and how did they survive?

39

00:02:15,050 --> 00:02:17,520

They worked on a farm.

40

00:02:17,520 --> 00:02:20,460

My father had three
brothers, and my mother

41

00:02:20,460 --> 00:02:24,210

came from a large family of
young ladies and brothers,

42

00:02:24,210 --> 00:02:26,520

and they worked the land.

43

00:02:26,520 --> 00:02:30,930

And that was what, I think,
90% plus did in those days

44

00:02:30,930 --> 00:02:32,250

in order to make it.

45

00:02:32,250 --> 00:02:36,120

And my father did his bit of
sharecropping at that time

46

00:02:36,120 --> 00:02:38,710

because was the way
things were done.

47
00:02:38,710 --> 00:02:43,290
But after he became
part of the armed forces

48
00:02:43,290 --> 00:02:46,770
and went with the
expeditionary forces to France,

49
00:02:46,770 --> 00:02:48,660
he came back a
different personality,

50
00:02:48,660 --> 00:02:51,900
and he wanted things to change.

51
00:02:51,900 --> 00:02:55,060
He didn't want to experience
the same kind of discomfort.

52
00:02:55,060 --> 00:02:58,050
So he became part of
the migration that

53
00:02:58,050 --> 00:03:01,350
left South Carolina
and went North,

54
00:03:01,350 --> 00:03:03,660
and he happened to
go to Philadelphia.

55
00:03:03,660 --> 00:03:07,440
And it was in Philadelphia
that five boys were born.

56
00:03:07,440 --> 00:03:09,990
You see, we already had a
sister born in the South,

57
00:03:09,990 --> 00:03:12,280
but five boys were
born in Philadelphia.

58
00:03:12,280 --> 00:03:13,860
I was one of them.

59
00:03:13,860 --> 00:03:15,630
Did he ever mention
to you what there

60
00:03:15,630 --> 00:03:18,750
was in the experience
in France that

61
00:03:18,750 --> 00:03:21,730
led him to believe that things
ought to be better over here?

62
00:03:21,730 --> 00:03:24,870
It sounds like the military
had some cause and effect

63
00:03:24,870 --> 00:03:26,090
relationship there.

64
00:03:26,090 --> 00:03:28,140
Yes.

65
00:03:28,140 --> 00:03:32,340
According to my readings,
"Black Jack" Pershing

66
00:03:32,340 --> 00:03:35,190
didn't want the Black
soldiers connected

67
00:03:35,190 --> 00:03:39,780
with his part of the Army, so he
farmed them out to the French.

68
00:03:39,780 --> 00:03:42,600
But I think it's with the
French, and by being in France,

69

00:03:42,600 --> 00:03:48,060
that he had a new insight
to how people think.

70
00:03:48,060 --> 00:03:49,860
He didn't have to
go around wondering

71
00:03:49,860 --> 00:03:53,700
if he was good enough, if he
could fit in to the society.

72
00:03:53,700 --> 00:03:55,620
They accepted him.

73
00:03:55,620 --> 00:03:58,170
This was not true with
the American forces.

74
00:03:58,170 --> 00:04:01,080
So he came back with
a new lease on life.

75
00:04:01,080 --> 00:04:03,480
How long was he in
France after the war?

76
00:04:03,480 --> 00:04:04,680
I don't know.

77
00:04:04,680 --> 00:04:06,420
I wish I had talked
with him more.

78
00:04:06,420 --> 00:04:07,980
I regret to this
day that I didn't

79
00:04:07,980 --> 00:04:10,590
ask him certain questions
about his upbringing

80
00:04:10,590 --> 00:04:13,590

and about his life,
especially the service.

81
00:04:13,590 --> 00:04:16,050
But I can only remember those
few things that he told me.

82
00:04:16,050 --> 00:04:18,990

83
00:04:18,990 --> 00:04:22,470
But I knew that he
came back, and he

84
00:04:22,470 --> 00:04:26,080
knew that what was in South
Carolina was not for him,

85
00:04:26,080 --> 00:04:27,820
and he had to get out of there.

86
00:04:27,820 --> 00:04:31,110
And so he came to Philadelphia
to fulfill his dreams

87
00:04:31,110 --> 00:04:34,900
and make life worthwhile
for himself and his family.

88
00:04:34,900 --> 00:04:37,170
So we were all there
in Philadelphia

89
00:04:37,170 --> 00:04:40,280
trying to experience
the good life.

90
00:04:40,280 --> 00:04:43,140
Needless to say that separate
but equal was pervasive.

91
00:04:43,140 --> 00:04:45,900
It was just as

operational in the North

92

00:04:45,900 --> 00:04:47,630
as it was in the South.

93

00:04:47,630 --> 00:04:50,910
And I went to an all-Black
elementary school,

94

00:04:50,910 --> 00:04:54,015
which was then by design.

95

00:04:54,015 --> 00:04:55,140
It wasn't just an accident.

96

00:04:55,140 --> 00:04:56,280
It was by design.

97

00:04:56,280 --> 00:04:59,302
But it was a good school, and
I think that saved the day.

98

00:04:59,302 --> 00:05:00,510
Were the teachers Black, too?

99

00:05:00,510 --> 00:05:01,170
All Black.

100

00:05:01,170 --> 00:05:04,230
Principal Black,
custodian Black.

101

00:05:04,230 --> 00:05:05,635
We had white paper.

102

00:05:05,635 --> 00:05:07,060
[LAUGHTER]

103

00:05:07,060 --> 00:05:08,010

104

00:05:08,010 --> 00:05:09,480
But the school was great.

105
00:05:09,480 --> 00:05:12,390
The teachers were really
an extension of the home,

106
00:05:12,390 --> 00:05:17,520
and they tried to promote those
values that my parents were

107
00:05:17,520 --> 00:05:20,592
pushing so hard, so that
when the chips were down,

108
00:05:20,592 --> 00:05:22,050
we would have
something on which we

109
00:05:22,050 --> 00:05:24,480
could call to help us through.

110
00:05:24,480 --> 00:05:28,950
Because you see, my parents,
maybe right or wrong,

111
00:05:28,950 --> 00:05:32,430
I don't know, insulated
us from the kind

112
00:05:32,430 --> 00:05:33,780
of pain they had experienced.

113
00:05:33,780 --> 00:05:35,490
We never went back
to South Carolina.

114
00:05:35,490 --> 00:05:37,800
Never in our whole
lifetime did we

115
00:05:37,800 --> 00:05:41,880
go back, at least not until

Uncle Sam took me back.

116
00:05:41,880 --> 00:05:44,820
We were in the North
and we stayed there.

117
00:05:44,820 --> 00:05:48,060
My parents never dealt
with that experience.

118
00:05:48,060 --> 00:05:52,110
They never talked about it
to us, about the hardships.

119
00:05:52,110 --> 00:05:55,848
I guess they figured we would
know about it soon enough.

120
00:05:55,848 --> 00:05:57,390
But then, of course,
you go to school

121
00:05:57,390 --> 00:06:00,370
and you leave the cocoon,
and I went to school.

122
00:06:00,370 --> 00:06:04,320
And it was there that I
discovered a sense of value,

123
00:06:04,320 --> 00:06:07,320
that I was somebody, that I
counted, because the teachers

124
00:06:07,320 --> 00:06:09,090
gave that to us.

125
00:06:09,090 --> 00:06:12,180
They shared with us
so many good things.

126
00:06:12,180 --> 00:06:14,910
Were there particular teachers

or particular experiences

127

00:06:14,910 --> 00:06:18,570

in school that you
feel affected you?

128

00:06:18,570 --> 00:06:19,170

Yes.

129

00:06:19,170 --> 00:06:19,982

Yes.

130

00:06:19,982 --> 00:06:20,940

There were quite a few.

131

00:06:20,940 --> 00:06:23,460

132

00:06:23,460 --> 00:06:27,000

One I remember is
the resource people

133

00:06:27,000 --> 00:06:29,280

they would bring to the school.

134

00:06:29,280 --> 00:06:31,170

These people went out
traveling, and they

135

00:06:31,170 --> 00:06:33,900

had contacts with the
larger Black society

136

00:06:33,900 --> 00:06:36,900

and they would bring
in people of stature.

137

00:06:36,900 --> 00:06:39,060

And I remember going to
their assembly one day

138

00:06:39,060 --> 00:06:43,860

and having a woman, a very
imposing figure in black

139
00:06:43,860 --> 00:06:47,910
with a cane, standing on
the stage and talking to us.

140
00:06:47,910 --> 00:06:50,190
And she was introduced
as Mary McLeod Bethune.

141
00:06:50,190 --> 00:06:53,310

142
00:06:53,310 --> 00:06:56,050
I had no idea who
Mary McLeod was.

143
00:06:56,050 --> 00:06:58,830
I was only about 10, I
guess, when I was there.

144
00:06:58,830 --> 00:07:01,328
And she began to talk, and
I can't remember everything

145
00:07:01,328 --> 00:07:03,120
she said, except one
thing, and that is she

146
00:07:03,120 --> 00:07:09,660
talked about writing that was
done by James Weldon Johnson.

147
00:07:09,660 --> 00:07:13,650
And it was "for your arms are
too short to box with God."

148
00:07:13,650 --> 00:07:17,410
And she stood there, I remember,
and her booming voice came out.

149
00:07:17,410 --> 00:07:20,460

And she said, son, your arms
are too short to box with God.

150
00:07:20,460 --> 00:07:21,870
And my eyes bulged.

151
00:07:21,870 --> 00:07:23,970
I thought she was
talking directly to me.

152
00:07:23,970 --> 00:07:27,150
And it was those
kinds of experiences

153
00:07:27,150 --> 00:07:31,650
that later on had meaning when I
discovered who and what she was

154
00:07:31,650 --> 00:07:35,130
and what her contribution
was to the total society,

155
00:07:35,130 --> 00:07:35,940
not just to Blacks.

156
00:07:35,940 --> 00:07:37,140
The total society.

157
00:07:37,140 --> 00:07:40,260
And I said, oh my god, what a
wonderful experience that was.

158
00:07:40,260 --> 00:07:42,740
And I began to hook
things together,

159
00:07:42,740 --> 00:07:45,240
just like I hooked together the
poetry that my father always

160
00:07:45,240 --> 00:07:45,915
recited.

161

00:07:45,915 --> 00:07:47,790

I never knew where it
came from, what it was.

162

00:07:47,790 --> 00:07:49,290

But when I got
into college and I

163

00:07:49,290 --> 00:07:51,760

began to go through the
literature and America lit

164

00:07:51,760 --> 00:07:54,540

and in Europe and all the
kind of literature around,

165

00:07:54,540 --> 00:07:57,060

I discovered what my
dad was talking about.

166

00:07:57,060 --> 00:07:59,340

He was reciting poetry
that he had learned.

167

00:07:59,340 --> 00:08:02,610

168

00:08:02,610 --> 00:08:05,670

I guess he had learned it in
school because he was a Pullman

169

00:08:05,670 --> 00:08:10,950

Porter, who struggled very hard
to make a living so that we

170

00:08:10,950 --> 00:08:14,130

would somehow have
a better life.

171

00:08:14,130 --> 00:08:16,500

But he always pushed education.

172

00:08:16,500 --> 00:08:18,940

He always felt that that was
the key, one of the keys.

173

00:08:18,940 --> 00:08:19,440

Yeah.

174

00:08:19,440 --> 00:08:21,960

Where were you in your
family constellation?

175

00:08:21,960 --> 00:08:24,270

I know you mentioned your
sister was the oldest.

176

00:08:24,270 --> 00:08:25,560

I think I was the middle boy.

177

00:08:25,560 --> 00:08:27,727

There were five of us and
I was right in the middle.

