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DATE: OCTOBER 12, 1978

Q: All right now. I see you have a book here on Dachau, and these pictures are of Dachau, the pictures that you are showing me now?

A: Right. There was a train that was pulled in on the siding just outside the camp, and they were trying to burn all of the evidence, really, and they threw a guard on this train and these people were shot--the ones that tried to get off. And so they just stayed there and died. Of course, most of them were very near death when they moved them.

Q: You were a liberator at Dachau?

A: Right. When you say liberator, I was with a medical unit, the 54th Field Hospital.

Q: 54th Field Hospital.

A: It's similar to a M.A.S.H., except we were truly mobile.

Q: Immobile or mobile?

A: Mobile.

Q: Mobile. I see.

A: M.A:S.H. is truly a mobile army hospital unit.

Q: You're referring to the M.A:S.H. TV series?

A: Yes. But in World War II, it was a smaller unit and we operated directly with an infantry unit. We were broken up into three platoons, and each platoon went with an infantry division and we took only belly and chest wounds, the very severe cases, and we had surgical teams that came in and operated maybe 6-8 hours average and 10-12 pints of whole blood. So I was close enough. I was always within artillery fire but never within small arms, but we moved right behind the infantry and I was the Supply Officer for the unit.

Q: You were the what?

A: The supply officer. And we moved right along behind these divisions, so I was in a position to see a lot and not be just isolated to one small area: I was all over France and Germany going to medical depots and supply depots and one place and another.

Q: Did you take these pictures?

A: Yes, I took those myself. We moved into this area Sunday afternoon and stayed until the next day, and then we pulled out.

Q: So it was one day, a 24 hour exposure.

A: Right. It was liberated in the morning and we set up...the infantry moves right on through, and then we follow right along behind the infantry.

Q: Do you remember the month?

A: Oh, yes. So we set up in a field right outside of this place. Of course, we weren't equipped, even subsistence-wise, to do too much; and the war was still going and we were combat troops, so we moved on. In fact the war was over in eight more days, and I ended up the war in Innsbruck, Austria: We went from here [pointing to map], which is outside of Munich, to Stuttgart and Ulm, crossed the Danube at Ulm, and then on down to Goeppingen and then on down to Innsbruck in Austria, and Garmisch.

Q: Do you remember what date you entered Dachau?

A: Yes, it was the 29th of April.

Q: April 29th and you left on the 30th then. You said you left the next day and it was 1945?

A: Yes. Right.

Q: Did you know that you were going to be going to a concentration camp?

A: Oh, no. See, the Seventh Army was advancing, of course. We crossed the Rhine at Mannheim, and we swung south then to Heidelberg, and the reason we swung south was the Third Army was north of us and Patton crossed our whole army front with his armour and closed the Brenner Pass just outside of Garmisch there,

and Innsbruck, so it was really just a swing then to the right and a mop up sort of an operation.

Q: So you were coming behind the infantry, as you had mentioned before.

A: Right. With the infantry. But the war was over for all practical purposes at that point, because it was just strictly mopping up. They were surrendering to the burgermeisters in the towns as we came along and turned in their weapons, the Germany Army.

Q: Now you entered the Dachau area. When you came to these pictures that you've shown me, what area did you go to first? What do you remember? If you can take yourself back in time a little. Do you remember what you saw first in this camp? Was it the entrance way?

A: No, this train.

Q: The train.

A: Yes, I came up on first from where we set up our hospital, and I took pictures of the train and then on into the camp.

Q: Now, in this picture we see, of course, the emaciated corpses, the skeletons, the dead skeletons. Do you remember what your thoughts were at that time when you saw this?

A: Well, I couldn't believe it, but I should have had an inkling, and I'll tell you why. We came through the Siegfried line with the Third Infantry Division, the

particular unit I was following at that time, and the Sargamien. Sargamund if it's German, Sargamien was French. Then we went to Zweibruecken. We came on through. Zweibruecken was really the next large town we got to, and in addition to being a supply officer, I was the real estate officer--there's army forms for everything, and we occupied buildings when we could. We went into tents if we had to, we had tents and all; but if we found a town that had a school or a large home or something similar to this, we would move in there and set up our hospital because we had very few patients. From Omaha Beach in Normandy to Innsbruck in Austria, we had less than 3,000 patients; about a third of them died.

