

NAME: DANIEL COGAR

INTERVIEWER:

CAMP: DACHAU

DATE: JULY 12, 1979

Q: Mr. Cogar, when did you first enter the Army?

A: April 3, 1943.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

A: I enlisted.

Q: What was your rank at the time and your serial number?

A: My rank was private first class and my number was 35752402.

Q: What numbered Army were you in? What Corp? The first? the third?

A: I was in the fifth and third.

Q: And the name of your division?

A: 42nd Rainbow.

Q: Do you remember the battalion number?

A: I was in the second battalion.

Q: And the regiment?

A: 222nd.

Q: Were you a member of any special unit?

A: No. I was a scout.

Q: Can you give me the name of your leaders, starting from the squad?

A: The platoon sergeant was Sgt. Broadley and the squad lead was Sgt. Cooper.

Q: Your battalion or regiment commander?

A: Colonel Lawongo was regimental commander.

Q: And your division commander? In 1945.

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A: General Collins.

Q: When did you land in Europe and where?

A: I think I landed in Le Havre in 1944.

Q: From the moment you landed, please describe the direction that your division took and if you can name some relevant cities along the way; what battles took place, the dates and the extent of the warfare at the time.

A: I went in as a replacement. I joined the Division. They went in as a task force and I joined them when they went back in January in the Harz Mountains in France. We walked across the Harz mountains in France. We started at Alsace-Lorraine and we walked all the way across Germany. We went through Wurtzburg, [unintelligible], Nuremberg, Munich, and down into Salzburg. We met the Russians over at the Brenner Pass in Italy.

Q: Salzburg was the last city that you were in?

A: Right.

Q: That was about the time the war ended, right?

A: We pulled Occupation in a little town named Hallein. I was there for a year after that.

Q: [Says to a third party, Jeff Hallet] Listen, if there are any questions that you want to ask, let me know and I'll let you intercede. So far these questions are good for your purposes?

JEFF HALLETT: Yes.

Q: Mr. Cogar, what concentration camp did you enter and can you describe the vicinity in relation to nearby cities?

A: It was just outside Dachau, which was just outside Munich.

Q: Did you know anything about concentration camps before you entered Dachau?

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A: I sure didn't. I never saw one before.

Q: Had you heard anything about them?

A: No, I hadn't heard anything about them. I never even realized they existed like they did.

Q: Can you describe what you saw the moment you entered there and how much time was spent there?

A: I suppose it took us 2-3 hours. We just took a tour. It was already liberated when I particularly got there. They just took us on a tour of the camp, and we saw the bodies and where they burned them -- the gas chambers and things like that.

Q: Can you describe first what your reaction was at the moment?

A: Another day's work. It was about the only thing I could tell you at the time. I was only 19 years old and I didn't know what was going on. I think I felt worse about it 30 years later than I did at the time because at the time we were hardened. We expected to see anything, which we did.

Q: How did others react? Do you remember?

A: No, not really.

Q: What did the prisoners do when they saw you?

A: They just hollered "Amis, Amis, Amis." They were so happy to see us that they couldn't believe it. And I was explaining to him last night the size of their barracks, the quarters where they lived in. There may be 10 people in bunks up the wall and they were all as skinny as these pictures you see over here. There wasn't anyone who had any flesh on him and there were all with their heads shaved. It was a terrible scene, I'll tell you.

Q: Their nationality...were they political prisoners? And the approximate number in the camp at the time?

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A: There were no Americans there, and I don't know any of the background of any of them. I couldn't speak any German.

Q: Were you able to determine at the time, in an approximate proportion, the division as to sex? Males-females? And age? Young-old?

A: No, I couldn't tell you if they were male or female. The majority of the ones that I saw were all young. The younger people.

Q: Children?

A: No. I would say there was no children. They were mostly from teenagers on up to about 30 years old.

Q: What type of a camp was it? Was it a labor camp or was it an extermination camp?

A: Extermination camp, I think. I think they screened them all there. I don't know what the ones that were left were doing but there were quite a few of them left there.

Q: But there were extermination facilities as far as gas chambers, ovens?

A: Oh, yes, sir.

JEFF HALLETT: Did you go through the gas chambers?

A: No, I didn't go through them at the time. But I did go through there when I took a trip back four years ago.

Q: What was the nature of your contact with the inmates? Do you recall any kinds of conversations that you may have had?

A: No. I talked to none.

Q: Were there any specific incidents that come to mind?

A: No, not really. Not that I can remember.

Q: Do you know or remember what kind of aid was extended to the inmates on your arrival?

A: That I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

Q: You did mention that the inmates gathered around you shouting "Amis." Was there any panic at any time?

A: No.

JEFF HALLETT: Were there any guards left when you were there? Any SS?

A: No.

Q: No German personnel of any kind?

A: Not living.

JEFF HALLETT: He did see SS that had been killed.

A: Right.

Q: Did you find any records of any kind, any German records?

A: No.

JEFF HALLETT: You did not witness any violent incidents between the guards and the prisoners or American soldiers?

A: No. Nothing.

JEFF HALLETT: Were there any German civilians around? Any in the vicinity of the camp?

A: Not that I recall, no. This camp was fenced in. They couldn't see what was going on. The only thing the civilians could do was smell the debris that came out of there. I think the civilians knew what was going on, but what were they going to do about it?

Q: Did you have any contacts with members of the armed forces of any other allied nation at the time?

A: No.

Q: Where did your unit head for after having passed through Dachau?

A: We headed on down toward Salzburg, Austria.