178

00:08:27,727 --> 00:08:30,780

There were two older and two
younger in the boy group,

179

00:08:30,780 --> 00:08:33,039

and I was right in the middle.

180

00:08:33,039 --> 00:08:35,970

And life was good.

181

00:08:35,970 --> 00:08:36,780

We were poor.

182

00:08:36,780 --> 00:08:40,235

It was a depression period
growing up during that time.

183

00:08:40,235 --> 00:08:41,610

But everybody in
our neighborhood

184

00:08:41,610 --> 00:08:44,850

was poor so nobody really
knew anything different.

185

00:08:44,850 --> 00:08:48,810

We all played together
and had a wonderful time.

186

00:08:48,810 --> 00:08:51,540

The community was
integrated only

187

00:08:51,540 --> 00:08:53,400

as far as the merchants
were concerned

188

00:08:53,400 --> 00:08:56,250

and the few Whites that
managed to stay on.

189

00:08:56,250 --> 00:08:58,290

But basically, the
community in which

190

00:08:58,290 --> 00:09:00,000

I lived-- and there
weren't too many

191

00:09:00,000 --> 00:09:03,870

blocks where there
were Blacks, but there

192

00:09:03,870 --> 00:09:08,360

were homeowners, as well as
those who rented their homes.

193

00:09:08,360 --> 00:09:12,470

At this stage, was the
family, or those acquainted

194

00:09:12,470 --> 00:09:15,140

with you and your
family, was there

195

00:09:15,140 --> 00:09:18,888
a sense of an active or
growing Civil Rights Movement

196

00:09:18,888 --> 00:09:20,930
as the 1930s, particularly
during the Depression,

197

00:09:20,930 --> 00:09:21,430
advanced?

198

00:09:21,430 --> 00:09:24,830

199

00:09:24,830 --> 00:09:26,630
I think there was a
lot of depression,

200

00:09:26,630 --> 00:09:28,700
and I'm not just talking
about the economic depression.

201

00:09:28,700 --> 00:09:30,158
I think that people
were depressed,

202

00:09:30,158 --> 00:09:32,840
because almost
daily you would read

203

00:09:32,840 --> 00:09:36,400
about lynchings that were
taking place across the country.

204

00:09:36,400 --> 00:09:38,450
They're trying to pass
an anti-lynch bill.

205

00:09:38,450 --> 00:09:40,950
It was having no success.

206

00:09:40,950 --> 00:09:46,730
The federal aid education was
constantly being sabotaged.

207
00:09:46,730 --> 00:09:50,570
People didn't have much in
the way of hope in those days,

208
00:09:50,570 --> 00:09:53,210
although there were
people who were struggling

209
00:09:53,210 --> 00:09:56,150
and who had made their voice
heard, such as A. Philip

210
00:09:56,150 --> 00:09:59,120
Randolph, who my
father talked about

211
00:09:59,120 --> 00:10:01,865
and extolled with his virtues
because he helped set up--

212
00:10:01,865 --> 00:10:02,990
Your father's union, right?

213
00:10:02,990 --> 00:10:03,740
Yes.

214
00:10:03,740 --> 00:10:06,530
The sleeping car
porters, he set that up

215
00:10:06,530 --> 00:10:08,210
and gave them, for
the first time,

216
00:10:08,210 --> 00:10:10,760
a voice in the scheme of things.

217
00:10:10,760 --> 00:10:13,900

218
00:10:13,900 --> 00:10:19,580
I often hear my father speak
of him in such glowing terms,

219
00:10:19,580 --> 00:10:23,480
because he had some very
difficult times as a Pullman

220
00:10:23,480 --> 00:10:24,980
porter.

221
00:10:24,980 --> 00:10:30,290
I remember the time he
told me that he had cleaned

222
00:10:30,290 --> 00:10:32,990
his car, the Pullman car.

223
00:10:32,990 --> 00:10:35,810
And he was standing, talking
with a couple of his friends

224
00:10:35,810 --> 00:10:38,480
outside of the car
near the tracks.

225
00:10:38,480 --> 00:10:40,730
And they were laughing
and having a good time

226
00:10:40,730 --> 00:10:42,710
when the supervisor came up.

227
00:10:42,710 --> 00:10:44,940
And the supervisor--

228
00:10:44,940 --> 00:10:45,830
I don't know why.

229
00:10:45,830 --> 00:10:48,290
I guess he felt odd man

out because he was not

230
00:10:48,290 --> 00:10:52,115
part of this jocularity thing
of having such a good time,

231
00:10:52,115 --> 00:10:53,240
and he wasn't a part of it.

232
00:10:53,240 --> 00:10:54,350
But he got on the train.

233
00:10:54,350 --> 00:10:56,350
And when he went through
the train, he came back

234
00:10:56,350 --> 00:10:59,510
and he called my
father and said, Bass,

235
00:10:59,510 --> 00:11:01,340
the car is not clean.

236
00:11:01,340 --> 00:11:03,890
And my father said,
I cleaned that car.

237
00:11:03,890 --> 00:11:07,310
And I know my father and
the kind of man he was.

238
00:11:07,310 --> 00:11:08,970
He did things well.

239
00:11:08,970 --> 00:11:12,350
And so when he said he cleaned
that car, he cleaned that car.

240
00:11:12,350 --> 00:11:14,510
But the man said the
car is not clean.

241

00:11:14,510 --> 00:11:17,360

My father said, well,
if it's not clean then

242

00:11:17,360 --> 00:11:19,610

it's not going to get clean,
because I've cleaned it.

243

00:11:19,610 --> 00:11:21,770

And he said, well, I'm
going to put you on report.

244

00:11:21,770 --> 00:11:24,150

So my father said, you have
to do what you have to do.

245

00:11:24,150 --> 00:11:26,660

And so he put him on report.

246

00:11:26,660 --> 00:11:29,000

And he was told by the
people in the union

247

00:11:29,000 --> 00:11:33,020

that if he would just say
that he didn't say that,

248

00:11:33,020 --> 00:11:34,370

they could get him off.

249

00:11:34,370 --> 00:11:37,790

But my father said, no, I said
it and I will not lie about it.

250

00:11:37,790 --> 00:11:40,910

I'd say if the
car was not clean,

251

00:11:40,910 --> 00:11:42,290

I was not going to clean it.

252

00:11:42,290 --> 00:11:45,800

And they docked him five

years of his seniority.

253

00:11:45,800 --> 00:11:47,810

And so my father,
instead of having

254

00:11:47,810 --> 00:11:52,640

30 years, when I got to be
more mature, he had only 25.

255

00:11:52,640 --> 00:11:55,520

And these kinds of
experiences stay with me,

256

00:11:55,520 --> 00:11:58,430

but I got an insight to the
kind of man my father was,

257

00:11:58,430 --> 00:12:03,140

and as I got older, I began to
appreciate him more and more,

258

00:12:03,140 --> 00:12:05,210

even to this day.

259

00:12:05,210 --> 00:12:07,790

Did you experience anything
in those growing up years

260

00:12:07,790 --> 00:12:13,200

in Philadelphia that made
you feel separate or apart

261

00:12:13,200 --> 00:12:14,380

from the main society?

262

00:12:14,380 --> 00:12:15,720

Yes.

263

00:12:15,720 --> 00:12:22,830

I went to this school
where they always

264

00:12:22,830 --> 00:12:25,890

taught us to care
and love each other,

265

00:12:25,890 --> 00:12:28,290

but to also have
a love of country.

266

00:12:28,290 --> 00:12:30,720

We pledged allegiance
to the flag every day,

267

00:12:30,720 --> 00:12:33,120

just like every other
young person in the city

268

00:12:33,120 --> 00:12:34,630

of Philadelphia would do.

269

00:12:34,630 --> 00:12:36,240

And we said "with
liberty and justice

270

00:12:36,240 --> 00:12:38,760

for all," just
like everyone else,

271

00:12:38,760 --> 00:12:44,280

only to go out and find, as we
matured, that that was not so.

272

00:12:44,280 --> 00:12:46,350

Liberty and justice
wasn't for everybody.

273

00:12:46,350 --> 00:12:49,650

It didn't exist, I
felt, for me and mine,

274

00:12:49,650 --> 00:12:52,740

as I found out when I
went to the theater.

275

00:12:52,740 --> 00:12:55,890

I went to a local theater,
and when I bought my ticket

276

00:12:55,890 --> 00:12:57,305

I was directed to the balcony.

277

00:12:57,305 --> 00:12:58,680

Not that there
was anything wrong

278

00:12:58,680 --> 00:13:00,888

with sitting in the balcony,
because I could see just

279

00:13:00,888 --> 00:13:02,790

as well there, but
it was mandated

280

00:13:02,790 --> 00:13:05,190

that I go there because
I wasn't good enough

281

00:13:05,190 --> 00:13:07,980

to go down on that main floor.

282

00:13:07,980 --> 00:13:10,530

And so I began to get a
little insight to the society

283

00:13:10,530 --> 00:13:15,430

and how the society viewed
me, a person of color.

284

00:13:15,430 --> 00:13:18,602

And we always went to the park.

285

00:13:18,602 --> 00:13:20,310

Philadelphia has one
of the largest parks

286

00:13:20,310 --> 00:13:23,070

in the country, Fairmount Park.

287

00:13:23,070 --> 00:13:26,080

And out there was an amusement
park, which no longer exists,

288

00:13:26,080 --> 00:13:27,570

but in those days it was there.

289

00:13:27,570 --> 00:13:30,390

I went to Woodside
Park, and I recall

290

00:13:30,390 --> 00:13:31,950

how I looked through
that wire fence

291

00:13:31,950 --> 00:13:38,640

at this large swimming pool,
which I knew I could never use.

292

00:13:38,640 --> 00:13:42,120

I would never be admitted,
because the society was

293

00:13:42,120 --> 00:13:47,290

saying loud and clear to me
that I wasn't good enough.

294

00:13:47,290 --> 00:13:49,680

And these are the
kinds of experiences--

295

00:13:49,680 --> 00:13:53,850

there were some others,
where people call you names.

296

00:13:53,850 --> 00:13:55,500

When you go to use
a book in school,

297

00:13:55,500 --> 00:13:59,310

you see certain terms in

there that turn you off,

298

00:13:59,310 --> 00:14:01,724
make you feel depressed.

299

00:14:01,724 --> 00:14:04,510

300

00:14:04,510 --> 00:14:06,850
Sometimes you overhear
people that you thought

301

00:14:06,850 --> 00:14:11,560
were friends say things that
you wouldn't expect them to say,

302

00:14:11,560 --> 00:14:13,240
because their racism
began to come out

303

00:14:13,240 --> 00:14:15,490
and they didn't think that
you were around to hear it.

304

00:14:15,490 --> 00:14:17,620

305

00:14:17,620 --> 00:14:20,560
Those are the kind of things
that make you feel bad.

306

00:14:20,560 --> 00:14:23,560

307

00:14:23,560 --> 00:14:27,430
And this was against a backdrop
of the advancing 1930s.

308

00:14:27,430 --> 00:14:29,770
You were approximately
20 years old

309

00:14:29,770 --> 00:14:32,590
by the time the Second World
War had become a reality.

310
00:14:32,590 --> 00:14:34,480
No.

311
00:14:34,480 --> 00:14:36,610
I finished school in 1943.

312
00:14:36,610 --> 00:14:41,543
I was 18, and that's when I
became part of the military.

313
00:14:41,543 --> 00:14:43,210
How did you become
part of the military?

314
00:14:43,210 --> 00:14:44,585
Did you volunteer or drafted?

315
00:14:44,585 --> 00:14:45,085
Yes.

316
00:14:45,085 --> 00:14:48,280
I went out and I
volunteered, and I was

317
00:14:48,280 --> 00:14:50,230
to go out with the next group.