Q: And you say that you should have had an idea:

A: Yes, because in Zweibruecken the town was shot up some, but I went into the town. Again, the infantry went through and pushed the Germans on through, or the Germans ran and the infantry followed them, and I came right into the town behind them. I went to this large home. It was really an office complex, in front of a small factory; there was a small factory behind it.

Q: Was this in Munich?

A: No, this was Zweibruecken. And this small factory -- machines, tools sort of a thing -- was behind this large building. So I went in this building, and I said, "We'll set up our hospital here." So I had signs and I had a driver, Herman Cohen, who spoke the language, who was a tailor from Chicago. I said, "We'll set up here and

put our signs out.” Then we would go back toward the unit, and we’d stick up our signs so they could follow the signs up to the new location. Sort of like circus people. But, when I went in this building, it was full of furnishings -- desks, chairs, what have you -- and furnished sparsely. It was sort of an office complex with an apartment upstairs; it was a three-story building. We got in there about dusk, and I told the driver, "We don't want to be on the road at night; we'll just throw our bed rolls here and spend the night, and in the morning we'll go back and get the unit." So we spent the night there. And the next morning we got up and walked to the back -- we heard some activity there--and looked out the window in the courtyard down there and there was a well, and there were people out there washing up. We didn't think too much about it -- thought maybe that they were Germans -- but they weren't soldiers so there was really no concern. We'd seen the German people before.

Q: These people were well fed?

A: No, not really, but they weren't emaciated like these people that we see. But I went back and got the unit and told about the signs and to move on up, and then I came back up to this place with this driver that I had, Herman Cohen, and when we got back there it was a wreck. All of the furnishings in the apartment had been torn up; the office desks and what-have-you had been slashed, so there was really nothing that we could use in the way of comfort for ourselves. These people were inside the building at this point. And they spoke Russian. I don't know whether they were

Jewish people or just Russians, but there was one man that was in charge of the group and there were men and women; I assumed that the women cooked, maybe for the household, or maybe even worked in the factory, but there were about 14 of these people. The man that was in charge of the group, from what we could get out of him -- he was Russian -- these were slave labor that was used right in that little complex there, and they lived in a dungeon, a cavern-type--it was really a wine cellar that was underneath this house.

Q: So there was a factory [unintelligible].

A: Right. And this man that was in charge of the group had had every finger on both hands broken and none set. They were going in all different directions, his fingers.

Q: Did he tell you how it happened?

A: No. We couldn't...

Q: Couldn't communicate.

A: ...communicate with him sufficiently to find out.

Q: And you felt that having seen that should have given you some idea:

A: Inkling of what might be going on. But it didn't register at that point.

Q: Well, your inability to communicate probably had a lot to do with that.

A: Yes, if we could have found out....

Q: Had there not been a language barrier.

A: We did find out that because he was in charge of this group that he was forced to make them work more, or something. Anyway, he had all his fingers broken.

Q: He had security there, too; it seems like a man from a slave labor camp that they were working at. And that was your first, your closest [unintelligible] before you got to Dachau?

A: Yes. Dachau is maybe 400 miles or more. We're talking from March... well no, the 29th of April it was at Dachau and we broke through the Siegfried line about March 15, as I recall, so within a period of 30 days I was from Zweibruecken to this place, but it was still unexpected.

Q: Still unexpected. There was no talk about it among the men in the Army. Do you know that anybody had seen anything at that point?

A: No. That's the thing. Like I say, I had an opportunity to visit supply depots and was on the road and asking directions and different things, and I had a chance to speak with many more folks than a man carrying a rifle that was just going through an area that was three miles wide and several hundred long.

Q: And with that opportunity, you never told [unintelligible].

A: We still didn't, until we hit this place. In fact, the civilians in there don't believe it, in the town of Dachau.

Q: Did you talk to them at all?

A: This driver that I had, Herman Cohen, spoke with them, and they denied any knowledge of that place, and I just can't buy that. I can't believe it, because it is just outside of town.

Q: Right. And this was a very large camp. Dachau certainly had its crematoriums. So as you saw the railroad tracks, you saw the people, you saw these bodies, were you alone? Were there other men with you when you saw these?

A: No, in those pictures you can see other troops from the infantry that was going through.

Q: Did you talk to any of these when you saw them?

