

NAME: DENTON HARRIS
INTERVIEWER: HERBERT JENKINS
CAMP: CASTLE IN RHINE RIVER VALLEY USED AS A PRISON, A
FACTORY COMPLEX USED AS A WORK CAMP
DATE: DECEMBER 14, 1978

A: My name is Denton Harris. I live at 84 Robin Hood Rd. in Atlanta, Georgia. I was born July 20, 1925 in the state of Arkansas and in September of 1943 was drafted into the Army. I went into the Army Specialized Training program, which was supposed to make us officers and gentlemen. They ultimately canceled that and put all of us in the Infantry. Our particular unit was the 86th Infantry Division. We ended up in Camp Livingston, Louisiana, and from there we were groomed and dressed and issued equipment to go to the Pacific. We got out to California, when the Battle of the Bulge and some other resistance came up in Europe, so they switched us and sent us, as the Army often does, in summer uniforms to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts, with snow about 2 feet deep, and from there we embarked overseas. We landed, as an Infantry Division, in Le Havre, France and went to a staging area called Camp Old Gold. From there we got on the old 40 and 8 railroad cars and went through France and, I believe, part of Belgium into Germany. We entered combat at Aachen, Germany. From there we went to Cologne, Germany, where we stayed several days and maintained observation posts and a line of defense overlooking the Rhine River. I was in what was called the Intelligence Reconnaissance section of the battalion, and we made a couple of so-called reconnaissance trips across the Rhine River where we were supposed to spot machine gun nests. We were all scared to death. From Cologne, we went south and crossed the Rhine River

at Remagen and joined Patton's Army. There was where we really saw that particular combat of some 30 days which our division was involved in, and we followed Patton's tanks down the Rhine River Valley. The last major resistance we ran into was at Ingolstadt, Germany, which is on the Danube River. But prior to Ingolstadt, somewhere in the Rhine River valley, we came across a flat area and on a huge mound was a medieval castle, quite a huge place, almost like something out of King Arthur's Knights. Being so young and not too worldly, I frankly didn't pay that much attention, but I remember that castle was so famous, whatever it was, that in its heyday they had their own coins with a crest on it, and some of us found some there. I should have kept some, but I didn't. Anyway, we came across, with little resistance, the open area to that castle which had a huge wall around it and total security. That was really the only thing we saw that we liberated that approached at all being a concentration camp or a slave camp. Obviously most of the German soldiers who were in charge of it had fled, and the prisoners there had mutinied and rioted and taken over. They had destroyed several of the guards. I remember so dramatically the commandant -- they called him -- of the prison. They had strung him up by his heels and had beaten him so that his head was a bloody pulp, and it was really, really sickening to all of us. But the people had been there so long that they had become like animals. The only other place we liberated that I recall anything approaching a prison was in a factory complex in Ingolstadt on the Danube River. Ingolstadt had quite a bit of resistance, and that went on throughout the night and about mid-morning the next day we secured the town. There was this large industrial complex, and they had quite a large prison under guards and fence there. These people lived in old, old factory buildings. They were not too badly treated, it didn't seem, because when we let those people out, they...most

of them were Russians and a lot of them were women and they went berserk up and down the main streets of the town, breaking the windows, and looting everything. Food, clothing. Some of the women would put on three or four or five dresses, one on top of the other, and have armloads of clothes, and they were eating everything in sight although they were really not emaciated. Those are the only two dramatic things that I recall. The one thing that really impressed all of us was that everybody that we ran into, if there was any doubt whatever that that civilian was a German or a Russian, they would all say *Nix Nazi, me Russian, Nix Nazi, me Russian*. They wanted us to not think they were Nazis.

Q Mr. Harris, on this castle that was used as a prison, how many prisoners do you think were in there?

A: I don't remember. I don't know that I even knew then. I would guess 500.

Q Do you know who they were? What was their nationality? Were they Jewish people?

A: Some of them. Some were Jewish, it was a total mixture. Now that we do remember. It was a total mixture.

Q:: And that's where they rebelled and killed the commandant?