318
00:14:50,230 --> 00:14:53,350
And when I went down to
the induction center,

319
00:14:53,350 --> 00:14:56,770
institutional racism smacked
me right in the face,

320
00:14:56,770 --> 00:15:01,060
because the Sergeant
was there and he

321

00:15:01,060 --> 00:15:04,030

told me to go one way when
I went through the door

322

00:15:04,030 --> 00:15:06,250

and he told my White
friends to go another way.

323

00:15:06,250 --> 00:15:11,680

Because my country practiced,
promulgated, and promoted

324

00:15:11,680 --> 00:15:15,190

institutional racism, and the
military was one of the largest

325

00:15:15,190 --> 00:15:16,400

to do just that.

326

00:15:16,400 --> 00:15:20,620

And so I went into an all-Black
unit, save for the officers.

327

00:15:20,620 --> 00:15:22,060

They were White.

328

00:15:22,060 --> 00:15:26,830

But all of my comrades in
arms at the time were Black.

329

00:15:26,830 --> 00:15:28,270

When you enlisted,
did you realize

330

00:15:28,270 --> 00:15:30,220

the military was segregated?

331

00:15:30,220 --> 00:15:33,370

You know, you hear,
but you don't even

332

00:15:33,370 --> 00:15:36,148

think about those things
until it hits you in the face.

333
00:15:36,148 --> 00:15:37,690
And when it becomes
a reality and you

334
00:15:37,690 --> 00:15:42,580
see how stark the whole
thing is, the contrast,

335
00:15:42,580 --> 00:15:44,110
you begin to wonder.

336
00:15:44,110 --> 00:15:46,150
And of course, the
thing that made

337
00:15:46,150 --> 00:15:48,880
it more real, more
painful, was the fact

338
00:15:48,880 --> 00:15:51,280
that they sent us South.

339
00:15:51,280 --> 00:15:56,890
They sent me and those who came
in with me down to Georgia.

340
00:15:56,890 --> 00:16:01,090
We went to Camp Wheeler, Georgia
for infantry basic training.

341
00:16:01,090 --> 00:16:03,220
And I worked on this
red clay of Georgia

342
00:16:03,220 --> 00:16:06,430
for three or four months,
trying to be a good soldier.

343
00:16:06,430 --> 00:16:08,750
And I had some experiences

that were very denigrating.

344

00:16:08,750 --> 00:16:12,730

I mean, really put-down kind
of things, both in the military

345

00:16:12,730 --> 00:16:14,590

and both in town.

346

00:16:14,590 --> 00:16:17,950

And after the three
or four months

347

00:16:17,950 --> 00:16:23,620

there, we were told that we
don't need infantry soldiers

348

00:16:23,620 --> 00:16:24,270

any longer.

349

00:16:24,270 --> 00:16:27,580

We're going to make
you combat engineers.

350

00:16:27,580 --> 00:16:30,500

So we had to start basic
training all over again.

351

00:16:30,500 --> 00:16:33,640

And so we had to leave Camp
Wheeler, and of all places

352

00:16:33,640 --> 00:16:37,360

they sent us, was they
sent us to Mississippi.

353

00:16:37,360 --> 00:16:38,950

So things got worse.

354

00:16:38,950 --> 00:16:40,840

And we spent quite a
time in Mississippi,

355

00:16:40,840 --> 00:16:44,230

right in Camp

McCain, near Grenada.

356

00:16:44,230 --> 00:16:46,090

and we spent almost

a year there.

357

00:16:46,090 --> 00:16:48,640

358

00:16:48,640 --> 00:16:53,120

We went on maneuvers

into Texas, Louisiana,

359

00:16:53,120 --> 00:16:56,560

and we came back to Little

Rock, Arkansas, Camp Joseph T.

360

00:16:56,560 --> 00:16:57,790

Robinson.

361

00:16:57,790 --> 00:17:02,260

Now, in all these places, I

was given the message of who

362

00:17:02,260 --> 00:17:06,520

and what I was, as far as

the society was concerned.

363

00:17:06,520 --> 00:17:08,710

And it was really

frustrating to think

364

00:17:08,710 --> 00:17:11,170

that you had made a

commitment to your country,

365

00:17:11,170 --> 00:17:15,190

and yet your country is

saying to you, all right.

366

00:17:15,190 --> 00:17:18,630
You're OK, but only so far.

367
00:17:18,630 --> 00:17:20,383
Veritable campaign
in the Confederacy

368
00:17:20,383 --> 00:17:21,300
is what they gave you.

369
00:17:21,300 --> 00:17:22,359
That's right.

370
00:17:22,359 --> 00:17:24,550
They sent us right into
the heart of the place

371
00:17:24,550 --> 00:17:28,150
where there would
be a confrontation.

372
00:17:28,150 --> 00:17:30,850
If not verbally and physically,
at least mentally you

373
00:17:30,850 --> 00:17:32,110
would have this confrontation.

374
00:17:32,110 --> 00:17:34,473
I went into Macon,
Georgia and attempted

375
00:17:34,473 --> 00:17:35,890
to get a drink of
water when I was

376
00:17:35,890 --> 00:17:37,970
in there, a simple thing
like a drink of water.

377
00:17:37,970 --> 00:17:39,970
Because you walk around
the town and you see it,

378
00:17:39,970 --> 00:17:41,317
a beautiful place.

379
00:17:41,317 --> 00:17:43,150
And you walk around,
you want to see things,

380
00:17:43,150 --> 00:17:45,692
and all of a sudden you see the
fountain and you go to drink.

381
00:17:45,692 --> 00:17:48,970
And coming from Philadelphia,
I had no indication

382
00:17:48,970 --> 00:17:52,220
that you follow the signs.

383
00:17:52,220 --> 00:17:54,220
I went to drink and someone
grabbed me and said,

384
00:17:54,220 --> 00:17:55,720
boy, you don't drink here.

385
00:17:55,720 --> 00:17:59,020
And he pointed to the sign,
which said White, and directed

386
00:17:59,020 --> 00:18:02,260
me to another sign,
which said Color, where

387
00:18:02,260 --> 00:18:03,502
there was another fountain.

388
00:18:03,502 --> 00:18:04,960
And you were, of
course, in uniform

389
00:18:04,960 --> 00:18:05,890

at the time this happened?

390
00:18:05,890 --> 00:18:06,220
Oh, yes.

391
00:18:06,220 --> 00:18:07,030
I was a soldier.

392
00:18:07,030 --> 00:18:08,770
Like all the other
Black soldiers,

393
00:18:08,770 --> 00:18:13,840
we were all experiencing this,
and we reacted differently.

394
00:18:13,840 --> 00:18:16,330
I was rather quiet
and introverted

395
00:18:16,330 --> 00:18:18,190
and took my hurt internally.

396
00:18:18,190 --> 00:18:22,030
Others would say and do things
that got them into trouble

397
00:18:22,030 --> 00:18:23,460
and very great difficulty.

398
00:18:23,460 --> 00:18:28,270
Was it your perception, though,
that the Black troops generally

399
00:18:28,270 --> 00:18:32,380
fully understood the fact that
while the rhetoric of the war

400
00:18:32,380 --> 00:18:36,345
against Nazi racism and so
forth was fine, in practice,

401

00:18:36,345 --> 00:18:38,470
the country was doing
something entirely different?

402
00:18:38,470 --> 00:18:39,130
Yes.

403
00:18:39,130 --> 00:18:41,890
It was as though you
were schizophrenic.

404
00:18:41,890 --> 00:18:43,990
Our country was
two personalities.

405
00:18:43,990 --> 00:18:47,080
In one way, we make
wonderful pronouncements.

406
00:18:47,080 --> 00:18:49,450
We talk about our
Judeo-Christian ethics

407
00:18:49,450 --> 00:18:51,250
and we're going to
make the world a better

408
00:18:51,250 --> 00:18:53,500
place for democracy,
and all that other jazz.

409
00:18:53,500 --> 00:18:55,390
But then when you get
down to the real thing

410
00:18:55,390 --> 00:18:59,296
and you start seeing
the way they operate,

411
00:18:59,296 --> 00:19:01,240
things were not in consonance.

412
00:19:01,240 --> 00:19:06,310

And so I began to be an
angry, frustrated, young Black

413
00:19:06,310 --> 00:19:07,510
soldier.

414
00:19:07,510 --> 00:19:12,790
What at that time, say in
1943, before you went overseas,

415
00:19:12,790 --> 00:19:17,620
was your awareness
of what was happening

416
00:19:17,620 --> 00:19:23,310
in Europe, particularly
to non-Aryans, to Jews,

417
00:19:23,310 --> 00:19:27,050
to gypsies, to other groups?

418
00:19:27,050 --> 00:19:30,680
I had not the foggiest
notion about what

419
00:19:30,680 --> 00:19:32,515
was going on in Eastern Europe.

420
00:19:32,515 --> 00:19:35,480
It had been going
on since the '30s.

421
00:19:35,480 --> 00:19:37,130
I had no idea.

422
00:19:37,130 --> 00:19:41,190
We had all of these orientation
sessions, and they said,

423
00:19:41,190 --> 00:19:42,735
this is why we fight.

424

00:19:42,735 --> 00:19:44,360
And they would talk
about these things,

425
00:19:44,360 --> 00:19:49,010
but never, never in all the
time did they talk about what

426
00:19:49,010 --> 00:19:52,400
was happening in Nazi
Germany and across Europe.

427
00:19:52,400 --> 00:19:55,160
Why do you think that was?

428
00:19:55,160 --> 00:19:58,370
I can only surmise and
guess, hindsight, especially

429
00:19:58,370 --> 00:20:00,590
with the kind of
information I receive now,

430
00:20:00,590 --> 00:20:04,920
is that our government
did not acknowledge,

431
00:20:04,920 --> 00:20:07,490
even though I felt it knew.

432
00:20:07,490 --> 00:20:10,760
It did not come out
and say this was so.

433
00:20:10,760 --> 00:20:13,250
And so for the Army to teach
us that this was going on

434
00:20:13,250 --> 00:20:17,240
would really be saying
that the government knew.

435
00:20:17,240 --> 00:20:21,290

And so we never had that
information given to us.

436
00:20:21,290 --> 00:20:22,100
At least I didn't.

437
00:20:22,100 --> 00:20:25,130

438
00:20:25,130 --> 00:20:26,870
We had heard all
about the Japanese

439
00:20:26,870 --> 00:20:33,020
and what they were like,
but never once did we learn.

440
00:20:33,020 --> 00:20:36,410
Did you yourself
have any preference

441
00:20:36,410 --> 00:20:40,640
at the time for which
theater of operations

442
00:20:40,640 --> 00:20:45,140
you wanted to be in,
the Pacific or Europe?

443
00:20:45,140 --> 00:20:47,400
I don't think I had any
preference at that time.

444
00:20:47,400 --> 00:20:50,270
But I imagine I wanted
to go to Europe.

445
00:20:50,270 --> 00:20:52,280
You read and study
and your history

446
00:20:52,280 --> 00:20:57,590
is oriented towards the

West, towards Europe.

447

00:20:57,590 --> 00:20:59,870

And I wanted to see and
experience some of the things

448

00:20:59,870 --> 00:21:01,620

that I had at least
studied about and read

449

00:21:01,620 --> 00:21:04,460

about, to go to Paris,
to go to London,

450

00:21:04,460 --> 00:21:06,300

and to travel across Europe.

451

00:21:06,300 --> 00:21:09,020

So I think that was a
motivating force for me.

452

00:21:09,020 --> 00:21:11,740

453

00:21:11,740 --> 00:21:15,938

But I think at this time I
wanted to get out of the Army.

454

00:21:15,938 --> 00:21:17,230

I'm being very honest with you.

