

RE: LOUIE C. GILLESPIE

INTERVIEWER:

CAMP:

DATE:

TRANSCRIBED BY: RUTH SCHEINBERG, NOVEMBER 17, 1981

Q: Mr. Gillespie, what is your full name?

A Louie Clement Gillespie.

Q And where do you live? Your address now?

A P O Box 147, Locust Road, Georgia.

Q And when were you born? What was your birthday?

A I was born December 7, 1920.

Q And how old were you when you liberated the camp?

A I was.. let's see, 22.... 22 or 23 years old. somewhere's... about half between there.

Q Okay. And what were you doing before the war? What kind of work were you in?

A Construction work.

Q And what were you doing until the time you got sick this time? What kind of work were you in?

(Rock Quarry)

A Well, I was working for Brocker Material Rough Clay (uncertain if this is correct name) at Stockbridge.

Q Rock quarry. Is that work in Macon.... ?

A Crushing stone...

Q Crushing stone... were you running a machine, or were you ..running the plant.

A I was running the plant, yeah.

Q You were the supervisor?

A No, I was control operator... control operator... that's the ... using the big machine.. That's the running all the crusher, it's in a building up in a tower where you look down and watch the conveyer belts and all the screens..... and it goes.... it runs out to different piles.

Q Okay, and what was your military unit when you liberated the camp?

A First Infantry Division, I was in 16th Regiment..

Q 16th Regiment of the First Infantry Division. And what was your grade ...?

A P F C.

Q You were a P F C then... were you a Rifleman?

A Yes, I was a Rifleman. And playing foot soldier.

Q Okay.... you were a "Dogface." ?

And do you remember the name of the camp that you liberated?

A It's been so long and everything, it seems like it was Wolfenberg.... or something like that.

Q Wolfersburg?

A Sumpin like that...

Q Was it in Germany?

A Germany.

Q It was in Germany.... do you remember where?

A Wolfersburg or something like that.

Q Wolfersburg... In Germany? Do you remember where it was near in Germany?

A ... uh...

Q Was it REgensburg?

A It was kind of... I believe ^{we} were about central in Germany. And it's between ... well, it was not too far from Bonn somewheres... along there?

Q Bonn... B O N N, the current capitol ~~is~~ ... not far from Bonn as far as you remember.?

A Yeah.

Q And do you remember the date that you went into...?

A No, I sure don't.

Q Do you remember the year? Was it '44 or 45?

A It was '44, I believe is what it was.

Q Do you remember the month? Was it wintertime? Or springtime?

A No, it was along 'bout springtime.

Q How did you first hear about the camp?

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- A Well, we heard.... lots talking about the ... you know what they did to them and everything, you know. Concentration camps and everything else... we just. I didn't know what really it was until I seen 'em .
- Q You say you heard about it.... did the Army give you any classes on it, or was it just scuttlebut mostly...?
- A Just mostly scuttlebut.... You heard everything, you know.
- Q From that was the time you got to Europe... or just after you got into Germany?
- A After we got in here... in France.
- Q What did you expect to see there? Did you have any idea of what...?
- A I didn't have the least idea... until I saw it.
- Q And what was the mood? Did you know you'll were going to come up on a camp?
- A No, we didn't. We were just pushing, you know. Gaining... you know, pushing the Germans back you know... just fighting them and pushing them back.
- Q And you'll just ran into the ~~camp~~ camp?
- A Just came into it...
- Q And so you'll weren't expecting it?
- You weren't even thinking about what you'd find...? It was a surprise? And you don't remember the date that you got there?
- A No sir, I sure don't.
- Q Do you remember, can you tell me anything about remembering what the camp looked like or the sounds that were there when you'all were walking up on it?
- A Well, I tell you, it was cold. I reckon the Germans must have shut it down or something, because there was bodies half burnt and everything's in incinerators, and it was just a great big dirty fence, oh ten or fifteen foot high with barbed wire and everything.... to where there was no way they could escape from it.
- Q Was the gate closed when you'all came up on it?
- A The gate was ...
- Q Were there any sounds coming out of the camp? Was anybody alive?
- A No, there wasn't nobody alive then at that when we went in there.

Q Nobody was alive when you..... was the bodies? Were the bodies stacked up?

A They was piled on top of one another... just like you pile, like you start piling a pile of sand.

Q Uh...hh... and was this inside, in the ovens, in the incinerators? Or was it outside

A Outside, next to the incinerators....the big bodies, the big pile of bodies...

Q Were they deteriorating... these bodies were they deteriorating?