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Q: Did you have any post-liberation duties after the war in a DP<sup>1</sup> camp, for example?

A: No.

Q: When were you discharged and sent back to the States?

A: April 13, 1946. Q: And between 1945 and 1946 where did you spend your time?

A: In Occupation in Austria, in a little town by the name of Hallein, just outside of Salzburg.

Q: What were your duties there?

A: At the time, I had a bad shoulder and I did mostly nothing other than just to stay there. The company guarded prisoners and they were cutting wood and stuff, but I never did pull any duty. There was a prison camp there but I don't think I ever saw the camp or pulled any duty.

Q: Were any trials taking place of the SS personnel or of Nazi leadership of some kind?

A: No.

JEFF HALLETT: Tell me. Did your experiences in the concentration camp affect the way you looked at the German civilians or looked at Germans in particular?

A: Not necessarily. No. I felt the civilians weren't responsible any more than we're responsible for what goes on in this country today.

JEFF HALLETT: Who was responsible in your eyes?

A: The SS and Hitler. Hitler was [unintelligible]...of course he had a lot of people back of him. Everybody thought it was great at the time when he took over there. They didn't know what was going to happen.

JEFF HALLETT: Did you draw a distinction between the SS and the rest of the

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<sup>1</sup>Displaced Persons

German Army and the German population?

A: Yes. They were a bunch of bloodthirsty soldiers is the only way I would put it.

JEFF HALLETT: Did you have any encounters with SS units when in battle?

A: I'm sure I did but I didn't know it at the time.

Q: Do you currently have any kind of artifacts, documents, letters, photographs of any nature of that period?

A: The only thing I have is a watch and a few German marks. They're the only things I have at all that I brought back.

Q: Is there anything that you would like to add of a personal nature, any kind of observation or commentary? Your own thoughts on the matter?

A: Not that I can think of.

JEFF HALLETT: I have a few more questions if I might add them. Did the military establishment help you to cope with the experience in any way? Was there any counseling offered or did the chaplain play any particular role in explaining?

A: No. I mean we were soldiers. We just took it [unintelligible]. It didn't bother me.

JEFF HALLETT: This experience did not stand out in your entire war time experience?

A: Yes it did. But, as I say, when I got out of the service, I put it all behind me and I mean I know a lot of guys who wound up in the nut house.

JEFF HALLETT: As a result of the whole war.

A: As a result of the war, right. [Unintelligible]

JEFF HALLETT: Did you tell anyone about the camp when you came back?

A: I don't think so. [Unintelligible] I didn't even talk to my wife about it..

JEFF HALLETT: You hadn't told your wife

A: No, the only time she ever hears about it is at these reunions and things. I only

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talk about it with somebody who was there with me, who knows something about it, because the majority of people would say “Oh, he's bragging” or “He don't know what he's talking about” and I just got disgusted.

JEFF HALLETT: Do you think there's anything people can learn from this?

A: There's definitely a lot people could learn from it.

JEFF HALLETT: As far as teaching it in school or in religious classes.

A: Yes, I think it should be taught in schools and religious classes. It would be a great help to people.

JEFF HALLETT: Has this experience changed your political views?

A: No, I don't think so.

JEFF HALLETT: Has it affected your attitude about the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam war, the Cambodian pogroms that have gone on?

A: That's hard to answer. I don't approve of a lot of the things that are going on today.

Q: Did you have occasion to watch the recent program on the Holocaust?

A: No, I didn't know anything about it. I would have liked to have seen it.

JEFF HALLETT: Do you have any children?

A: Yes. Two.

JEFF HALLETT: What would your reaction be if one of your children said they wanted to become a Nazi?

A: I'd feel pretty bad, I'll tell you. I have one boy, 25, and a daughter, 24, and I think they are more intelligent than that. But it burns me up to see these guys riding around in this county on motorcycles with Nazi helmets and Nazi tattoos all over them. I just don't understand what their reasoning is for it.

JEFF HALLETT: Do you see the entire Holocaust, especially your experience in Dachau, as primarily a persecution directed against Jews?

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A: I couldn't say they were Jews. I had no way of telling. I mean you can't look at a person and tell what nationality he is and that's about all I did was look. Just went through the camp at the time.

Q: Did this experience in any way change your attitude toward Jewish people or to present-day politics in the Middle East?

A: No, I don't think so.

JEFF HALLETT: That's all I have.

Q: Mr. Cogar, thank you very much for the interview.

A: Maybe some of the other guys will come in and talk to you.

[Interruption in tape. Conversation resumes as follows.]

Q: ...the establishment or put down the Army for their role in Vietnam. We have here living testimony of the role that American soldiers have played and young people have to learn that this is the primary role of the American GIA: Right or wrong, they had to do it and I don't think it was right but I almost had to go back during the Korean situation.

Q: I think we have to re-learn the young people of this country as to the positive role played by the Army and not just the image that they have tried to portray. We have to counter that kind of an image and that's why we think a lot of this testimony is important for the learning process.

A: I don't understand the majority of the young people nowadays anyway. What do you want me to do? Sign this right here?

Q: Just put your name and your signature.

JEFF HALLETT: If you just state your name and address, please. .

A: Daniel H Cogar. 5618 31st Avenue, North St. Petersburg, Florida. Born January 7, 1925. My age? I was 19 at the time.

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JEFF HALLETT: And profession at the beginning of the war?

A: I was only 18. I didn't have an occupation or anything at the time.

JEFF HALLETT: Present occupation?

A: I am a manager of a convenience grocery store.

JEFF HALLETT: Thanks very much