455

00:21:17,230 --> 00:21:19,510

After my experiences,
I really did not

456

00:21:19,510 --> 00:21:26,410

want to be in this man's
army, especially after having

457

00:21:26,410 --> 00:21:28,738

to stand on a bus--

458

00:21:28,738 --> 00:21:30,280
when there were no
seats at the back,

459
00:21:30,280 --> 00:21:34,510
having to stand up for 100
miles looking at empty seats.

460
00:21:34,510 --> 00:21:39,100
That didn't endear
me to my country.

461
00:21:39,100 --> 00:21:40,770
Couldn't eat in a restaurant.

462
00:21:40,770 --> 00:21:43,810
I had to go around the back and
knock on the door to get food.

463
00:21:43,810 --> 00:21:48,970
And I'm in a uniform, and I
saw POWs, prisoners of war

464
00:21:48,970 --> 00:21:51,910
from Germany, being allowed
to go in a restaurant

465
00:21:51,910 --> 00:21:54,090
and sit down to eat, and
yet I was not entitled

466
00:21:54,090 --> 00:21:55,990
to that same opportunity.

467
00:21:55,990 --> 00:21:58,210
So it left me with
a bitter taste,

468
00:21:58,210 --> 00:22:02,350
and yet our unit left by way
of Boston across the Atlantic

469
00:22:02,350 --> 00:22:07,630

and to England, where we
spent three months, three

470
00:22:07,630 --> 00:22:09,250
wonderful months in England.

471
00:22:09,250 --> 00:22:10,360
You say wonderful months?

472
00:22:10,360 --> 00:22:10,930
Yes.

473
00:22:10,930 --> 00:22:12,670
Is that in quotation marks?

474
00:22:12,670 --> 00:22:13,230
[LAUGHS]

475
00:22:13,230 --> 00:22:13,930

476
00:22:13,930 --> 00:22:16,270
Can you describe the
experience of actually meeting

477
00:22:16,270 --> 00:22:17,620
the Europeans?

478
00:22:17,620 --> 00:22:19,840
We were bivouacked
in a small community

479
00:22:19,840 --> 00:22:22,090
called Fordingbridge hence.

480
00:22:22,090 --> 00:22:24,790
That's so many
miles from London.

481
00:22:24,790 --> 00:22:26,470
I know where it is.

482

00:22:26,470 --> 00:22:31,000

It was a small town, and that's
where the 183rd was billeted.

483

00:22:31,000 --> 00:22:33,970

And when we were there, we were
getting our equipment together

484

00:22:33,970 --> 00:22:36,100

during those two
or three months.

485

00:22:36,100 --> 00:22:39,550

And I had a chance to meet
the people in Fordingbridge.

486

00:22:39,550 --> 00:22:40,660

Not too many were there.

487

00:22:40,660 --> 00:22:42,940

They were mostly older
people and very young people,

488

00:22:42,940 --> 00:22:46,300

but occasionally there were
some younger people there.

489

00:22:46,300 --> 00:22:48,220

And I remember meeting
this young lady.

490

00:22:48,220 --> 00:22:51,670

And we had a wonderful
relationship,

491

00:22:51,670 --> 00:22:52,940

and I met her family.

492

00:22:52,940 --> 00:22:56,170

And we went to London
and saw "Hamlet."

493

00:22:56,170 --> 00:22:59,620
John Gielgud played Hamlet
at the Haymarket Theater.

494
00:22:59,620 --> 00:23:02,650
Nobody looked at us
as though we were

495
00:23:02,650 --> 00:23:04,510
something weird, different.

496
00:23:04,510 --> 00:23:05,740
We were soldiers.

497
00:23:05,740 --> 00:23:07,510
We were there to do
one thing, and that

498
00:23:07,510 --> 00:23:10,870
is to help them get
rid of the problem

499
00:23:10,870 --> 00:23:13,730
that the Nazis had
created for the world.

500
00:23:13,730 --> 00:23:17,020
And so I had a really
wonderful experience,

501
00:23:17,020 --> 00:23:19,330
but it was short-lived.

502
00:23:19,330 --> 00:23:21,250
Our unit left by
way of Southampton

503
00:23:21,250 --> 00:23:24,700
and went across the channel
to Le Havre, France.

504
00:23:24,700 --> 00:23:27,040
And then we moved

up through France

505

00:23:27,040 --> 00:23:30,610

and stopped outside of a
small town alongside the road

506

00:23:30,610 --> 00:23:33,370

and waited for the
orders to come down.

507

00:23:33,370 --> 00:23:37,370

And it was into this
environment that we

508

00:23:37,370 --> 00:23:41,600

began to understand what war was
all about, because the weather

509

00:23:41,600 --> 00:23:42,660

was terrible.

510

00:23:42,660 --> 00:23:46,700

It had been raining,
sleeting, and cold and foggy.

511

00:23:46,700 --> 00:23:50,840

And yet we waited, until finally
the orders came down and said

512

00:23:50,840 --> 00:23:54,740

that we were attached to
General Patton's Third Army,

513

00:23:54,740 --> 00:23:59,400

and our responsibility was
to go to a place called

514

00:23:59,400 --> 00:24:01,610

to Martelange in Belgium.

515

00:24:01,610 --> 00:24:05,390

It was a small town where
a bridge had been blown up,

516
00:24:05,390 --> 00:24:07,460
either by us or by the enemy.

517
00:24:07,460 --> 00:24:09,200
But there was no
bridge in Martelange

518
00:24:09,200 --> 00:24:12,320
that would connect
the main highway.

519
00:24:12,320 --> 00:24:14,810
And we had no idea what
was going on at that time

520
00:24:14,810 --> 00:24:18,980
because no one had
told us that in 1944,

521
00:24:18,980 --> 00:24:22,120
around this Christmas
season, that the German,

522
00:24:22,120 --> 00:24:23,870
in a desperate move
to try to win the war,

523
00:24:23,870 --> 00:24:28,100
had counterattacked and found
a soft spot in the lines

524
00:24:28,100 --> 00:24:30,575
and then pushed us back
and created a bulge.

525
00:24:30,575 --> 00:24:31,950
Which is the Battle
of the Bulge.

526
00:24:31,950 --> 00:24:32,690
And so that's it.

527

00:24:32,690 --> 00:24:34,107

We were in the
Battle of the Bulge

528

00:24:34,107 --> 00:24:35,480

and didn't know it at the time.

529

00:24:35,480 --> 00:24:39,140

And here we are,
moving up in darkness,

530

00:24:39,140 --> 00:24:42,800

in the blackout conditions,
up through [? Arlon ?], up

531

00:24:42,800 --> 00:24:45,150

to Martelange.

532

00:24:45,150 --> 00:24:47,750

And we began to do what
we were told to do,

533

00:24:47,750 --> 00:24:50,660

and that is to
rebuild that bridge.

534

00:24:50,660 --> 00:24:55,190

And General Patton, who's
Third Army we were attached to,

535

00:24:55,190 --> 00:24:58,610

was coming with the
Army divisions--

536

00:24:58,610 --> 00:25:00,770

the guns, the tanks, the men.

537

00:25:00,770 --> 00:25:03,830

And all of that was necessary
because above Martelange,

538

00:25:03,830 --> 00:25:05,930

about so many
kilometers, not many,

539
00:25:05,930 --> 00:25:08,540
there was a town
called Bastogne.

540
00:25:08,540 --> 00:25:11,930
In Bastogne, I understand
there was a division.

541
00:25:11,930 --> 00:25:13,850
I think it was 101st
Airborne Division.

542
00:25:13,850 --> 00:25:14,600
101st Airborne.

543
00:25:14,600 --> 00:25:15,380
General McAuliffe.

544
00:25:15,380 --> 00:25:16,010
Yes.

545
00:25:16,010 --> 00:25:17,780
Yes, the fellow that
said "nuts" when

546
00:25:17,780 --> 00:25:18,947
they asked him to surrender.

547
00:25:18,947 --> 00:25:21,620
Well, they were all
encircled and were

548
00:25:21,620 --> 00:25:23,870
told they were going
to be wiped out.

549
00:25:23,870 --> 00:25:27,140
So forces were being moved,
I guess, from many places,

550

00:25:27,140 --> 00:25:29,370

and Third Army was
one part of that.

551

00:25:29,370 --> 00:25:31,263

And we had to get
that bridge up so

552

00:25:31,263 --> 00:25:32,930

that those army
divisions could go cross

553

00:25:32,930 --> 00:25:33,920

without having to wait.

554

00:25:33,920 --> 00:25:38,810

And so we worked night and
day and we put that bridge up.

555

00:25:38,810 --> 00:25:42,320

And we put it up in time
so there was no delay.

556

00:25:42,320 --> 00:25:44,850

And we saw blood and
guts come along there.

557

00:25:44,850 --> 00:25:47,720

We saw him with his
pearl handle, guns,

558

00:25:47,720 --> 00:25:50,690

and that quite an image he gave.

559

00:25:50,690 --> 00:25:52,880

And he came through, and
those soldiers went up

560

00:25:52,880 --> 00:25:56,550

and they really
helped save those men.

561

00:25:56,550 --> 00:25:59,910

And it became my
first experience

562

00:25:59,910 --> 00:26:03,810

with death and dying.

563

00:26:03,810 --> 00:26:07,170

See, up to this time, I had
never seen anybody even shot

564

00:26:07,170 --> 00:26:08,160

or wounded.

565

00:26:08,160 --> 00:26:10,710

But here I saw the bodies.

566

00:26:10,710 --> 00:26:12,210

On the grave
registration trucks,

567

00:26:12,210 --> 00:26:16,170

I saw the bodies of
people that I knew.

568

00:26:16,170 --> 00:26:18,780

And I remember another time
I saw someone I didn't know.

569

00:26:18,780 --> 00:26:20,010

He happened to be White.

570

00:26:20,010 --> 00:26:22,713

He was about my age and
he was on the ground

571

00:26:22,713 --> 00:26:23,880

and his eyes were wide open.

572

00:26:23,880 --> 00:26:24,840

They were blue.

573

00:26:24,840 --> 00:26:29,100
He had blond hair, and his hands
were frozen above his body,

574
00:26:29,100 --> 00:26:30,540
because the weather was so cold.

575
00:26:30,540 --> 00:26:32,933
He had been alongside
the road for a while.

576
00:26:32,933 --> 00:26:34,350
And I looked down
into those eyes,

577
00:26:34,350 --> 00:26:38,290
and I realized that I could
end up just like that.

578
00:26:38,290 --> 00:26:41,520
And that's when I began
to question my wisdom

579
00:26:41,520 --> 00:26:43,760
for having joined the Army.

580
00:26:43,760 --> 00:26:46,350

581
00:26:46,350 --> 00:26:47,940
I wanted to know
why I was there.

582
00:26:47,940 --> 00:26:50,310
What the heck am
I doing here when

583
00:26:50,310 --> 00:26:52,920
I can't get a drink
of water, when

584
00:26:52,920 --> 00:26:55,260
I can't ride on a bus, when

I can't eat in a restaurant?

585

00:26:55,260 --> 00:26:57,930

And here I am putting
my life on the line,

586

00:26:57,930 --> 00:27:01,237

fighting for rights and
privileges that I'm denied.

587

00:27:01,237 --> 00:27:02,820

When you were in
Great Britain and you

588

00:27:02,820 --> 00:27:07,800

had that hiatus, before
moving into the combat zone--

589

00:27:07,800 --> 00:27:11,610

again, it's back to the
perceptions of your comrades.

590

00:27:11,610 --> 00:27:13,980

Were there comparisons
made between

591

00:27:13,980 --> 00:27:15,258

stateside relationships?