A: Well, not really. I took these pictures with a 35 mm camera and I was sure happy that I had it with me. The American soldier is a fine fighting fellow. My experience in observing them and working with them is that the German soldier could take commands, but once a sergeant was shot or the officer, then they didn't get with it like the American soldier, because with the American soldiers we promoted right down through the ranks. If a lieutenant was shot, the sergeant was the lieutenant and the corporal was the sergeant, so everybody could step in; it was that little American ingenuity that paid dividends at all levels. But, I'd never seen them really brutal until we went through here.

Q: You never saw the American soldier brutal until you went in here?

A: No.

Q: What's [unintelligible]

A: Now I've seen them shoot a German that came out with this "comrade" bit after he'd emptied his weapon; I say shoot them. I've seen them turn them over to the French in France, the free French, which meant the death warrant, but this soldier had shot at them until he used up all of his ammo then he had said, "Comrade." Well, the American soldier generally didn't buy this bit; if he still had a couple of bullets or even one bullet, this saved him, but they're not going to let somebody shoot at them until they use up all their ammo and then say "I'm your comrade" or "I want to surrender." But in here, they shot...this book indicates...now the G-2 people from Army came down and made this up and they talked with people, and you'd probably get more from this because I didn't speak with people, I just observed it. The Wehrmacht was there; the SS had gone and just the old German soldier was there, and everyone they shot they gave a rifle butt right in the face. His own mother wouldn't recognize him. They just caved in his face with a rifle butt after they'd shot him. And they shot every one.

Q: The American, after having witnessed this.

A: Yes, after having witnessed this, they shot them all and gave them all a rifle butt right in the face and caved it in. I took a picture of a stream there that had a couple of German bodies in it; I didn't take a picture of a fellow I saw reach down and pull up a ring finger and cut it off and take the ring and throw it back.

Q: It evoked so much feeling

A: It did, it did. That people would treat other people like this. I tell you, they were vicious.

Q: They did this. Did they talk about it?

A: No, in fact, I was going to say, the troops all the while were moving on up, and they captured some more Wehrmacht soldiers. There were two that came right back up during this afternoon. They were sitting on the front of a jeep with a GI driving it and a GI sitting on the back with a gun on them. And as they pulled through this area, these slave laborers pulled these people off that jeep. Crossed the road and blocked it and pulled them off and beat them. They didn't kill them, but they beat them on the grass right there, and the GIs did nothing. Now these really weren't people that had persecuted them, but they were feeling the same thing that the GI soldier was feeling, and it's very understandable.

Q: [Unintelligible]

A: Now I walked all through that place, and one thing that impressed me was that there was a commissary there.

Q: At Dachau.

A: At Dachau. And, of course, these people broke into that . Well, when they broke out they came to where we had set up our hospital. They ate out of the garbage cans, they ate grass, they were milling around all over.

Q: How did you feel when you saw them?

A: Oh, this was horrible. See, I'm a mortician in civilian life. I've worked with the medics all the while in the Army. I was with the medical department; I didn't want to get in Graves Registration. I only did once and that was in Korea, about 45 days. But I'm accustomed -- I was at that point -- to death and dead people, but you'll notice I didn't take any pictures of the live ones because they were the walking dead and I just couldn't. At that point I just couldn't take a picture of those emaciated people that were still on their feet.

Q: Did you react to them as human beings?

A: Oh, yes. We tried to do everything that we possibly could for them, and that's what I was mentioning. They went into this commissary. They were, like I say, milling around all over. We weren't equipped to handle them and the people that were going through, but they went into this commissary which was for the Germans, I'm satisfied. The thing that impressed me was that the floor was littered with little cigars. They weren't after cigars; they went for the food that was there. The Germans had cheeses in toothpaste tubes-like, fine cheeses, and other crackers and other condiments and food. They trampled cigars all over the floor and when they would pick up one of these they'd heave it aside; they were looking for food. They could care less for smoking the things.

Q: Did they try to talk to you at all? Did they try to say anything?

A: Oh, well. My unit was interested only in their well-being. There was a Dr. Goldblatt from Connecticut and there was a Dr. Rosencranz from Albuquerque, New Mexico, I believe. But they spoke with them. But I think they were not interested, really, in having these people tell them all the bad things, you know. They were more interested in what can I do for you, how do you feel at this point.

Q: I see. So these were medical people.

A: Yes, these were doctors. But we were there only for an afternoon and part of the next morning and gone.

Q: When you got in there, apparently everybody had gone is what you told me. There were no SS left. The Wehrmacht was there.