A They sure was.

Q Was it a bad odor?

A Oh Lord yeah...we wore gas masks... we couldn't breathe, couldn't stay long... we just pushed through there, and then a clean up unit come behind us.

Q All, right, so you'all didn't stay in the camp at all... you'all.... as far as you knew at the time you went through, all the prisoners were dead that were in the camp?

A Just... our part, because you know it was scattered you know. We just went through one ~~company~~ ^{part} goes through here, and another company goes through there, and another unit goes through...

Q So you went through a part of the camp?

A Through part of it.

Q And you'all didn't look around or anything? Did you?

And when you came up and you went through, were the orders to keep going, or did you'll just want to get out of there?

A No, kept going. We wanted to... I ~~YAKKAKK~~ ... I reckon tell you the truth I was ready to go. I didn't want to stay here I mean we just kept pushing. We had them on the run, we just kept pushing.

Q And since you'all had come up on the camp and you hand't expected, you'all had not gotten any specific orders in case you'all came across a camp like this?

A I don't

Q Okay.

A Cause if it was any orders, it wasn 't passed down to us, you know. The big, I mean the officers ...I mean kep' it to themselves.

Q Okay, and so you .. you really didn't see any live prisoners?

I did not)

A I did) see a live prisoner ... (? inaudible to positive or negative reply)

Q And did... what did you think about ... you didn't see any guards? Any Germans or anything? At that time?

A They had left, and so everybody - except for the American unit that was going through - nothing was alive in the camp. What I saw... was part of them bodies, that big mountain of bodies ... what I saw _____ wasn't nobody, alive.

Q Did you know who they were?

A No.

Q Was there any identification?

A There wasn't no identification, no clothes, & they just plumb naked. They was old, little bit of bodies, they was just - just plain grown people, old people, young people, on down to kids and babies.

Q Was there a lot of children?

A Well, yes, there was a lot _____ where they could throw them higher, er sumpin.

Q And they were mostly skin and bones?

A They was skin and bones.

Q What was you... how did you react to this?

A It just made me sick, I just couldn't I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it.

Q And your feelings? Your feelings then were pretty strong?

A Sure, and you always have that feeling of it. ... you ain't going to git it out of your mind, that's one thing.

Q You are still fighting?

A Uh huh, people doing human beings like that. That's worse than *pile up dead cattle* it's awful.

Q And you had that feeling then when you did you feel like these were human beings that were stacked up? You could tell that?

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Q You could tell that way personally? You felt that way personally?

A Sure..

Q It hurt you just to see it? Have you been able to answer the questions... or have you asked yourself the question: what kind of people would do something like this? Or, did that just...?

A Well, I just asked myself... what was they bound to be... just plain made people, crazy, they had to be crazy or something to ... not have respect for people.

Q Did you-all, did you talk about this with anybody? As you went through?

A No sir~~x~~. no we didn't. I reckon everybody just kept it to themselves, seeing what it was and just swallowed it down and kept it to his ownself. I know I DID.

Q So you didn't relieve your tension in wany way? Or your bad feelings in any way? Did you have a buddy that you talked about this to later on? Anybody in your unit?

A Well...

Q Just over a beer or something?

A No, now and then we might just say something, ~~mmxx~~ like I'll never forget that, and that's it, we'd let it go at that, and try to forget it. It's just hard to talk about.

Q Okay. And did anybody, did anybody after that business going through the camps, did anybody try to get out of unit, or try to, you know, did that cause them to break up...?

A No, I reckon not, I don't recall none. Not in my company, ~~xxxxx~~ they didn't.

Q Did anybody else ... did you, you say you had a real strong feeling, and you sort of teared up now, do you remember if you teared up then or anything?

A I don't know.

Q You don't remember. But your main memory is just you wanted to get out? Get through there and get away from the camp?

A We was on the go, we were in a haks half-track, jeep, and foot soldiers, and we just just kept... just like a town. When we hit a town, we hit it, and went on through it, just kept going.

A Okay.

Q Cause we had the MPS and were told to mop up the back up force or something, and

Q Did you have a chaplain with you in your unit? At that time, do you remember?

A I don't remember, but we had one, that stayed with us pretty well all time, but I just remember.

Q He never mentioned any of this, or there was no discussion...any of this? Okay.

Did you tell anybody about the camp? Then, or am I really the first guy that you = personally talked to?

A No, I have talked to my people, my brothers and my wife, and my stepmother.... Maybe the family about it, you know.

Q When did you talk to them?