592

00:27:15,258 --> 00:27:17,550

Here you are in uniform and
can't get a drink of water,

593

00:27:17,550 --> 00:27:20,490

but yet you can attend "Hamlet"
with a British woman in London?

594

00:27:20,490 --> 00:27:21,660

Yes.

595

00:27:21,660 --> 00:27:25,260

All of these things
came across to us

596

00:27:25,260 --> 00:27:30,990
as we had those experiences,
because we talked.

597

00:27:30,990 --> 00:27:33,960
I've got to know quite
a few of the young men,

598

00:27:33,960 --> 00:27:37,290
and we talked continually
about the here and now

599

00:27:37,290 --> 00:27:42,150
and about the future, what we
would do when it was all over.

600

00:27:42,150 --> 00:27:44,190
And we talked about
the civil rights.

601

00:27:44,190 --> 00:27:47,610
We talked about the difference.

602

00:27:47,610 --> 00:27:50,080
And it made some of them
very militant and very angry,

603

00:27:50,080 --> 00:27:52,710
and it created problems
within our unit,

604

00:27:52,710 --> 00:27:54,750
as well as between units.

605

00:27:54,750 --> 00:27:57,270

606

00:27:57,270 --> 00:27:59,073
There was not much love lost--

607

00:27:59,073 --> 00:28:00,990

I'm being very honest
with you-- not much love

608
00:28:00,990 --> 00:28:04,290
lost between the White American
soldier and the Black American

609
00:28:04,290 --> 00:28:09,630
soldier, especially if
there were girls involved.

610
00:28:09,630 --> 00:28:12,540
That created a real
problem, to be in a country

611
00:28:12,540 --> 00:28:15,540
where the girls were White and
here the soldiers are Black

612
00:28:15,540 --> 00:28:17,670
and here the other
soldiers are White.

613
00:28:17,670 --> 00:28:19,650
It created something,
because we all

614
00:28:19,650 --> 00:28:21,720
brought our baggage
from the United States,

615
00:28:21,720 --> 00:28:24,450
and that baggage was racism.

616
00:28:24,450 --> 00:28:27,240
And the damage it had
done to both groups

617
00:28:27,240 --> 00:28:29,935
put them at odds with
one another, you see.

618
00:28:29,935 --> 00:28:31,560

And you didn't need
much to trigger it.

619
00:28:31,560 --> 00:28:33,600
And here, of course,
white womanhood,

620
00:28:33,600 --> 00:28:36,150
that was one of the keys in
the whole business of racism.

621
00:28:36,150 --> 00:28:37,770
That would certainly
stir the pot.

622
00:28:37,770 --> 00:28:40,410
And so we did have our problems.

623
00:28:40,410 --> 00:28:44,940
And people began to
look and compare.

624
00:28:44,940 --> 00:28:48,420
And I'm sure my father must
have done the same thing.

625
00:28:48,420 --> 00:28:50,640
And I knew that when
we get back home,

626
00:28:50,640 --> 00:28:52,980
you're not going to put
them back on the farm,

627
00:28:52,980 --> 00:28:56,500
not after they've been
all over the world.

628
00:28:56,500 --> 00:28:59,250
Was the experience of
being so close to death

629
00:28:59,250 --> 00:29:03,000

and seeing death
with your own eyes--

630
00:29:03,000 --> 00:29:06,960
and I'm sure others
of your compatriots

631
00:29:06,960 --> 00:29:08,820
were in the same situation--

632
00:29:08,820 --> 00:29:13,800
did that bring the races, to
any degree, closer together?

633
00:29:13,800 --> 00:29:16,410
Was there more fraternization
in the face of death

634
00:29:16,410 --> 00:29:18,550
than there had been before?

635
00:29:18,550 --> 00:29:24,810
I think there were occasions
when people sort of transcended

636
00:29:24,810 --> 00:29:29,580
the differences and
would rise above, too.

637
00:29:29,580 --> 00:29:31,560
Those kinds of things
that impinged on them,

638
00:29:31,560 --> 00:29:33,520
as far as racism is concerned.

639
00:29:33,520 --> 00:29:35,080
But it took a war.

640
00:29:35,080 --> 00:29:38,640
It took almost death and
dying to make this happen.

641

00:29:38,640 --> 00:29:41,730

I recall going to
a place and not

642

00:29:41,730 --> 00:29:43,800

knowing whether
I could get back,

643

00:29:43,800 --> 00:29:49,200

because of blackout conditions,
and seeing these two soldiers

644

00:29:49,200 --> 00:29:53,730

who were White right near the
bridge that I had just crossed.

645

00:29:53,730 --> 00:29:55,890

I told them which way I
could get to somewhere.

646

00:29:55,890 --> 00:29:57,807

They said, you're taking
a chance if you go.

647

00:29:57,807 --> 00:29:59,640

Why don't you come on
in here, stay with us.

648

00:29:59,640 --> 00:30:00,515

You can bunk with us.

649

00:30:00,515 --> 00:30:03,000

And I went inside the
room and there were wall

650

00:30:03,000 --> 00:30:04,450

to wall soldiers on the floor.

651

00:30:04,450 --> 00:30:08,280

And he said, just
find a spot, curl up.

652

00:30:08,280 --> 00:30:11,640
War made us somehow
forget for a while

653
00:30:11,640 --> 00:30:13,530
some of the things
that were wrong.

654
00:30:13,530 --> 00:30:17,700
But then again, you
go back into the areas

655
00:30:17,700 --> 00:30:22,800
where people are trying to
have rest and relaxation,

656
00:30:22,800 --> 00:30:27,330
and then it all seems
to come back up again.

657
00:30:27,330 --> 00:30:28,890
It's unfortunate.

658
00:30:28,890 --> 00:30:31,650
When you reached France
and then into Belgium,

659
00:30:31,650 --> 00:30:35,520
did you have contact
with European civilians?

660
00:30:35,520 --> 00:30:37,300
Yes, there were civilians there.

661
00:30:37,300 --> 00:30:40,770
As I said, most of them
were old or very young.

662
00:30:40,770 --> 00:30:44,520
I met a young boy named
Gustav Shimfessel.

663
00:30:44,520 --> 00:30:47,910

He spoke six or seven
languages very well.

664
00:30:47,910 --> 00:30:50,760

665
00:30:50,760 --> 00:30:53,820
And I could talk with him
because he could speak English,

666
00:30:53,820 --> 00:30:56,445
and we became good friends.

667
00:30:56,445 --> 00:30:58,320
But this is right in
the middle, in the midst

668
00:30:58,320 --> 00:31:00,900
of the Battle of the
Bulge, so I don't know

669
00:31:00,900 --> 00:31:02,260
whatever happened to Gustav.

670
00:31:02,260 --> 00:31:06,630
I just have a picture of
him and I remember him.

671
00:31:06,630 --> 00:31:08,610
The adults were there.

672
00:31:08,610 --> 00:31:12,660
They probably were more
concerned with surviving.

673
00:31:12,660 --> 00:31:17,400
And I recall that
I took a chance.

674
00:31:17,400 --> 00:31:22,230
One of the civilians
there, in whose home

675

00:31:22,230 --> 00:31:27,420
we were stationed and
billeted, wanted some gasoline.

676

00:31:27,420 --> 00:31:31,360
They needed some gasoline to
operate a stove or something.

677

00:31:31,360 --> 00:31:32,890
And I didn't think
anything of it.

678

00:31:32,890 --> 00:31:35,840
I gave them some
gasoline from my truck,

679

00:31:35,840 --> 00:31:39,060
the can, the large jerrycan.

680

00:31:39,060 --> 00:31:42,690
I poured some gasoline, just
a little, a half a bucket

681

00:31:42,690 --> 00:31:45,210
for them, and didn't
think anything was wrong.

682

00:31:45,210 --> 00:31:48,630
And then all of a
sudden, the next day

683

00:31:48,630 --> 00:31:50,910
there was this big thing
in The Stars and Stripes

684

00:31:50,910 --> 00:31:54,060
about soldiers who were making
money by selling gasoline

685

00:31:54,060 --> 00:31:57,210
during the Battle of the Bulge.

686

00:31:57,210 --> 00:31:59,760

If I had been caught
giving it away,

687

00:31:59,760 --> 00:32:03,120

I probably would have
ended up in jail.

688

00:32:03,120 --> 00:32:05,280

And yet I thought I was
doing an act of kindness

689

00:32:05,280 --> 00:32:09,360

to help someone, not for profit.

690

00:32:09,360 --> 00:32:13,020

But those are my connections
with some of the adults.

691

00:32:13,020 --> 00:32:15,160

We were very good friends.

692

00:32:15,160 --> 00:32:18,690

In fact, when we came
back through Belgium--

693

00:32:18,690 --> 00:32:21,900

on one occasion I had
a chance to come back

694

00:32:21,900 --> 00:32:24,600

with an officer who
was from Alabama.

695

00:32:24,600 --> 00:32:27,930

We stopped at the same place.

696

00:32:27,930 --> 00:32:30,000

And the lady had us
in for a steak dinner.

697

00:32:30,000 --> 00:32:32,545

We sat down at the table.

698
00:32:32,545 --> 00:32:34,170
And I recall the lady
said that there's

699
00:32:34,170 --> 00:32:36,600
no difference, in
her broken English.

700
00:32:36,600 --> 00:32:38,160
You American.

701
00:32:38,160 --> 00:32:41,310
She pointed to the fellow
from Alabama, who was White.

702
00:32:41,310 --> 00:32:42,450
You American.

703
00:32:42,450 --> 00:32:44,650
You a Colonial.

704
00:32:44,650 --> 00:32:47,160
See, the only way they
understood people of color

705
00:32:47,160 --> 00:32:48,990
was from the colonies.

706
00:32:48,990 --> 00:32:51,300
There were colonists
in Belgian, the Congo.

707
00:32:51,300 --> 00:32:52,410
So I was a colonial.

708
00:32:52,410 --> 00:32:54,780
She said there's no
difference between the two.

709
00:32:54,780 --> 00:32:57,810
He turned red,

like a thermometer.

710

00:32:57,810 --> 00:33:02,070

And I just sort of
chuckled to myself.

711

00:33:02,070 --> 00:33:06,090

This was an experience
I'll never forget.

712

00:33:06,090 --> 00:33:11,765

But yes, I had some contact
during the war with adults.

713

00:33:11,765 --> 00:33:13,015

How long were you at Bastogne?

714

00:33:13,015 --> 00:33:16,250

715

00:33:16,250 --> 00:33:17,800

I'm not sure how long that was.

716

00:33:17,800 --> 00:33:19,050

I don't think it was too long.

717

00:33:19,050 --> 00:33:22,330

It might have been
two, three weeks.

718

00:33:22,330 --> 00:33:23,760

And I'm guessing.

719

00:33:23,760 --> 00:33:27,000

I couldn't say.

720

00:33:27,000 --> 00:33:31,380

We moved out all across
Belgium, doing various things,

721

00:33:31,380 --> 00:33:35,940

putting up other bridges,

removing landmines,

722

00:33:35,940 --> 00:33:38,160

checking on bridges to see
if they were strong enough

723

00:33:38,160 --> 00:33:42,460

to withstand traffic.

724

00:33:42,460 --> 00:33:44,090

We went to lots of places.

725

00:33:44,090 --> 00:33:50,730

I remember Niederpallen,
Wilts, [PLACE NAME],,

726

00:33:50,730 --> 00:33:51,840

a few other places.

727

00:33:51,840 --> 00:33:53,280

It escapes me now.

728

00:33:53,280 --> 00:33:57,500

But we went through Belgium
and finally into Luxembourg.