A: Yes. The Wehrmacht was there and, of course, as the GIs went through, they shot the Wehrmacht.

Q: Right. And what about the civilians? Had any civilians come to the camp, at that point, from the town?

A: No, no. Of course, this was a period when there was firing as we moved through the town and moved through the camp.

Q: I see. There was still fire. That would have been later on that [unintelligible].

A: Yes.

Q: I have several more questions to ask you, but I do want to be sure that we get some of these questions for the record on this tape, so I don't forget. I am going to need your full name. What is your full name?

A: Jesse. J-E-S-S-E H. L-A-F-O-O-N.

Q: And your address?

A: 6900 Bishop Road, Fairburn, Georgia:

Q: And your date of birth?

A: 9 November, 1922.

Q: And you were born where?

A: Victoria, VA:

Q: And your age at the time that you got into Dachau?

A: Well, I was born in 1922. This was 1945. May and November, the difference.

Q: 23? At 23 years of age?

A: Almost 23, yes.

Q: And your present occupation is?

A: I am a retired army officer.

Q: And retired from what? You were a mortician, you say?

A: No, I was with the Medical Department.

Q: And your military unit at the time you were with the service?

A: The 54th Field Hospital.

Q: Is that the whole title because I know there were several...?

A: Yes. That was it. 54th Field Hospital.

Q: And your rank at the time of liberation.

A: First lieutenant.

Q: And you liberated Dachau only, or you came into Dachau?

A: Dachau. Right.

Q: When you did get there, you were not aware that you were going to be there, so what....

A: We were just moving through.

Q: You just moved through, so actually you did nothing in terms of the survivors, the inmates, you didn't handle the bodies or anything of that nature?

A: No. Now, later, I ran into some of these people that were from Dachau. After the war was over, in Innsbruck, in Austria, is where we ended up, we moved back to Goepingen, Germany, and they had set up a Displaced Persons camp there.

Q: In Goepingen?

A: UNRAA in Goepingen. The war was over and there was a unit of the 36th Infantry Division in town, so we set up a little station hospital. Where we'd been a field hospital and had taken bellies and chests, we set up a little station hospital-like and then we took everything: sore throats, fractures, everything; and this Displaced Persons Camp was outside of town. The burgermeister or the town mayor of our

town was a major who had served in World War I, and he had been a town mayor as a sergeant, so he was mayor of our town. And he had bags of money! I should have known about this. But you're young, and you don't know. But like I mentioned, we broke through the Siegfried line with the Third Infantry Division. Now Sargemeins was right there at the line, so the minute we broke through the line one morning, that same morning, we were in Sargemeins. The town was only a couple of miles through the line. When we hit the infantry broke through, and we had been sitting since December on the other side. So one morning we popped through the line. When we hit the town the people had all run. In fact, there was food on the table and there were guns in the corner where the German soldiers had even run; but the whole town was mined and booby-trapped, because the Siegfried line really wasn't the thing that Hitler sold it for. The Maginot line was a four-story deep proposition with machine rooms, engine rooms, guns, everything, but Hitler had sold that Siegfried line as a [unintelligible] when really it was just dragon's teeth and a few pillboxes. So we got through that in a hurry, and we're right in this town, and everybody runs, but their buildings are blowing up. When I came in right behind the infantry to get set up for the hospital, they had just moved through and then I'm there. The buildings were blowing up and I thought it was incoming artillery; but I went down to the bank and there was money all over the floor! We went through the building. Soldiers will look at the loot a little, you know. You can't carry much. Anyway, we went down to the

bank and there was money everywhere! I picked out the largest denomination bill I could find and put it in my pocket as a souvenir. I had to watch my boys so they don't loot or destroy any property or anything. But, we did pick up a large denomination. Well, all that money that was printed prior to 1928 was good that was there; the Germans later said that everything after 1928 wasn't any good. This man that I spoke of, he joined our unit.

Q: The mayor?

A: Yes. His town was down Goepingen, south of Stuttgart, but he hit us about the time we went through the Siegfried, and he was just one man with 4 or 5 people to run a town. He had to be with somebody to get something to eat, at this point. But I am satisfied that others waited until the town was liberated and then went in. But he joined us at this point, and every time that we went through there after that, he policed up all this money, and he had duffel bags of it. So when we got to Goepingen -- just getting back to my original story and the Displaced Persons camp -- he was able to hire us people from the Displaced Persons camp to work in their hospital.

