

NAME: GRADY BARKER  
INTERVIEWER: ED SHEHEE  
CAMP: DACHAU  
DATE: NOVEMBER 10, 1978

A: My name is Grady M. Barker. I reside at 1275 Winburn Drive, East Point, Georgia. My date of birth is 6/24/13. At the time I went into the service, I was age 29. When I left the service, October 5, 1945, my profession at that time was a truck driver. After leaving the service, I went into the trucking business for a number of years. I am now retired. Before retirement, though, I was with the United Family Life Insurance Company for a number of years. Also, my military unit was the 685th Ordnance Ammunition Company and I performed the duty of a truck driver for them. I was rated as a corporal or T-5 when I was released from the service. I was stationed at Ft. Benning and sent to Ft. McPherson, where I enlisted in 1942. I received my discharge from Ft. McPherson, Georgia.

Q: And which prisoner camp were you associated with?

A: The only thing I was associated with was Dachau prison and that was after it had been liberated, but the prisoners were still held in the camp a couple of days after liberation. I did see the ones who were able to walk and carry the prisoners that were dead. I did see them taken and put into a pit with burning material in there. There were box cars out there with some bodies in them and also the ground was covered with a number of bodies. It seems the ones that were able to walk and all were nothing but skin and bones due to starvation and mistreatment, I imagine. It was a terrible sight to lay eyes on and, of course, at that time, you don't really

get involved because we did not get involved with the forces that had them under control. We only went to the fence to look through. My colonel and I paid a visit there. We did find one Storm Trooper with his head cut off. One of the prisoners had been able to get a knife and relieve him of his head.

Q: How did you first hear about the camp?

A: My Colonel heard about it and as I had been transferred out of my outfit into the headquarters outfit, the Colonel wanted to go over there and see what was happening and he was the one that told me about it.

Q: What did he say about it? What was his description?

A: He wanted to go and see what had happened. He might have had orders to go over there because he had another officer with him and myself. We did view the camp entirely and then we left and went into an area where they had the Polish soldiers lined up on the airfield with new jet MIGs, I believe they were. But they did not have any fuel to fly them with, so they came out and lined up in formation as we went through to review their troops. And the irony of it all is, as a corporal, I was saluted and the officers were not. So, that's my experience at Dachau and I do have several pictures showing some of the scenes there.

Q: What were your personal feelings when you were going to this camp? Did you have any idea what you were going to run into?

A: I think I did have some idea because of the hearsay I had heard from others. I heard that it was a very bad situation and I knew that they were mistreating the prisoners of other faiths that were in that camp.

Q: Do you remember any more sights or smells or sounds that you heard about the camp besides what you have said? Did it smell bad?

A: Yes, you had an odor there, but you'd been around a lot of soldiers that were dead in the field and things like that so you really didn't pay too

much attention to it.

Q: Could you hear the prisoners crying?

A: No, they were past their crying stage. They were a beaten race and they knew it; a beaten bunch of people and probably some of them didn't even realize what was going on.

Q: Did the prisoners say anything to you at all?

A: No. We didn't get that close to them because, as I say, we only went to the fence and looked through the barbed wire at the prisoners and the conditions around there. One of the officers had said that the people across the street didn't know what was going on over there, but I understand they had some lampshades in their house made from human skin.

Q: Did you decide not to go in there for any particular reason?

A: No. There was another outfit that had charge of it and we didn't interfere with their business there. I really didn't want to go in there and neither did our officers because of the disease and the filth and the lice that is possible to get on you so we just didn't go in.

Q: What did you think about these poor prisoners when you saw them?

A: It's hard to describe.

Q: Did you feel compassion for them?

A: Oh, yes. I think they were human beings in body only. I don't think their minds even knew what they were, but it was disgrace to see a human being in that condition.

Q: Did you see any more guards other than the one that got his head cut off?

A: No, not the German guards because our men had taken over there then. They took their officers prisoners which were living and disposed of them or carried them back to a camp or something.

Q: Did you ever hear any stories or see any evidence or anything about the

way these guards were treated, other than the one you told me about?