729

00:33:57,500 --> 00:34:00,550

730

00:34:00,550 --> 00:34:02,280

Then one day we came
to a place called

731

00:34:02,280 --> 00:34:05,550

Mainz, which is on
the Rhine River,

732

00:34:05,550 --> 00:34:09,300

and I think it was there
that they discovered

733

00:34:09,300 --> 00:34:10,845

a pink champagne factory.

734

00:34:10,845 --> 00:34:13,830

735

00:34:13,830 --> 00:34:16,320

As I told before, the
group before-- nobody

736

00:34:16,320 --> 00:34:18,719

built a bridge that night.

737

00:34:18,719 --> 00:34:20,820

It was party time, I guess.

738

00:34:20,820 --> 00:34:24,179

But shortly after that, we
crossed the Rhine River,

739

00:34:24,179 --> 00:34:27,389

and we had to put a
bridge across, help

740

00:34:27,389 --> 00:34:29,159

put a bridge across the river.

741

00:34:29,159 --> 00:34:33,179

And we went across to
Frankfurt, and then we

742

00:34:33,179 --> 00:34:36,510

went up through Germany.

743

00:34:36,510 --> 00:34:39,750

Given what you would
later find in Buchenwald

744

00:34:39,750 --> 00:34:43,679

may have an impact on how you
perceive things in hindsight,

745

00:34:43,679 --> 00:34:45,600

but did you begin
to form an estimate

746
00:34:45,600 --> 00:34:50,110
of the Germans themselves,
both as enemies and as people?

747
00:34:50,110 --> 00:34:54,840
And at what point did
that begin to gel?

748
00:34:54,840 --> 00:35:00,030
Well, I think I had
had an impression

749
00:35:00,030 --> 00:35:05,700
of the German soldier as being
an excellent soldier, one

750
00:35:05,700 --> 00:35:09,150
to be feared if he
was your opponent.

751
00:35:09,150 --> 00:35:10,140
We couldn't play games.

752
00:35:10,140 --> 00:35:16,050
We had to deal with him, and not
[? light. ?] The German people,

753
00:35:16,050 --> 00:35:18,270
we were not allowed to
fraternize, especially

754
00:35:18,270 --> 00:35:18,990
during the war.

755
00:35:18,990 --> 00:35:21,360
We had not yet won the
war so, I didn't get

756
00:35:21,360 --> 00:35:25,110
too close to the German people.

757

00:35:25,110 --> 00:35:27,810

Whenever we went into a place,
we would say to them raus.

758

00:35:27,810 --> 00:35:29,310

That means they had to get out.

759

00:35:29,310 --> 00:35:30,930

And we would give
them so many minutes

760

00:35:30,930 --> 00:35:33,138

to get their things together,
and then we would go in

761

00:35:33,138 --> 00:35:36,340

and billet, stay there.

762

00:35:36,340 --> 00:35:40,960

So I didn't really get
to know them very well.

763

00:35:40,960 --> 00:35:43,122

And then the war ended.

764

00:35:43,122 --> 00:35:47,337

An I think when the war ended,
we became occupation forces.

765

00:35:47,337 --> 00:35:49,170

And we were still not
allowed to fraternize,

766

00:35:49,170 --> 00:35:51,510

but somehow people manage.

767

00:35:51,510 --> 00:35:55,740

When there's proximity, you're
going to get to know people.

768

00:35:55,740 --> 00:35:58,290

And I got to know
some, but not enough

769
00:35:58,290 --> 00:36:03,750
for me to say that I really
knew the German way of thinking

770
00:36:03,750 --> 00:36:04,590
and their culture.

771
00:36:04,590 --> 00:36:07,630

772
00:36:07,630 --> 00:36:11,410
I guess at that time, I
had such strong memories

773
00:36:11,410 --> 00:36:16,130
of what I discovered when
I went down to Weimar.

774
00:36:16,130 --> 00:36:19,290
We went to Weimar and
set up our bivouac area,

775
00:36:19,290 --> 00:36:25,160
and then went immediately with
an officer, about five of us.

776
00:36:25,160 --> 00:36:26,910
We were in the
intelligence reconnaissance

777
00:36:26,910 --> 00:36:32,170
section of our unit, and we
went right to Buchenwald.

778
00:36:32,170 --> 00:36:35,740
And that was the day
that I was to discover

779
00:36:35,740 --> 00:36:40,450
what had really been going

on in Europe under the Nazis.

780

00:36:40,450 --> 00:36:44,100

Because I walked
through the gates and I

781

00:36:44,100 --> 00:36:48,490

saw walking dead people.

782

00:36:48,490 --> 00:36:51,500

Seriously, walking dead people.

783

00:36:51,500 --> 00:36:52,780

I am not a doctor.

784

00:36:52,780 --> 00:36:56,530

I cannot assess things
that accurately.

785

00:36:56,530 --> 00:37:00,730

But in just looking at these
people, who were skin and bone

786

00:37:00,730 --> 00:37:04,555

and dressed in those
pajama-type uniforms,

787

00:37:04,555 --> 00:37:08,860

their heads
clean-shaved, and filled

788

00:37:08,860 --> 00:37:12,520

with sores due to
malnutrition, and here they

789

00:37:12,520 --> 00:37:15,610

were coming towards
us, making all kinds

790

00:37:15,610 --> 00:37:19,120

of guttural statements and
using their own language.

791

00:37:19,120 --> 00:37:22,030

And it was very difficult
for me to comprehend

792

00:37:22,030 --> 00:37:22,810

what was going on.

793

00:37:22,810 --> 00:37:24,268

I just looked at
this in amazement.

794

00:37:24,268 --> 00:37:26,740

795

00:37:26,740 --> 00:37:33,230

I said to myself, my God,
who are these people?

796

00:37:33,230 --> 00:37:35,420

What have they done?

797

00:37:35,420 --> 00:37:37,040

What was their crime?

798

00:37:37,040 --> 00:37:40,565

It's hard for me to try to
understand why anybody could

799

00:37:40,565 --> 00:37:41,690

have been treated this way.

800

00:37:41,690 --> 00:37:43,460

I don't care what they had done.

801

00:37:43,460 --> 00:37:46,190

It just didn't grab me.

802

00:37:46,190 --> 00:37:48,800

And I didn't have
any way of thinking,

803

00:37:48,800 --> 00:37:51,110
of putting a handle on
it, no frame of reference.

804
00:37:51,110 --> 00:37:53,480
I was only 20.

805
00:37:53,480 --> 00:37:56,390
So this young man
who spoke English

806
00:37:56,390 --> 00:38:00,390
began to tell us
about Buchenwald.

807
00:38:00,390 --> 00:38:01,600
An enemy prisoner?

808
00:38:01,600 --> 00:38:02,100
Yes.

809
00:38:02,100 --> 00:38:04,250
He had not been there, I
guess, as long as others.

810
00:38:04,250 --> 00:38:05,920
He seemed to be in
better condition,

811
00:38:05,920 --> 00:38:10,230
but he spoke perfect
English, and he was Polish.

812
00:38:10,230 --> 00:38:13,800
And so he began to explain
to us the composition

813
00:38:13,800 --> 00:38:17,465
of this place, that these
people were Jews and gypsies,

814
00:38:17,465 --> 00:38:22,290
that they were trade unionists

and communists and homosexuals

815

00:38:22,290 --> 00:38:26,280

and Jehovah's witnesses.

816

00:38:26,280 --> 00:38:27,510

There were some Catholics.

817

00:38:27,510 --> 00:38:30,100

818

00:38:30,100 --> 00:38:35,140

There had been some mental
defectives, but they were gone.

819

00:38:35,140 --> 00:38:38,793

He went through a litany of
groups and names of groups,

820

00:38:38,793 --> 00:38:40,960

saying that these people
had been incarcerated here,

821

00:38:40,960 --> 00:38:43,930

because if I could use the term
I used before, they weren't

822

00:38:43,930 --> 00:38:47,240

good enough, you see.

823

00:38:47,240 --> 00:38:49,160

And they had been put
here for one purpose,

824

00:38:49,160 --> 00:38:52,890

and that was to be
worked until they died,

825

00:38:52,890 --> 00:38:54,800

or starved until they died.

826

00:38:54,800 --> 00:38:58,520

827
00:38:58,520 --> 00:39:01,030
And I walked around the camp.

828
00:39:01,030 --> 00:39:03,520
I went to a barrack.

829
00:39:03,520 --> 00:39:05,920
I opened the door.

830
00:39:05,920 --> 00:39:08,715
I wanted to go in, but
the stench came out,

831
00:39:08,715 --> 00:39:10,090
and there was no
way in the world

832
00:39:10,090 --> 00:39:13,420
I was going to get through
that overpowering odor.

833
00:39:13,420 --> 00:39:14,883
And so I just stood there.

834
00:39:14,883 --> 00:39:17,050
I looked down on the bottom
bunk right near the door

835
00:39:17,050 --> 00:39:19,930
and there was a man there.

836
00:39:19,930 --> 00:39:25,300
He was skin and bone,
and he was on somewhat

837
00:39:25,300 --> 00:39:29,380
like a pallet of dirty
straw and filthy rags.

838
00:39:29,380 --> 00:39:34,260

And he just could barely turn
his head and look up at me.

839
00:39:34,260 --> 00:39:37,300
I looked into his face,
into that skeletal face

840
00:39:37,300 --> 00:39:41,470
with those deep set eyes,
which I can't forget.

841
00:39:41,470 --> 00:39:46,250
But he said nothing and
I said nothing to him.

842
00:39:46,250 --> 00:39:48,620
You were part of an intelligence
team in your outfit.

843
00:39:48,620 --> 00:39:50,000
There was an officer.

844
00:39:50,000 --> 00:39:51,860
Had the officer been briefed?

845
00:39:51,860 --> 00:39:55,070
Had the intelligence
team been told anything?

846
00:39:55,070 --> 00:39:56,930
I can't speak for the officers.

847
00:39:56,930 --> 00:39:58,700
We didn't communicate that well.

848
00:39:58,700 --> 00:40:00,980
I'll be very frank with you.

849
00:40:00,980 --> 00:40:04,190
Not too much love lost
between us and our officers,

850

00:40:04,190 --> 00:40:08,160
many who were Southern, many
who had been damaged by racism.

851
00:40:08,160 --> 00:40:10,850
And I guess my own feelings,
as a result of racism,

852
00:40:10,850 --> 00:40:14,330
caused me to not want to
get to really know them.

853
00:40:14,330 --> 00:40:17,790
And so there wasn't
much communication.

854
00:40:17,790 --> 00:40:19,520
So if they knew, I didn't know.

855
00:40:19,520 --> 00:40:21,830
So it was complete,
absolute shock,

856
00:40:21,830 --> 00:40:23,330
surprise when you got there?

857
00:40:23,330 --> 00:40:24,290
Totally.

858
00:40:24,290 --> 00:40:25,280
Totally.

859
00:40:25,280 --> 00:40:28,160
And had I been told, I
doubt if I could have had,

860
00:40:28,160 --> 00:40:30,170
in my mind's eye,
envisioned anything

861
00:40:30,170 --> 00:40:32,600
as horrible as what I saw.

862

00:40:32,600 --> 00:40:34,100

There had been no
talk in the ranks?

863

00:40:34,100 --> 00:40:35,630

No word had filtered out?

864

00:40:35,630 --> 00:40:37,190

Not to me.

865

00:40:37,190 --> 00:40:39,830

Now maybe there were others
who did get information,

866

00:40:39,830 --> 00:40:45,200

but I can only deal with myself
and some of the friends I knew.

867

00:40:45,200 --> 00:40:48,230

Terms like Auschwitz and
Bergen-Belsen and Majdanek,

868

00:40:48,230 --> 00:40:50,750

and places like that
were not known to you?