Q: He paid for that with that money from the bank?

A: Yes! And we could get Germans, we could get coal, anything we wanted, he had the money for. If it was available, he could get it. But the thing that impressed me was I think I had a fine unit. There weren't too many of us. It was a small unit.

We had 5 MFC officers and 15 doctors and 15 nurses and then we had about 85 enlisted people. But within that group there were so many trades and skills that I think that with those 85 people I could have done most anything, but the thing that impressed me about this Displaced Persons Camp was if we had some patients and I wanted to give them some entertainment, I went out there and there were concert pianists out there, engineers, everything!

Q: From the Displaced Persons Camp?

A: Sure. I mean, even though they had been slave laborers, these people were the cream of the crop. They were well-educated people, in the arts and everything else.

Q: You mentioned UNRAAA: Was UNRAA the whole unit that ran the displaced persons camp?

A: Yes, they ran these things all over.

Q: You worked with the Displaced Persons camps?

A: No. Just from the standpoint of if I needed any entertainment or anything from the hospital, I could go out there and the mayor would pay them, and I could get just the finest entertainers in the world. The finest engineers were there, the doctors.

Q: Were these people survivors of concentration camps or labor camps? Or do you know?

A: No. I really wouldn't.

Q: Because there was a difference between those people that were able to work and those people that were totally emaciated and survived by some miracle.

A: Oh. yes. But in this particular camp, from just glancing through here at the pictures, and seeing the people there, they were at all stages of emaciation.

Q: There weren't too many survivors at Dachau.

A: No.

Q: Very, very few [unintelligible] at Dachau.

A: No. But, this you might want to glance at, it might raise a question.

Q: This is a soft cover book, Dachau and who put this out?

A: The Army. The G-2 people.

Q: G-2 people? Oh, I see.

A: They came down and interviewed them. But they only spent a couple of days too.

Q: The 163 B Photo Signal Company.

A: They took the pictures.

Q: Right. The 7th Army.

A: Yes.

Q: Are we going to be able to hold onto this book for a while?

A: Oh, yes, I'd like for you to copy it.

Q: Copy it, or would you like to put it in our Archives here at the university?

A: I would like to do that [put it in the Archives] because most people should see it.

Q: Very fine. Very fine. It is historical documentation. And what about these photos?

A: You can make copies of those. I would be happy to let you have those.

Q: Do you want the originals back, or do you want us to make copies?

A: I would be happy to give you those, with the book.

Q: That would be really wonderful, because we are building up Archives here, and this is a certain type of original documentation that would be most valuable in our research. Yes. This, indeed, does have a lot of information on Dachau.

A: Now, they interviewed some of the people there.

Q: They interviewed some of the inmates?

A: Right.

Q: In other words, the Army interviewed the inmates?

A: Right, right. The G-2. And they have some history of the....

[End of Side 1 of tape. Conversation resumes as follows on Side 2]

Q: We did talk about the Dachau book and now we're into some more of the questioning. When you returned from your service, did you share this information

immediately, the experience that you had when you saw Dachau? Did you write home about it?

A: No. I didn't write any bad news at home. My folks were elderly. My father was 35 when I was born, and they were old and I was a young person.

Q.: I see. So you really shared none of this with them at the time. When you came home, did you share this information of the camps specifically, or did you stay away from this specifically and share your other Army experiences? Do you have any recollection of that at all? Did this make any more of an impression upon you, or less of an impression, or equal impression as did your other Army experiences?

A: My Army experiences were pleasant, for the most part, because, even with the hospital that I was with... I saw a lot of death. In Normandy, of course, there were many people killed when we first came in, military and Germans, and even lots of animals everywhere.

Q: You're talking about dogs and cats?

A: No, cows, primarily cattle.

Q: It's interesting that you mentioned that. You are our first interviewer to mention the death of animals. Were you close to animals? Were you on a farm?

A: Well, I started out in the funeral business when I was 14 years old. A mortuary moved into Martinsville, Virginia, and I was living there at the time. They bought an old home in my area, and I had a friend who was older that worked there, and it was

six months before they got a body. And I happened to be there the day they got a body. I helped them set up when they first moved in, and I visited often, but my friend hadn't had any experience with death or preparation of the dead, and he got sick on the first body and I took over his job. So as a 14 year old I worked at that funeral home and then I worked in the funeral business, off and on, until I finished high school and came into the military. But in the military, I wanted to get with the medical department; I figured that I would enjoy this more. Because I liked to help people, that's what I'm saying. I always have. I enjoy people and like to help people and I got a lot of satisfaction out of the funeral business because I could take a body that looked ghastly and make it look fine.