A Well, when I come back from overseas. Told some of them what it's like, I told them when Sherman said War was Hell, he didn't say half enough. I just told them what I seen.

Q After did you tell them about the camp in particular?

A No, I just told them about seeing all them dead bodies... and everything, and hearing the other people talking about the other camps and everything... found them. I heard somebody talking about finding them, crawling - just so weak they couldn't even set up, and were still alive when the other companies took the other parts of it.

Q And you know, I asked you originally to ...whether you'd be interested in giving some information for the Project, to try and get some facts down on paper, and intially we talked and we decided, well, you wanted to wait before you made up your mind. Was that because it was so hard for you?

A Well, yeah... all these years, I was just trying, you know, to push it back out of my mind. I just feel.... it comes back in your mind, you know when you are daydreaming or something, you think about it.

Q Did you have... ever have any bad dreams about it when you were sleeping at night?

A No, ... I didn 't .. wake up, you know. Might goback to them days and everything and you'll think about it.

Q So you have never really had any nervous problems that you had to get help with?

A No.

Q You spoke to your wife about it?

A Yeah, I told her about it.

Q Do you think... do you have children?

A Yes.

Q Did you speak to your kids about it?

A Yeah, I told all of them, my boys, you know. I talked to them, I told them about it.

Q What did you try, when you told them about it, what... why were you telling them? What were you trying to get across?

A I talked about... you know I had two... uh sons who was in Viet Nam, you know.

War. And they was in the Navy, but they - you know - lots of stuff you know goes on and what they seen, you know when they went to ^{shore} war. I told them ^{not to brag it up} that ~~brings up~~ this _____ and I said you ain't seen nothing until you seen what I did in WW II, you know. I'd say something about it. And then that;s it.

Q So it was a discussion of the wars experiences. Did you see the television show - The Holocaust?

A I watched everyone of them.

Q You saw the whole series of..?

A Yes sir. And I told ...whoever got them films, I wonder where they got them films from the Nazis, and that's true, I said they are true, cause I seen them.

Q Do you think people should learn anything from all of this?

A Yes sir, they should. I know... whoever was there, they learned something from it.

Q Do~~a~~ you think that this information should be taught in schools?

A I think they should. I believe ... that's history, and it's every bit of history. That's true history, I still say that people should know about it.

Q Do you think it should be ~~taught~~ in high school or colleges, or ...?

A I should say it... it should start in grammar school and go all the way through.. To younger kids, they too should know something about that.

Q What about religious classes... you know religious schools? Sunday Schools and ...?

A Well, I ... it wouldn't be, it should be if they felt like teaching it... teaching

Q Do you think people would have trouble ~~teaching~~ it?

A No, I don't think so. No, I don't believe so, because ... now, let me ask you something

Q Now, let me ask you something, that again you may not be able to figure...

Would you, say you, you had some 12 to 15 yr old boys and girls, would you be able to deal with it... talk to them about it?

A Sure. It should be taught it in school, but you should learn it, that I was there, I saw and you should see it too. or read about it

Q Do you consider a religious person?

A Well, thats sort of a hard question, ain't it? I'm on the borderline, let's put it thataway.

Q When you went through the camp, and you were pressing through there, did you, do you remember thinking anything about ... the idea of God or about the idea of religion? Religious ideas when you were going through there? Any ~~want~~ questions you asked yourself?

A I just thought how in the world people could be that cruel, and live... that God would let them live to be that cruel to do that to people? I just thought that

Q Have you ever been able to answer that yet?

Or is that question still the same?

A Still the same. To me.

Q Do you remember having any thoughts ... being you would say were irreligious? Or..

A No, no.

Q Or being angry at God... did you think this was all people's work, or that

A It was Hitler and his army work ... I knew that. I knew it wasn't nobody else but him.

Q What if you weren't really religious? Would you have ~~felt~~ felt any different when you saw those bodies and everything in terms of or was it your religious ...

A If I wasn't religious or - say a gangster, say one of the mean men or something, it would have - - -

Q YOU THINK IT would have affected anybody?

A It would have affected anybody. I believe.

Anybody who's got any human dignity for himself, sure it would

Q Have you wondered, you say you are sort of on the borderline being religious, or you may be religious, if you ... have you ever wondered if you would have been able to keep your religious feelings or your faith if you had been a prisoner in the camp?

A I sometimes ask myself the same thing... if I had knowed, if I was in that place, I would have prayed to God to help me or take me, or something or another, instead of having to suffer like that.

Q What... did you have any idea? Did you think the NAZIS OUGHT to be forgiven?