869

00:40:50,750 --> 00:40:52,340

Even when I went
into Buchenwald,

870

00:40:52,340 --> 00:40:55,850

I had no idea that
those places existed.

871

00:40:55,850 --> 00:41:00,860

Those names only came to me
after I got out of the service.

872

00:41:00,860 --> 00:41:06,800

Later, much later, I began
to hear of names and places,

873

00:41:06,800 --> 00:41:10,100
and realized that there was
more than just a Buchenwald,

874

00:41:10,100 --> 00:41:13,190
that there were many, many, many
Buchenwalds of different names

875

00:41:13,190 --> 00:41:15,980
all over Europe and Russia.

876

00:41:15,980 --> 00:41:18,650

877

00:41:18,650 --> 00:41:22,850
That's what boggles the mind,
to think that a group, a society

878

00:41:22,850 --> 00:41:30,380
can organize, and do it in a
systematic way, such a program

879

00:41:30,380 --> 00:41:34,910
to remove from the world
a whole group of people,

880

00:41:34,910 --> 00:41:40,940
and any others they
didn't think were worthy.

881

00:41:40,940 --> 00:41:42,620
To me, that was just
a little bit much.

882

00:41:42,620 --> 00:41:44,180
I couldn't put a handle on that.

883

00:41:44,180 --> 00:41:49,700
But I saw what I saw in
the camp, the place where

884

00:41:49,700 --> 00:41:52,460
they tortured people and

the bloodstains all around

885

00:41:52,460 --> 00:41:54,650

and the instruments
of torture there,

886

00:41:54,650 --> 00:41:59,060

the building where they had
all parts of the human anatomy

887

00:41:59,060 --> 00:42:03,710

stored as a result
of their experiments,

888

00:42:03,710 --> 00:42:07,370

really labeled and put in jars.

889

00:42:07,370 --> 00:42:10,640

What reaction we you able
to gauge in other soldiers

890

00:42:10,640 --> 00:42:11,150

to this?

891

00:42:11,150 --> 00:42:15,730

892

00:42:15,730 --> 00:42:19,840

I can't make an
assessment of that.

893

00:42:19,840 --> 00:42:21,890

This was a traumatic
experience for me.

894

00:42:21,890 --> 00:42:23,560

I was going through it as an--

895

00:42:23,560 --> 00:42:24,370

Focused.

896

00:42:24,370 --> 00:42:32,530

I was focusing on how I felt.
I couldn't deal with my friends

897
00:42:32,530 --> 00:42:35,050
who saw the same thing and
what they were feeling.

898
00:42:35,050 --> 00:42:37,240
And I know they must
have felt something

899
00:42:37,240 --> 00:42:38,390
because we never talked.

900
00:42:38,390 --> 00:42:39,932
You never talked
about it afterwards?

901
00:42:39,932 --> 00:42:40,510
Never.

902
00:42:40,510 --> 00:42:42,280
Never.

903
00:42:42,280 --> 00:42:45,070
The only one person I
talked to about this

904
00:42:45,070 --> 00:42:50,850
was Sergeant Scott that
I met when I went down

905
00:42:50,850 --> 00:42:54,690
to the Memorial Council,
Liberators Memorial

906
00:42:54,690 --> 00:42:56,010
Council in Washington.

907
00:42:56,010 --> 00:42:57,510
That's where I
bumped into him again

908

00:42:57,510 --> 00:43:01,560

and we talked and dealt
with things we saw

909

00:43:01,560 --> 00:43:05,272

and our reaction to the same.

910

00:43:05,272 --> 00:43:06,730

And he reminded me
of things that I

911

00:43:06,730 --> 00:43:09,410

had seen that I'd forgotten.

912

00:43:09,410 --> 00:43:10,990

And I know that I went to the--

913

00:43:10,990 --> 00:43:12,850

Was Sergeant Scott
White or Black?

914

00:43:12,850 --> 00:43:13,540

He's Black.

915

00:43:13,540 --> 00:43:17,200

All Black were in this unit, you
see, except for the officers.

916

00:43:17,200 --> 00:43:18,920

And so I just got
with the photographer

917

00:43:18,920 --> 00:43:22,750

and he took pictures
of the camp.

918

00:43:22,750 --> 00:43:26,320

And he's given me
a couple of shots,

919

00:43:26,320 --> 00:43:28,480

in which I am a part of it.

920
00:43:28,480 --> 00:43:34,150

921
00:43:34,150 --> 00:43:38,470
And I saw their
bodies all around.

922
00:43:38,470 --> 00:43:40,210
I saw the clothing
of little children,

923
00:43:40,210 --> 00:43:42,730
but I never saw any
children in that camp.

924
00:43:42,730 --> 00:43:47,560
But I saw the clothing
piled up in neat piles.

925
00:43:47,560 --> 00:43:53,530
And as I said, the
bodies were everywhere.

926
00:43:53,530 --> 00:43:59,410
And then there was the pile of
bodies, about four feet high.

927
00:43:59,410 --> 00:44:02,360
Had all the German military
left and all the guards left?

928
00:44:02,360 --> 00:44:02,860
Yeah.

929
00:44:02,860 --> 00:44:03,880
Those that got away.

930
00:44:03,880 --> 00:44:07,750
I think maybe a few
might have been captured.

931

00:44:07,750 --> 00:44:10,000
I did see one man.

932
00:44:10,000 --> 00:44:12,340
Sergeant Scott was with
me at the time, I think,

933
00:44:12,340 --> 00:44:13,250
when we saw him.

934
00:44:13,250 --> 00:44:16,540
He was being beaten
by the inmates.

935
00:44:16,540 --> 00:44:18,656
They wanted us to
come and join them.

936
00:44:18,656 --> 00:44:21,460
Of course, we didn't, but
it was my understanding

937
00:44:21,460 --> 00:44:23,860
that they beat him to death.

938
00:44:23,860 --> 00:44:27,070
And of course, I never
subscribed to that.

939
00:44:27,070 --> 00:44:30,190
I think human life is
sacred, but I'm not

940
00:44:30,190 --> 00:44:35,980
sitting in judgment because
I didn't walk in their shoes.

941
00:44:35,980 --> 00:44:38,788
But I could not
be party to that.

942
00:44:38,788 --> 00:44:40,330
I should have said

something, though.

943

00:44:40,330 --> 00:44:42,080

I imagine my voice
should have been raised

944

00:44:42,080 --> 00:44:44,440

and said, no, no,
that's not the way.

945

00:44:44,440 --> 00:44:45,970

I regret to this
day that I didn't.

946

00:44:45,970 --> 00:44:49,390

947

00:44:49,390 --> 00:44:52,135

I went into that
crematorium, where

948

00:44:52,135 --> 00:44:53,260

these bodies were piled up.

949

00:44:53,260 --> 00:44:54,843

They were adjacent
to the crematorium.

950

00:44:54,843 --> 00:44:55,510

I went in there.

951

00:44:55,510 --> 00:44:59,260

There were six
ovens, six of them.

952

00:44:59,260 --> 00:45:02,135

I looked into one.

953

00:45:02,135 --> 00:45:03,760

I imagine there were
other crematoriums

954

00:45:03,760 --> 00:45:04,593
throughout the camp.

955
00:45:04,593 --> 00:45:06,070
It was a large camp.

956
00:45:06,070 --> 00:45:09,310
But I looked into one oven
and I saw the remains there,

957
00:45:09,310 --> 00:45:10,360
the ashes, the bones.

958
00:45:10,360 --> 00:45:15,692

959
00:45:15,692 --> 00:45:18,150
Someone said that they took
the ashes sometimes and used it

960
00:45:18,150 --> 00:45:19,920
as human fertilizer.

961
00:45:19,920 --> 00:45:26,040
Can you imagine that, to use
the ashes of human beings

962
00:45:26,040 --> 00:45:29,910
for fertilizer on fields to
grow some crops that you would

963
00:45:29,910 --> 00:45:32,140
need to promote the war effort?

964
00:45:32,140 --> 00:45:35,350

965
00:45:35,350 --> 00:45:37,320
I saw all of these
things probably more

966
00:45:37,320 --> 00:45:40,170

than I can remember,
but I came out

967
00:45:40,170 --> 00:45:42,660
of there sick to the stomach.

968
00:45:42,660 --> 00:45:45,510
And I went to the gate to wait.

969
00:45:45,510 --> 00:45:48,825
And we all went back to camp,
onboard the trucks in silence.

970
00:45:48,825 --> 00:45:51,450

971
00:45:51,450 --> 00:45:54,420
Nobody said anything.

972
00:45:54,420 --> 00:46:00,960
And shortly after that, a brief
time, I guess, of occupation

973
00:46:00,960 --> 00:46:01,860
we were there.

974
00:46:01,860 --> 00:46:04,590
And then the war
ended and we were

975
00:46:04,590 --> 00:46:09,360
told that our unit was no longer
needed, and it was disbanded.

976
00:46:09,360 --> 00:46:12,010
You were never debriefed on
the experience of Buchenwald?

977
00:46:12,010 --> 00:46:15,270
No American officials,
officers, civilian, or military

978

00:46:15,270 --> 00:46:17,290
ever wanted to know
what you had seen?

979
00:46:17,290 --> 00:46:18,210
No.

980
00:46:18,210 --> 00:46:21,750
I understand that
it was seen by many.

981
00:46:21,750 --> 00:46:23,430
I think the president--

982
00:46:23,430 --> 00:46:26,290
not then, he was
General Eisenhower--

983
00:46:26,290 --> 00:46:30,510
had brought as many of
the troops as he could

984
00:46:30,510 --> 00:46:32,215
into the camp to see.

985
00:46:32,215 --> 00:46:33,840
And I think this is
true of other camps

986
00:46:33,840 --> 00:46:35,910
where Americans were in charge.

987
00:46:35,910 --> 00:46:39,060

988
00:46:39,060 --> 00:46:41,790
He also asked the
Congress to come

989
00:46:41,790 --> 00:46:45,330
and the correspondents to
come and people in the movies

990

00:46:45,330 --> 00:46:47,700

to come and take pictures
of this, because he

991

00:46:47,700 --> 00:46:49,080

didn't want people not to know.

992

00:46:49,080 --> 00:46:51,690

993

00:46:51,690 --> 00:46:53,790

But nobody ever spoke to us.

994

00:46:53,790 --> 00:46:55,900

We never spoke to each other.

995

00:46:55,900 --> 00:46:58,500

And when we were disbanded, I
ended up in the Philippines.

996

00:46:58,500 --> 00:47:04,020

I spent seven, eight months
down there waiting to go home.

997

00:47:04,020 --> 00:47:06,450

The war had ended in the
Pacific after I got down there,

998

00:47:06,450 --> 00:47:10,890

so I just sat still and
waited, and finally came home.

999

00:47:10,890 --> 00:47:13,500

I was 21 years of age.

1000

00:47:13,500 --> 00:47:17,970

In retrospect, Dr
Bass, have you been

1001

00:47:17,970 --> 00:47:24,600

able to assess why you, and
possibly others, have went

1002
00:47:24,600 --> 00:47:26,640
through this period
of silence, where

1003
00:47:26,640 --> 00:47:31,710
you couldn't talk about
these things to each other?

1004
00:47:31,710 --> 00:47:34,340
Because I'm sure it must
have had an effect on you.

1005
00:47:34,340 --> 00:47:35,370
Yeah.

1006
00:47:35,370 --> 00:47:43,650
That's a hard question to answer
because I'm being speculative.

1007
00:47:43,650 --> 00:47:45,210
I don't want to be a cop-out.

1008
00:47:45,210 --> 00:47:48,060

1009
00:47:48,060 --> 00:47:50,220
I guess I go back
to psychology one,

1010
00:47:50,220 --> 00:47:52,830
where they say things that
are ugly and miserable,

1011
00:47:52,830 --> 00:47:58,470
you somehow push it back
in your mind somewhere.