Q: Right. And in terms of your animal experience, you had no farm experience, because you mentioned the death of the animals?

A: Well, my grandparents did, and I have always had animals. I have animals at home now.

Q: So it was a part of your life.

A: Yes. So I grew up with animals, and I like people and I like animals. But when I came back home from the service, I went back into the funeral business and then I went to the Cincinnati College of Embalming and I got my licenses in Virginia. I showed these photos to the people that I worked with there, in this brochure, and also at the Cincinnati College of Embalming.

Q: What was their reaction?

A: There were some military people there that could see that this thing could happen based on the attitudes of Hitler and his total control of the situation over there, but most of them were younger people then that were just coming out of high school and going into their father's business or going into the mortuary business. I am satisfied that it didn't have the impact on them that it did the soldiers. This was my observation.

Q: And so you were really able to take this material immediately and your experience with it. Did you really apply what you saw since you were in the mortuary business and you had this experience seeing the emaciated bodies? Was there ever any relationship between your working in a mortuary and having any of the visions of these bodies at the time? Did you ever feel that you were working with just natural death, as opposed to unnatural death?

A: It did hit me a couple of times in that regard. I hadn't thought of this ever, really, but, an emaciated person that has it happen to them over, we'll say, a month's hospitalization, I can restore that person in the funeral home. I can bring back the fullness to the cheeks and what have you with fluids and osmosis, but with these people if it happens over a long period of time, no, you can't.

Q: [Unintelligible] restoration?

A: Yes. So those people could never approximate the appearance of what they once were.

Q: I would like to get into some of the questions that we have here that have to do with the religious aspect of our interviewees, in relation to your experience at the camp. One of our questions is: do you consider yourself a religious person, or did you consider yourself a religious person at that time? Did you follow any religion?

A: I'd been brought up in the Baptist Church and I had, since I can remember, believed in a Supreme Being; but I've always respected everyone else's religion. In the funeral business we handled Catholics, the Jewish people, Polish, all nationalities, Chinese, and so I have always respected everyone's religion and religious customs.

Q: Were there any conscious thoughts about God or religion at the time, or perhaps shortly after you were exposed to this type of an experience? Do you remember any thoughts of that nature?

A: I can only remember one. I've got a pretty good memory, but the one thought that I had was that I grew up poor; I was from a working class family, not poor because we were a family and a close family, but my father had been in the construction business and in the crash he lost everything. During the time that I was about 10 and can recall, in the 1930's there was a depression, and one of my first thoughts was golly, if Roosevelt had been the type personality that Hitler was, we

could have had one of these same situations. He could have been a dictator, if he had wanted to, I believe, because at that point, in the country, we had the depression and all the related things that the Germans had.

Q: The historical background at the time led to that type of situation; that's very interesting that you should remember that type of a feeling at the time. Very interesting.

A: Yes. Well, we may have discussed it there that, gosh, this same thing might have happened to us.

Q: You say you discussed it with your fellow Army people.

A: Yes.

Q: Did your religion have anything to do with the way you viewed these inmates, these prisoners? Do you have any memory of that?

A: No. I've always had a desire to help people and that's the reason I really wouldn't have been satisfied in any other service other than the medical. We tried to help.

Q: All right. What about your feelings about the civilians then? What was your reaction to these people?

A: I didn't see any of those in that particular town.

Q: You saw civilians perhaps in other towns.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: After your experience at Dachau, after having witnessed what you witnessed there, when you looked at the civilians did you ever get the feeling of "who is responsible for this" or was there a feeling of apathy for these civilians? Do you remember having any reaction at all?

A: I met many good Germans. I had the driver, Herman Cohen, and I was interested in real estate.

Q: Did he try to influence you one way or the other?