A No, & everyone that had anything to do with that, no sir. No, that's where I don't believe in capital punishment, you know, in a way. In a way I do and in a way I don't. But that's one time, by George, I believe in it. I wouldn't hesitate.

Q Okay. Did ~~xxxxxx~~ your experience, going through that camp change your political views at all ...? Intermis of you can consciously say, did it make the way you looked at the world & different, than the way you looked at the world before you had seen the camp?

A It sure did. Yeah. It just well, in fact, I just ~~xxx~~ couldn't understand, or imagine, the world would be that way, that cruel. I didn't think nobody in the world could be that cruel.

Q Did it change, does it affect, what you saw there, did it... Do you know if it makes you think ... Do you think it might make you ~~xxx~~ think differently when you think about... for instance the Viet Name War, the Middle East, or the Cambodian thing that would have been if you had not gone through that camp?...

A Yep, it sure would.

Q Do you feel that you were more tolerant of war or less tolerant of war?

A I don't believe, I am less tolerant of war. I just... that did it for me. Otherwise, I just ... war is war, I'll tell you... I hope I never live, and I hope none of my kids have to ... or none of my grandkids ever live and have to go to war. At no time.

Q How would you react if one of your children said... that they wanted to be a Nazi... if they came... For instance in North Carolina, they had this guy that this man who said he was an American Nazi, and he was running for an office. And he got a significant percentage of the vote, you know, in the Republican Primary. ~~xxx~~ What would you say? I mean .. how ...?

A Boy, I'd set him down and I'd try to change him ... his mind. I'd tell him he had better have his head examined, that he was going crazy. _____ That got a place in

Milledgeville for people like you... that's a nut house. That's what I'd tell him, that
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A I don't believe in that.

Q Did you see, this... these death camps, or the camp that you went through, the extermination camps primarily as a Jewish persecution or everybody?

A I'll tell you the truth, you couldn't tell what the bodies was... they was so poor and everything, you couldn't tell what nationality, they didn't have enough flesh on them to tell. They could have been black people, they could have been anybody, it could have Mennites or something, you just couldn't tell.

Q Did you hear, or read anything, during that time or around that time, that would make you think that the death camps were ...

A WERE for Jews? It was for Jews. They said it was all Jews.

Q Where did you read? Do you remember where you read that? Was that in military papers or..

A I think they had a little piece of it in Stars and STRipes, but you could hear other guys talking about it...

Q A lot of the information you got was what you heard...in your unit and everything, but there was no... as far as you remember, there was no organized information programs that your unit set out at any time during the war?

A No, but we heard on the radio, you see we had a radio, some of us had radios, and on Saturday night. Or say, like we 'd take a trunk and come back for a rest, like pull back off the front line. We could hear lots of news then. That's the only way we could get the news.

Q When you, before you went through this experience, which you obviously found a hard one for you to deal with, and you still have difficulties ... as we ~~all~~ would have I am sure, did you have different ideas? What did you think about Jews before then? Had you ever heard of them even? Or...

A No, I never did. If I did, I never paid noattention, just saying a Jew is just like a German, like us, like an American, just like the British, that... the nationality was ... to me it was just nationality, you know.

Q You had not ...it was more of a nationality ^{rather} than a religion? Or anything. And you

A No, I sure didn't ... hadn't heard anything in church or school... I did not hear nothing ~~downing~~ them... or nothing, no.

Q Okay. And how far did you go in school?

A I went to the 10th grade.

Q That was a high school in a small town?

A Yes.

Q And did you, after the camp, and after you heard this ... that most of the people might have been Jews, did it change your attitude, did ~~y~~ it feel ... did that bring up ~~ixx~~ any questions in your mind?

Q Well, when they said the Jews and stuff, I said well what.... what country is that? What do they call Jews? You know.... and some of them said...well, they's _____ they's a nation, just like we got niggers. We got blacks, they 's Jews. And then you got them Africars, you know. And like Italians or Dutch, I mean Polacks, you know.

Q Do you feel like you personally have to do something, or you move to do something to make sure something like this never happens again?

A Well, yes, as much as I can. Because with our President, a nd our Congress, and our Senators whose _____ helps run this world to keep this and that from happening ..

Q Now, my understanding is that though really and you sit down and you think about it, yourself personally, that you have ... you have kept most of this inside of you...

A Sure have.

Q Inside of you most of the time ...

A They's lots of stuff that a feller seeing and went through enough --- he just don't like to talk about it.