A: Not to my recollection, no. When they started surrendering in 1945, you could see thousands of them coming in and laying down their rifles and giving up. They were raggedy, bedraggled, hungry, frozen, and everything else just about. That's the thing that I did see that impressed me, that many soldiers supposed to be the elite troops of Germany could come in in that condition. When they found out the war was over, they really wanted to come in and give up. They were all hungry.

Q: Did you see any German civilians around Dachau?

A: No. We were stationed in a headquarters outfit in Augsburg, Germany at that time.

Q: How far was that from...?

A: I couldn't tell you in mileage or kilometers. I know we went up and back in one day. I cannot tell you exactly. I don't have my maps with me or anything. They wouldn't show Dachau on a map anyway. They wouldn't want to let anyone else know about what was happening.

Q: When you were going up, were there civilians around the place?

A: No. The officers and the men that were in charge of that camp had taken over. I'm sure they kept all the civilians and everybody else away because this was a serious situation there. But their Intelligence probably went around to the homes and all and straightened them out.

Q: If you had to go through this experience again, would you ask not to go or did it bother you that much?

A: After being over there two years, you get kind of used to everything and it didn't bother me too much at the time, but a little later I thought a lot about it and I'm thankful I have the pictures that I have of it.

Q: Did you see those bodies in the railroad cars?

A: Yes. You could see from a distance there. I didn't go up to them because

I didn't want to get involved with the smell or anything else. You could see a few cars sitting there with some bodies in there. I know they were bodies because you could see they were dead and all.

Q: What about the ones that were stacked up?

A: I did not see any stacked up, maybe three or four high just piled in the box cars. These out in the area were just laying around. They were not stacked in any order.

Q: Did they have clothes on?

A: They had a pajama-like outfit on, white with black, vertical-running stripes. They were all ragged. I guess they had taken them off the dead ones and put them on the living ones. I don't see how they survived as long as they did in there.

Q: Did you have any particular strong reaction toward this experience? Did you feel bitter toward the Germans because of it?

A: Knowing some of the German people, I didn't feel the bitterness toward the Germans as a whole. It was the war. Naturally, I had a bitterness towards the people that were in the war fighting us. As far as the German people go, after they found out we were occupying their area, they tried to look out for us in every way possible as far as food or anything else they could get for us. But, war is just hell, anyway.

Q: Do you have any or did you have any anti-Semitic feelings?

A: Bitterness?

Q: Right.

Q: Towards them?

Q: Towards Jews, before or afterwards?

A: Yes. I knew they were our enemies and I was ready to go to bat for my country.

Q: I mean about the Jews, though. Did you have any feelings toward the

Jews?

A: No, no, no. Some of my best friends are Jewish people and I had some Jewish boys in the first outfit I was with.

Q: Do you feel like these concentration camps were set up for an anti-Jewish extermination?

A: Well, not altogether. I think they had some Russians in there, Russian Jews. I didn't see any of our American prisoners in there and I understand there were not any at Dachau. I think there were Russians and Jewish people.

Q: Did you talk to anybody about this experience?

A: No. No more than the officers that were with me.

Q: How did they react?

A: They felt about like I did, I think. It was just another job.

Q: Disgusting.

A: Disgusting, sickening thing.

Q: Do you think it was important for your wife to know about this? Your family?

A: I told them a little bit about it, but it's in the past. They were not there.

Q: If you're not involved, it's not as important?

A: That's right. War is hell. That's about the answer you'd get from anybody who had not been there.

Q: Do you think that this should be exposed more to the public?

A: Definitely. I think everything should be exposed to the public so we won't have any more of this stuff. I could go on and on about war. I lost a nephew in Viet Nam. Of course, I had a bitterness about that, but I don't have any ill feelings toward the people because they are humans just like we are. But when there is an organization that's against my country, I'm ready to do something about it. Even at my age now I would, if possible.

Q: Did you have any nightmares or anything about this?

A: No more than usual. I mean, we all have nightmares of this stuff sometimes. In fact, the other night, my wife said I woke her up hollering "Ellen." And I'm trying to think of some girl by the name of Ellen.  
[laughter]

Q: Did you see the TV movie, *Holocaust*?

A: No, I don't care about seeing it. I mean it might be good but I just don't want to get involved.

Q: At the time you were at Dachau, would you have considered yourself a religious person?