1012
00:47:58,470 --> 00:48:02,100
You never get rid of it,
but you don't deal with it.

1013

00:48:02,100 --> 00:48:04,085
That's a possibility.

1014
00:48:04,085 --> 00:48:05,460
And I think the
other possibility

1015
00:48:05,460 --> 00:48:09,720
is that I got busy putting
my life together, trying

1016
00:48:09,720 --> 00:48:14,520
to do those things that I
wanted to do, like go to school,

1017
00:48:14,520 --> 00:48:18,900
get a job, get married,
start promoting

1018
00:48:18,900 --> 00:48:21,300
my career as a
teacher and struggling

1019
00:48:21,300 --> 00:48:25,920
to become a principal,
and all those things.

1020
00:48:25,920 --> 00:48:30,480
Getting and spending
became important.

1021
00:48:30,480 --> 00:48:35,270
You don't deal with other
things, and that's what I did.

1022
00:48:35,270 --> 00:48:39,150
What was your reason for
wanting to be a teacher?

1023
00:48:39,150 --> 00:48:43,540
Well, I think it's when I
went to the Philippines.

1024

00:48:43,540 --> 00:48:50,850

While I was there, believe it or not, I became a company clerk.

1025

00:48:50,850 --> 00:48:53,730

1026

00:48:53,730 --> 00:48:57,390

I guess it's because I was a high school graduate.

1027

00:48:57,390 --> 00:49:00,360

And in the world of blind men, the one-eyed man is king.

1028

00:49:00,360 --> 00:49:02,748

So they said, you become the clerk.

1029

00:49:02,748 --> 00:49:03,915

I said, well, I cannot type.

1030

00:49:03,915 --> 00:49:04,915

He said, it's all right.

1031

00:49:04,915 --> 00:49:06,330

You can learn how to type.

1032

00:49:06,330 --> 00:49:09,690

So I learned how to hunt and peck in the Philippines.

1033

00:49:09,690 --> 00:49:15,960

But in the process of filling out the payroll,

1034

00:49:15,960 --> 00:49:20,610

I discovered that there were young men my age,

1035

00:49:20,610 --> 00:49:26,560

and even younger, who could not sign their own name.

1036
00:49:26,560 --> 00:49:32,290
Had to put down an x and
have it witnessed by someone.

1037
00:49:32,290 --> 00:49:34,810
And I think it was
during that time

1038
00:49:34,810 --> 00:49:36,730
I really came to
grips with the fact

1039
00:49:36,730 --> 00:49:41,020
that if I went back to school,
I would like to be a teacher.

1040
00:49:41,020 --> 00:49:44,890
Sounds strange and weird,
but that came to me

1041
00:49:44,890 --> 00:49:47,450
as something that was important.

1042
00:49:47,450 --> 00:49:53,185
And so when I came back, I
enrolled at West Chester State

1043
00:49:53,185 --> 00:49:53,935
Teacher's College.

1044
00:49:53,935 --> 00:49:57,830

1045
00:49:57,830 --> 00:50:00,230
I was a happy,
young man to think

1046
00:50:00,230 --> 00:50:02,900
that I could get into college.

1047
00:50:02,900 --> 00:50:04,840

And my father was still
living and my mother,

1048
00:50:04,840 --> 00:50:10,460
and I know that they were
feeling so proud that I was now

1049
00:50:10,460 --> 00:50:12,920
matriculating at West Chester.

1050
00:50:12,920 --> 00:50:15,407
And my father told me I
should be a history teacher.

1051
00:50:15,407 --> 00:50:17,240
I wanted to be a physical
education teacher.

1052
00:50:17,240 --> 00:50:19,115
He said, no, I think
you should take history.

1053
00:50:19,115 --> 00:50:20,400
History is important.

1054
00:50:20,400 --> 00:50:23,300
And so I became a
teacher of history.

1055
00:50:23,300 --> 00:50:31,310
And I discovered, though, that
the same pain that I left when

1056
00:50:31,310 --> 00:50:34,580
I left here, the same pain
that my father experienced

1057
00:50:34,580 --> 00:50:38,460
when he came back here,
was waiting for me.

1058
00:50:38,460 --> 00:50:42,650
I came back to this country

and I went to school,

1059

00:50:42,650 --> 00:50:44,300

and I was walking
down High Street

1060

00:50:44,300 --> 00:50:45,560

with some of my White friends.

1061

00:50:45,560 --> 00:50:49,850

And we went to a
drugstore, and we went in.

1062

00:50:49,850 --> 00:50:52,490

And they ordered coffee and
I wanted a glass of milk.

1063

00:50:52,490 --> 00:50:56,332

There must have been about eight
cups of coffee, but no milk.

1064

00:50:56,332 --> 00:50:58,790

And the lady filled the coffee,
put the sugar and cream in,

1065

00:50:58,790 --> 00:51:00,000

and kept looking
for the manager.

1066

00:51:00,000 --> 00:51:02,330

And finally she got his
attention and beckoned to him.

1067

00:51:02,330 --> 00:51:02,910

He came over.

1068

00:51:02,910 --> 00:51:05,420

She whispered to him.

1069

00:51:05,420 --> 00:51:07,580

And then he called over
one of my White friends

1070

00:51:07,580 --> 00:51:12,120
and whispered to him, and while
doing this, looked right at me.

1071

00:51:12,120 --> 00:51:13,070
And I knew.

1072

00:51:13,070 --> 00:51:14,510
My antenna was up.

1073

00:51:14,510 --> 00:51:16,430
I had been conditioned.

1074

00:51:16,430 --> 00:51:18,500
I knew that something
was not kosher.

1075

00:51:18,500 --> 00:51:23,738
And so I waited until
finally the fellow came over.

1076

00:51:23,738 --> 00:51:26,030
And he looked at the coffee
and said, let's go, fellas.

1077

00:51:26,030 --> 00:51:26,720
Come on.

1078

00:51:26,720 --> 00:51:29,000
And he ushered all of us out.

1079

00:51:29,000 --> 00:51:31,938
And of course, it was some
kind of misunderstanding.

1080

00:51:31,938 --> 00:51:33,230
The fellow said, wait a minute.

1081

00:51:33,230 --> 00:51:33,813
Wait a minute.

1082

00:51:33,813 --> 00:51:34,880
The coffee is there.

1083
00:51:34,880 --> 00:51:35,820
He said, no, no.

1084
00:51:35,820 --> 00:51:36,570
We don't want any.

1085
00:51:36,570 --> 00:51:37,430
He said, why?

1086
00:51:37,430 --> 00:51:41,730
He said, they didn't
want to serve Leon.

1087
00:51:41,730 --> 00:51:43,200
Can you imagine?

1088
00:51:43,200 --> 00:51:48,720
I put in three years of my
life, put it on the line,

1089
00:51:48,720 --> 00:51:50,670
to make it possible
for people like that,

1090
00:51:50,670 --> 00:51:52,470
a young lady and
manager, whoever

1091
00:51:52,470 --> 00:51:55,143
owned that store, to
function and enjoy the rights

1092
00:51:55,143 --> 00:51:56,310
and privileges of Americans.

1093
00:51:56,310 --> 00:51:58,802
And they were saying to me,
just like the Nazis did,

1094

00:51:58,802 --> 00:52:00,510
just like they told
me down in the South,

1095
00:52:00,510 --> 00:52:04,720
what they told my father,
Leon, you're not good enough.

1096
00:52:04,720 --> 00:52:07,860
What a damnable kind of
thing to say to somebody.

1097
00:52:07,860 --> 00:52:11,940
Here I am now 21 and
back from the wars,

1098
00:52:11,940 --> 00:52:15,450
and still can't get that
relief that I needed.

1099
00:52:15,450 --> 00:52:18,310

1100
00:52:18,310 --> 00:52:20,560
At what point did
you become involved

1101
00:52:20,560 --> 00:52:22,780
in organized civil
rights activities?

1102
00:52:22,780 --> 00:52:25,232
Oh, I don't know.

1103
00:52:25,232 --> 00:52:27,190
From my vantage point,
I think just about every

1104
00:52:27,190 --> 00:52:30,160
Black American, and every
American worth their salt,

1105
00:52:30,160 --> 00:52:32,070

got involved in some
way, to some degree.

1106
00:52:32,070 --> 00:52:35,632

1107
00:52:35,632 --> 00:52:38,320
I moved into a
community after looking

1108
00:52:38,320 --> 00:52:41,260
for a house for the
longest in the 1950s.

1109
00:52:41,260 --> 00:52:48,070
I finally found a place which
had integrated open housing.

1110
00:52:48,070 --> 00:52:51,880
It was in Concord
Park in Bucks County.

1111
00:52:51,880 --> 00:52:55,120
Operated by the Quakers,
Society of Friends,

1112
00:52:55,120 --> 00:52:57,520
and Marge Milgram, the builder.

1113
00:52:57,520 --> 00:52:59,740
And they put up this place
and I was able to get,

1114
00:52:59,740 --> 00:53:02,020
under the GI Bill
of Rights, a home.

1115
00:53:02,020 --> 00:53:03,970
And I discovered, by
talking and living

1116
00:53:03,970 --> 00:53:06,820
among people who were Quakers,

that they put their money where

1117
00:53:06,820 --> 00:53:07,840
their mouth is.

1118
00:53:07,840 --> 00:53:10,630
And they did all
kinds of things to try

1119
00:53:10,630 --> 00:53:12,850
to effectuate a
change in the society

1120
00:53:12,850 --> 00:53:16,330
during the era of the
Civil Rights Movement.

1121
00:53:16,330 --> 00:53:19,030
So I became part of
whatever they were doing.

1122
00:53:19,030 --> 00:53:22,600
And I remember going to
that March on Washington,

1123
00:53:22,600 --> 00:53:26,290
along with so many other
250,000 more people.

1124
00:53:26,290 --> 00:53:30,490
I was one of them, and what a
wonderful experience that was.

1125
00:53:30,490 --> 00:53:33,580
And I felt that things
were going to be different.

1126
00:53:33,580 --> 00:53:37,710
And I was teaching at an
all-Black elementary school

1127
00:53:37,710 --> 00:53:39,060
when this happened.

1128
00:53:39,060 --> 00:53:42,330
I went on this
march, and it gave me

1129
00:53:42,330 --> 00:53:44,790
a degree of hope because
I had, coming to my class,

1130
00:53:44,790 --> 00:53:47,970
about 49 youngsters, Black
youngsters from poverty,

1131
00:53:47,970 --> 00:53:52,980
who were looking to me to give
them the sustenance they need

1132
00:53:52,980 --> 00:53:55,890
so they could make it from
day to day in a society that

1133
00:53:55,890 --> 00:53:59,455
was constantly beating
them down economically,

1134
00:53:59,455 --> 00:54:02,080
but in every other way, telling
them they were not good enough.

1135
00:54:02,080 --> 00:54:03,800
And I had to try to change that.

1136
00:54:03,800 --> 00:54:05,790
And then it was when
something happened

1137
00:54:05,790 --> 00:54:07,920
in Montgomery, Alabama.

1138
00:54:07,920 --> 00:54:10,725
I think a lady named Rosa
Parks sat down on a bus.

1139

00:54:10,725 --> 00:54:13,810

1140

00:54:13,810 --> 00:54:15,910

You know the story.

1141

00:54:15,910 --> 00:54:20,770

I could go on.

1142

00:54:20,770 --> 00:54:22,280

It will go on in a few minutes.

1143

00:54:22,280 --> 00:54:23,697

We're going to
take a short break.

1144

00:54:23,697 --> 00:54:24,870

OK.

1145

00:54:24,870 --> 00:54:34,271