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CAMP: DACHAU
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A: I am Harry F. Allen. I was born on January 10th, 1916. I served in World War II from March of 1942 until April of 1946. I was drafted. I went in as a private and eventually went to Officer's Candidate School, graduated from there, and was assigned to the Combat Engineers. We had a training session in Mississippi with new troops and then eventually ended up in England. We were stationed there in preparation for the invasion of Europe, and prior to D-Day some of us did go over to see about removing the obstacles for the landing. We landed in Europe after the other troops because we came back and then there was a storm that's [unintelligible] in the red area. We were Combat Engineers assigned to a group who in turn assigned us to support the different divisions, and we were part of the first, third, and seventh armies. On the way through Europe, one of the incidents that occurred was the liberation of Dachau, and our company was assigned to support one of the infantry divisions. We went with them in support, and prior to getting to the actual stockade, we began to see these railroad cars lined up with human bodies laying in them like stacks of cordwood.

Q: Is that right?

A: As we progressed, we became more agitated, all of us. The infantry was really the first people there and we were right behind them. At that time, the prisoners and the guards were still there. We contained the guards, and the prisoners threw themselves on the barbed wire fence and made a

way for them to get over, and they crawled over each other's bodies to get at these guards.

Q: Did you have any problem with the guards?

A: No. Soon as we surrounded them, they....

Q: They surrendered.

A: ...pretty much dropped their weapons. But, everybody was so incensed at the condition of these people which were walking corpses really. They incinerated them there and you could smell the burning flesh odor even though the fires had gone out or were down. They weren't burning people when we got there.

Q: Was that the first you knew about the prison? Had you heard about the prison before? What did you expect? Did you find about what you'd expected?

A: Yes. We had been told that we would be in the neighborhood of what had been a crematorium. It was more than we expected, because we never expected to see something in the fashion that occurred there -- to see human beings do this sort of thing to other human beings. I stood on a little knoll there and looked and saw these people. Their eyes were black coals, their head was like a skeleton, and their hair was half gone. It's just, I guess, malnutrition and everything. I looked at these people whose elbows stood out like big knobby things and their bodies swollen.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to talk to any of these prisoners? Do you know what their nationality was or anything about them?

A: Of course, there was a language problem. Most of them just said *Jude, Jude*.

Q: Most of them were Jews?

A: To my knowledge, all we saw were Jews.

Q: All of them Jews.

A: I understand that they had not confined that to Jewish people, but also to political dissidents. And there were some. But I stood in one position and I could look behind me and see these bodies like cordwood piled up in these cars, these open-like coal cars. They were taking those bodies from wherever they came from, some other camp or whatever, and burning them there plus the people that died there. These people were supposed to be worked in these camps.

Q: How many bodies do you suppose it was being brought? How large was this train?

A: That train was probably half a mile long.

Q: Is that right? A hundred cars or more.

A: Yes, because they were the shorter European cars. I guess it could possibly be a hundred or more cars.

Q: How many bodies would you estimate to the car stacked up like cordwood?

A: We talked about that at the time, and we figured there had to be somewhere around four, five, six hundred people.

Q: To each car?

A: Yes. It bends your mind.

Q: Beyond your imagination.

A: Yes, it was. That's why we, I guess, held the guards so that the prisoners could get to them. We felt like they were entitled.

Q: Did they attempt to get to the guards?

A: They got to them, as weak as they were. Of course, they just overwhelmed them, and all they could do was beat them and pummel them and hit them with whatever they could find. It was finally stopped,

but I mean the first reaction was let them have them.

Q: That's easy to understand, isn't it?

A: Yes, it sure is at a point like that. After all, you're in combat, you're mentally geared to kill and things of this sort, but you see things like that...in fact, I've got some pictures somewhere. I didn't have a chance to look them up before you came.

Q: I'd like to look at them when I have time. No rush.

A: They're similar to what you've seen in all magazines and everything where these bodies are just stacked up like cordwood. It's unbelievable.

Q: But these are pictures that you made?

A: Yes, I made some pictures there. And I ran into people after the war was over who had been in different places. Shortly after the war was over, in the fall, I saw one man at one of these...it became the CIA but it was the OSS then, and they were handling all the civilian details of setting up the towns, cities....

Q: That was American soldiers.

A: That was American soldiers who acted as I guess you might say political people setting up a town, and I had some business with this one man there. He spoke English; in fact, he was from Milwaukee and had been to visit his mother in Europe when the war broke out, and when that thing happened they put him into one of these concentration camps. I said, "You look very good," and he took his leg and put it over the edge of the table and pulled his pants down and said, "I haven't got any flesh on my legs yet." But he was still skin and bones really. And that's essentially my experience.

Q: How long did you stay at this camp, and how many prisoners would you estimate survived? You said they wanted to break out and did break out.

How many prisoners do you think survived, and how long did you stay there?

A: I didn't see the whole camp. It's a big area and I saw one area. We had come down the railroad track in the process of coming there. We were going on to...I get my towns mixed up, but to where Hitler's headquarters had been. They had all the records, and that was really a part of our purpose to stay right with the infantry because Dachau....

Q: Was that in Munich?

A: Yes. Dachau is not that far from Munich. So this is our reason for being so close in behind the infantry. We were normally either way in front or way behind, because we were a bridge building company, and they sent us in front to build a bridge for the tanks and the infantry to go over and they left us behind fixing the roads so that they could be supplied.

Q: What was the reaction and what was the thinking of you and your buddies when you arrived and found all this?

A: It was unbelievable. The first reaction was anger. And the second reaction was to retaliate. That's probably the reason that they let the prisoners get at the guards and things like that. I don't think that there was anybody in command at that point.

Q: The commanders of the camp had already abandoned and gone.

A: They'd taken off running, yes, and they were later caught. But, the American troops reacted on their own initiative rather than anybody giving any commands for them to do these things. It just happened. But I could understand it.

Q: Mr. Allen, is there anything that you feel like adding to your statement? What was your first reaction? Has it affected your life since then? As you look back today, what is your reaction to the Holocaust?

- A: My reaction is probably one of horror, because being a Christian, it's unbelievable to me that human beings would do such a thing to each other. You can't understand how anybody could be involved in doing such a thing from one human being to another. But it's also understandable what they did because of the emotional mentality of the time. These people did anything Hitler wanted. They had twelve- and thirteen- and fourteen-year-old kids fighting toward the end of the war. They were told that we would do things like this to them.
- Q: A brain washing operation.
- A: Right, and a complete one, and the thought comes to my mind that the next time some powerful figure gets up and waves a flag and starts playing the marches and everything that the Germans won't follow them again. They've done it throughout history, and yet, as we discussed, probably the most aggressive, most active people in Europe are the Germans. And you don't understand this, and looking back at it you don't believe that it's really true. You think this has to be some sort of a nightmare, but when you see the physical evidence such as I did, you know that this is what people had done to each other. As far as it affecting my life, you put unhappy things behind you if you can, and that probably was the most unbelievable thing that I have ever seen. Going to the moon was more in line of doing what you strive to do, but this sort of a thing is just unbelievable.
- Q: Thank you very much., Mr. Harry Allen.