A: Well, I'm satisfied that he did, because his grandmother was lost in a similar situation in Holland. She was from Holland. But I know that when we took over homes, we went to the burgermeister's office and checked for the Nazis in the area. We usually ended up with a dentist's home or a doctor's home or someone in that category. Of course, we were interested in nice homes first off. I had occasion a number of times after that to go into Innsbruck and then back to Goepingen where we set up, and I know in Goepingen I went to the burgermeister's office, this major that I knew, and we got the homes of the Nazis. At this point the war was over, and when we got back to Goepingen we could relax some and we set up a little club for our officers. I went to the burgermeister's office and I said, "Give me the list of the Nazis," and I went to those homes and when they said, "When am I going to get my chair back or my sofa or this particular piece of furniture?", I said "Paint your name

underneath it on the bottom. We occupied this country for 20 years after the last war and that wasn't sufficient evidently. You can expect it back after 20 years."

Q:: So in other words, Herman was a Jewish man, and he must have shared some experience or reaction of his with you. What was his reaction, and how did you react to how he felt?

A: I think what I just said may have been a reaction to what he said, how he felt.

Q: He was out to get every last Nazi.

A: He was bitter that people could do this to people.

Q: Did he ever influence your feelings about...?

A: I am satisfied that with this housing experience he did, but it probably didn't take much influence, based on what I had witnessed. I just couldn't see how educated people could condone this.

Q: It is a difficult thing to justify, isn't it?

A: It is.

Q:: What kind of persecution did you see this as, in terms of the camps, or have you ever thought about it? The method of persecuting these people and making these people the inmates of the state. How did you see this? Did you ever think about the Nazi methodology?

A: At the time that we happened upon this, I wasn't familiar with all of the political and economic implications of the thing, the big picture, but the thing that I

recall that impressed me was why starve these people to death? Why feed them water with a couple of potatoes in it? If you're going to work them, feed them. I am from the South. My family didn't have slaves, but my grandfather and great grandfather had tobacco farms, Bright Tobacco Farm, 50 odd acres. They always had enough children to maintain it, so we weren't in cotton and didn't require slaves, but I disagree with a lot of people now when they try to tell me about how we treated the people in the South. I say, "Golly, what you are saying just isn't logical, because when land is selling for 10 cents to a \$1.00 an acre and I have to pay \$1300 for a slave, am I'm going to abuse him? " That's just like saying that I would buy a Cadillac car and run it through my woods down here on my farm. It's ridiculous. But I'm sure there are instances.

Q: You couldn't understand the logic of starvation if you're going to have people working for you.

A: No.

Q: You said that you had shared this material, on and off, with several groups and different people.

A: With Jewish groups here in the Atlanta area, in the 1950's.

Q: Is that right? What was the reaction at that time, in the 1950s?

A: I really couldn't say, because I loaned this to an individual who took it to these groups, and he always brought it back. Fantastic!

Q: Right. You're fortunate. They knew that you had the material and they wanted it for a project. Is that it?

A: About the time of the Jewish holidays, I might be tempted to look that up or somebody might mention it, and like in 1948 when they were establishing a country. I've been 200% for them since then in all their fights. I think they're the best fighters in the world, probably; and this is the thing that I offer people for an example. I say back during the Civil War there were twenty million Yankees and there were six million Southerners, and we gave them a good fight. And I relate this to the Korean thing; there were twenty million south Koreans and six million north Koreans, and you mean to tell me that if the north Koreans invade their homeland that they can't protect themselves, that we have to be there with a presence? And I go back to the Israelies and their numbers and how they could whip a lot of people. So I've always been for them. And I don't know whether that is a result of my experience here or not.

Q: That's interesting. Yes, it would be difficult for you to know whether or not it was a result of your experience. Do you have children?

A: Five.

Q: Did you ever share the experience with the children?

A: I've mentioned it a number of times.

Q: Have they seen the photographs?

A: A lot of people don't tell war stories, but I tell war stories. I tell pleasant war stories, situations that have happened to me that are comical.

Q: Have your children seen these pictures?

A: Yes they have.

Q: Do you know whether or not they have shared this type of information with their children, as a matter of history, sociology, to be aware of what has happened, what could happen again. Are you aware of any of this?

A: No, I only have two children that have children.

Q: We were just wondering how much education...?

A: They're small and I really couldn't say what impact this had on my children, but I will say that they've been exposed to it and my comments that it shouldn't have happened and it should never happen again.

Q: Did you see "The Holocaust"?

A: I did. And I hadn't thought of this material for a number of years. I called my local newspaper up here and I asked them if they would be interested in writing anything. I told them I had this material. And they came out and spoke with me, and that's one reason that I can recall possibly a lot of this now that you are asking about; normally, I wouldn't be able to just recall it this well.