A: I had a belief. I'll put it this way, and that has never changed. I know there is a Supreme Being. I did not belong to a church. I'm of Protestant faith, and I'd never taken the time before I went into the service to really go to church. In fact, after I got out, it was quite a while before I joined the First Baptist Church in Atlanta in 1948. But, I did know there was a Supreme Being and he helped me through in a lot of ways in a lot of places.

Q: When you saw this camp, did you have any thoughts about God or how God could allow this to happen?

A: No, I don't question Him.

Q: Did you have any thoughts about man's inhumanity to man or how cruel man could be to let people like this starve to death?

A: Yes, you have thoughts about it, but war is war. There's been a lot of stories that I cannot verify, but if you've got a prisoner and you don't have time to take him back to camp, what do you do? Shoot him or he shoots you. I never did see any of this actually happen, but it has happened I'm sure.

Q: Did this experience have any effect on you in your religion, your attitude

toward becoming more religious?

A: Some of it, yes. But, it's just a thing in the past there and I have my own feelings about religion. I know it starts in your heart first and that's where it's going to be. It's what you do here now that counts.

Q: If you had been a prisoner in the same circumstances as these people, do you think you could have kept your faith?

A: I don't know. It would have been rough, but I think I would have. Yes, because that's all you've got. I mean they didn't have anything else and I'm sure that some of them kept their faith.

Q: Can you forgive the Germans, the Nazis, for what they did to these people?

A: The Nazis? No. But I can the German people because they were forced to do things, I'm sure, to support the Nazi cause.

Q: Does your religion have any influence on your attitude toward these people now?

A: It's the way I was brought up, in a way. Sure, I would forgive the German people, but not these Nazis. Why forgive them? They did their job. They're all gone or just about, and they are going to pay their dues just like anybody else.

Q: Did this experience have any influence on your attitude toward civil rights or the rights of human beings?

A: No, that experience didn't. Being a Southern boy and the way I am and the way this country's going now, I imagine 99% of the people are changing their thinking about things. But, as far as my religion, I'm going to keep it.

Q: What about the Viet Nam war? What did you think about it?

A: I think it was a sickening shame that we had to go over there and get involved in this.

Q: Why should we have gotten involved in Germany and not in Viet Nam?

A: They were our allies and all, but they were stomping on them. To my way of thinking, if it had not been for the Americans, it would have been a different story now from what it was. If we had left the Germans alone, the Russians wouldn't be here.

Q: What about what is going on in the Middle East?

A: Now?

Q: Yes, the Arabs and the Jews.

A: I think they are holding us up to tell you the truth about it. They sell us oil then take the money and come back and buy our banks and our property. So what's the end going to be?

Q: What do you think about the executions in Cambodia?

A: I'm not familiar with a lot of this stuff. I stay away from it because the only thing that bears in my mind is my nephew who was lost on a hill there in Viet Nam in 1967. He was only 19 years old and had three more weeks before coming back home and he got it. But, I'll say one thing here and now. We'll never have another president like Richard Nixon, because he did get those guys back home out of prison where to the others it was just another thing.

Q: What would be your reaction if your son came to you and said he was going to be a Nazi?

A: Of course, I can't control him now, but I would try do everything I could to keep him from turning into one and I don't think he would anyway.

Q: Did seeing these prisoners in this camp who were mostly Jews change your attitude to Jews in any way?

A: No. As far as my feeling to the Jewish people, I liked them and never had any problems with them. They were humans just like anybody else, and if I saw them burning, or if I saw you burning, or some of my buddies

burning, I would have gone in there. But, here was a case where it was all over.

Q: Nothing you could do about it.

A: No, no.

Q: Do you feel something needs to be done today to keep something like this from ever happening again?

A: Yes. I think there should be lots done today and we should publicize a lot of the things that happened in the past. Maybe it will wake some people up. Here we are indifferent now. Everyone does his own thing and you don't know what he'll do. He's liable to turn Communist tomorrow or join the Nazis; he's liable to stay and try to be otherwise, but you just don't know.

Q: Grady, I surely do appreciate your helping us with this and I'm sure you'll be hearing from them somewhere along the line. There's not any way I can thank you enough.

A: It's just a pleasure to help you out any way I can and, in the future, if you need me, call on me.

Q: All right.