A: Yes. There were a number of Jewish soldiers in our company, and after the war...one thing I will never forget is we had a very fine and wonderful young Jewish fellow, roughly the same age I was, who was born in Austria, and he was in the interpreter for all of us. We came back to Mannheim, Germany, and we were there about a week, and he met this absolutely beautiful girl who said she was Jewish. He checked everything out and was completely convinced that she was. She was living with her grandmother who was not Jewish, but I don't know. And he fell in love with the girl, and they said someday they were going to marry. The night before we left, he wanted to stay over there with her and her

grandmother. We had a first sergeant who was in some ways anti-Jewish, and he was an old, rough Irishman. He put him on guard duty, on the night shift, from 3 to 5 I guess it was. I told him I'd do it for him, serve his duty for him. His name was Massey. We were leaving the next morning, getting up real early, and Sgt. Miller came out while it was still dark and I was on guard duty and he said, "Where the hell is Massey?" I said, "I told him I would take his place." I kidded the sergeant a lot, and I said "Sgt., look. That guy is really in love. He loves that girl and she loves him. This is not a quickie deal." And of course they couldn't marry then because it was forbidden, so he said, "I am going to get that Jewish so and so." And I said, "No wait a minute. True love." So that morning Massey came back and we were on a troop truck together and this girl had written him a long letter in German. After we got out and it got daylight and bright enough, he pulled it out and opened it up and read it to all of us. It was so beautiful it made us want to cry.

Q: Is that right?

A: The only address I have for Massey is New York City, which was his address then and he is not in the phone book in New York, so I don't know what happened to him. I've often wondered.

Q: On this second place that you liberated, or helped to liberate, how many prisoners do you think were there?

A: I don't know, there had to be several hundred or thousand people working in that whole factory/complex. All ages. More older men and younger women.

Q: Do you know their nationality?

A: Most of them said they were Russian. Of course, everybody said they were Russian back then because Russia was our ally. I do not think there were any Jewish people there. I don't know.

Q: [Unintelligible] had a lot of conversation, heard a lot about the prison camps, the work camps. What was your thinking and your reaction and when you arrived there, did you find about what you expected?

A: We had heard about the gas chambers, the horror camps and all of that, and the only one that even came close to it was that medieval castle, because those people who were there were incarcerated completely. No labor, no anything, they were just there. And I would assume from the attitude of the people who were still there that the guards were quite horrible. Because for them to have rioted and taken over after the German soldiers fled, and beaten this guy to death, it had to be pretty bad.

Q: It had gotten to the point where it was common knowledge that the war was coming to an end.

A: Yes.

Q: So some of the guards fled; then the prisoners took over just before your outfit arrived.

A: And the strange thing there was that even though the Germans by then were giving up by the thousands, they didn't give up at this prison. They left. They ran. I guess they didn't want anybody to know that they were stationed at a place that horrible.

Q: What effect do you think the war and the Holocaust had on you and your friend? Did it change your attitude? Are you following the line of work that you planned to? How did it affect you?

A: I came from a rural background where there were no Jewish people. I didn't even know what a Jewish person was when I entered World War II. I was fortunate enough to be in the Army Specialized Training program which supposedly you had to have 5 points higher IQ to be in than you did to go to

officers' candidate school. So there were some very intelligent people in there, and many of the very intelligent people were Jewish. I witnessed anti-Semitism for the first time in basic training here in Fort Benning, Georgia . Why was it anti-Semitism? One of the drill sergeants, who thought he looked like Clark Gable, was from Alabama and he was uneducated. And he resented these bright young fellows. He resented them whether they were Jewish or not Jewish but he happened to especially resent the Jews. It showed. So that alarmed me then. Then I was fortunate enough to serve with them when we all got put in the Infantry. Coupling that with what we heard and what little we witnessed over in Germany impressed me a great deal and then I have been fortunate enough in the last few years to have gone to Israel. And there, outside Jerusalem, I saw the evidence of the Holocaust. I went five years ago and we were the first tourists into Israel, the first flight on El Al Airline, after the war with Egypt. We saw the tremendous evidence of it. We got in on Thursday, and the Friday night was the first time that they had lit up the Wailing Wall. So there were 13 of us. Seven were Jewish and six were Christian, which is the way to go to Israel. With what I had experienced in basic training and what I had seen over in Europe and being there and seeing the floodlights on that Wailing Wall, it was quite impressive. It had to bring tears to anybody's eyes to see that.

Q: That's fine. Thank you very much, Mr. Harris. Is there anything else that you would like to put in this record regarding this overall activity? You've given us a fine statement and anything you can add to it would be greatly appreciated.

A: I have also been to Germany since World War II two times. Of course, none of us ever really knows the exactly innermost feelings of anybody else, but I would like to think that most of the Germans feel a sense of guilt and rage about what happened during World War II and preceding World War II. I do think that as a

nation and as a group of people, the German people now want to be fair and equal to everybody. I hope so. We don't know if the situation came back again, whether they would be that way or not, but I got the impression when I was over there which was about 6 or 7 years ago that they did feel a sense of guilt about it. And I'd like to think that many of the German people never knew this went on. I hope they didn't anyway. But it shows that a few people can take a whole country and change it completely, and maybe with communications like they are now it will never happen again. Let's hope and pray it doesn't.

Q: Thank you very much, Mr. Denton Harris.