Q Did you ever, did it ever come to your mind, what would you have thought about. .. how you would dealt with being in the camp?

A Well, that's what...

Q have you ever thought about it you had been ~~x found~~ ^{assigned} there as a guard?

A No. I hadn't because we, the Americans, wouldn't do that. If we had prisoners or were guarding prisoners and stuff, we would guard them, but they would be fed and everything just like we would. They wouldn't have been treated, I wouldn't ~~mx~~ mind

A doing something like that. But not like that, no. There wasn't no way.

Q You don't believe it would happen by American officers and American government?

A No sir. I never.... it would never happen with nobody else, I would say, it wouldn't happen by... Russia. Or by China or somebody. I don't believe, no, I don't believe they treat prisoners like that... people like that, no, I don't believe they would.

Q Have you ever thought what you would do if somebody told you had to do something like that? You know... that it did happen, would you refuse to do it, or is it hard to say?

A I believe I would refuse. I believe I would just ..what I seen, no I would just flat tell them - no, I wouldn't do it. Even if it meant me to go to jail.

Q What if, the guy said, well I am going to shoot your head...?

A Well, I'd have to tell him to go ahead and shoot.

Q Is there anything now...? Now, I have gone... I have gone through most of the questions that are the ones that they try to get in general to speak to people who liberated or passed through the camps.... do you remember anything more now about the name of the camp or anything now?

A No, that's what I am trying to tell you now... you know those Germans had funny names, camps, and funny towns, and everything else, and that's been quite a few years ago.

Q But you think it is near Bonn?

A It somewheres in the central part, I would say down in the flat part of Germany on the .. I reckon it would be on the south - southeast side of Germany.

Q Do you keep in contact with any of the guys that you served with during the war?

A I have up to about three years ago, and two of my buddies is dead, and I got one that I don't see that often , but maybe onct a year or maybe sometimes longer than that before I see him.

Q Where does he live?

A He lives in Darleston (spelling?) South Carolina.

Q Was he with you when you went through there?

A Right in there... right in there...

Q What is his name?

A Robert Learny... His ~~xx~~ last name is Lonny....

Q How do you spell that?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

A L O ... let's see how you spell that...? L O U D D Y...

Q Loundy?

A Lundy.... Robert is his first name..

Q And he was in the 16th REGiment, First Infantry.

A First Infantry, 16th REGiment...

Q What would you think if I asked you... would you think if was right if I asked you to --- if you feel bad after your treatment and everything -- if you would write him and tell him that... about this research project... and ask him if he would be willing to talk with somebody...? Do you think he might?

A He might, I don't know about it. He might do that.

Q Have y'all ever talked with each other ^{about} it? When you see him?

A Now, the last time - the last time we talked about, I was driving a truck ... and I happened to go into this town to load to on load and I knew he worked at that big paper mill and I hunted him up. When he got off that work that afternoon and told me where he lived, I met him and we went out and had a few beers and talked about war times, you know. We talked about the war ... about how it did us, and about how it made a man out of me, I told him that way. That it sure settled me down.

Q Had you been wild pretty much?

A Well, I was young, and boys, you know, got out and has lots of good times, you know. Dated girls _____ went with me, you know just how young boys was. And i met my wife and started going with her regular, through one of my girl friends _____ I just, I don't know, it sure settled me down. When I come out of the Army I was a different person than when I went in, I'll tell the world.

Q And now, let me ask you something. If you had been in ^{the} Army and just had not gone through that camp, would you still have come out the same kind of person, or would you say that that camp was an important part of your war experiences?

A Well, that's one part that stays on you... that' was the bad part of it, I mean the worst part of it. It's bad enough to get shot at and froze to death and take 'em and just see your buddies fall wounded or run up one that had been killed just in front of you or something, but it's bad, but these bodies - the way they had them stacked up... Well, I just couldn't imagine them being that way until I saw it. And seeing them

Ajust throwed in, _____ and they had cut the gas off or got blowed up, or something, anyway some of the doors were open ...you could see as you went through. And some of them was closed, I didn't know where there was anything in it or what, so we went on through. We had a unit come back and do know that they went in there and dug a big trench and ~~bared~~ ^{polished} them. _____ I don't know what you call them....

Q Grave registration.... Is there anything more that you want to make or say, or make any statement that ~~XXXX~~ we haven't covered, that you think might be important to put in there?

A No, that's about all that I know. That's the nearest truth I know of what I saw and how you know.

Q Mr. Gillespie, thank you very much, thank you.

Ruth Scheinberg, transcriber

Nov. 17, 1981