Q: You've had several reviews.

A: I have because I spoke with them and they ran a couple of pictures. That was one thing, with "The Holocaust" and with them, and I can understand why. They didn't show any pictures. They showed pictures of the crematorium and they showed one other picture. Two pictures and a nice article but it didn't have any of the gruesome facts, details, or pictures, and I could see that that would be overkill. But it doesn't bother me that it would be overkill.

Q: It's overkill because it's so terribly unbelievable.

A: Yes. The Holocaust. It wasn't an overkill proposition.

Q: It was an overkill.

A: Yes, but they didn't bring out all the gruesome....

Q: The movie itself.

A: Yes. That's what I mean.

Q: Very gently done in order to have a viewing public, perhaps.

A: And they didn't want overkill.

Q: Do you know if your children saw the movie, "The Holocaust"?

A: Yes.

Q: I think we've just about covered most of the material that we have on our questionnaire here. One other thing. I did ask you whether or not you had shared your experiences with your co-Army personnel, and from what you told me, very

little was talked about after you saw Dachau. The men shared very little of what they saw.

A: Yes. Well, we witnessed it.

Q: You witnessed it, but you didn't talk about it among each other.

A: The war was over in eight days, and this was a relief to everyone, but as I recall, we really didn't go into this thing in detail. I think everybody was just so horrified that they had rather not discuss it.

Q: Your wife---she knows that you are here today?

A: Yes,

Q: You have shared this with her?

A: Yes.

Q: You obviously have shared this many times. Your reason for sharing it, I think you have indicated, is that you just don't feel you want it to happen again. This is your way of preventing it from reoccurring, which is really admirable. I am just reviewing here to be sure that I have covered just about all the information with you. One more question in terms of coping with this experience. You were close to death at 14 years of age--you indicated that you were working with dead bodies on and off, so you really had almost an "insulation" for yourself in terms of what death was and viewing death. Do you think that that had any softening impact in relation to your viewing death in the Army per se, or specifically this type of...

A: No. I would say no. I have embalmed nine bodies in a single day. It always bothered me. It bothered me more if it were a younger person--I hated to work on children, babies in particular, but an older person that had died of natural causes at a ripe old age, this didn't affect me as much, and so I had not been hardened to death. And this bothered me lots because these people were of all nationalities. They were not old people. They didn't die of natural causes.

Q: I thank you very, very much Mr. Lafoon. I have some material here that I'd like you to sign for us.

[Tape is turned off and conversation ends. Conversation resumes as follows]

Q: I'm going to put this back on tape again because we're interested in it. You returned to Dachau in 1961 with your wife and your children.

A: Of course, the crematorium....

Q: Did you think about what you had seen and then what you were seeing in 1961?

A: Right. The crematorium was there like it was.

Q: [unintelligible] wasn't changed yet.

A: The crematorium is there just about like it was, and the monuments are there, and the prison camp is gone. There is grass, and what-have-you.

Q: Yes. I heard that Dachau looked like some sort of chalet, at this point. And I don't know if it was reconstructed that way in 1961 yet; it may have been a little bit later, where they really made it look fairly attractive. I don't know if you had that experience.

A: No. I didn't go anywhere except the crematorium and the several monuments that are there where supposedly the ashes were spread.

Q: And at the time that you returned did you share the story with your family when they were there with you?

A: Yes. I showed them where I stood to take those pictures. The stench was so great that....

Q: Do you remember the odor when you were there?

A: ...that I just went up to the window and snapped the picture and got out as fast as I could. Some of them were taken in those rooms and those stacks of bodies were taken from a window and the door.

Q: Do you remember the odor at the time when you went there the first time? Do you remember any odor at Dachau when you went there?

A: Oh, yes, I remember the odor.

Q: The stench of the bodies and so forth.

A: But there wasn't as much considering the numbers of people there as you would expect. The thing that got me was that there wasn't any blood and all. Of

course, these people just died and all of their arteries were intact. One of the pictures I have there is of a German guard that was killed the day we came through, and he bled; he's on top of the stack and there's blood. You can see blood there. I noticed how fat he was and how much he bled. I took a picture of this.

Q: So you were really able to relate to your family, when you returned there, what you saw the first time as opposed to what you were seeing then.

A: Yes.