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INTERVIEWER: HERBERT JENKINS  
CAMP: BUCHENWALD  
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Q: Mr. Nash, we appreciate you taking the time to see us and talk with us. We appreciate you making this recording. Dr. Crawford, of course, is the director of this program, and what we'd like to have is what you saw and what you experienced and what you think about what was happening at the time in Germany. If you would please give us your name and address and date of birth and then just tell us whatever you remember and what you think about.

A: My name is Lauren Nash. I was born October 14, 1918, and I grew up in the rural county of Wilkes County, Georgia. Washington, Georgia is the county seat. And I came to Atlanta in 1940 and then in January of 1943, I went into the service, going with the 961st Engineer Maintenance Company. We took our basic in Camp Swift, Texas. After basic training maneuvers in Tennessee, from there to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts. From there we went overseas to North Ireland, where we got prepared for the invasion of Normandy Beach. I went in on Omaha Beach, on the 10th of June, 1944, and we went in to St. Lo. There we joined General Patton's Third Army. I went in as a Second in the Second Armored Training Division, I believe they called it that. Anyway I went with the Third Army and we went through the campaign of France. In Christmas of 1944 we was at a little village outside of Metz, across the river. We was on the west side of the river from Metz in a little town of Hagendange. I believe that's spelled H-a-g-e-n-d-a-n-g-e, France. That was during the Battle of the Bulge and they transferred us up to Clemency, Luxembourg, and from there we worked into Arlon, Belgium, as a back up during the time the 101st

was trapped there in Belgium. Then we came back down into Gotha, Germany. We came back to Konigsmarkef, France, near the Maginot Line. From there we went into St. Wendel, then into Weimar, where just outside of Weimar is the Buchenwald prison camp. And this is where we first saw the real core of what we was fighting for, what Germany was doing to people, that they were trying to destroy the human race.

Q: Were you with the group that liberated this camp?

A: Yes, I was. We were a service company. We were the maintenance company for the XX Corps of Engineers, and it and the Fourth Armored was the ones that went in. We went in the day that they liberated it. We went in to see it.

Q: What was the first unit that went in, do you know?

A: I'm not sure.

Q: But you were with the second unit that went in to the prison camp?

A: I was with that, and we went into the camp. I have pictures here.

Q: There's some real good pictures there.

A: This is the main entrance to the camp, and I have another one here if I can find it. Yes, here's a shot that I am back away. This faces the southwest as you go through one of the prettiest forests you've ever seen. And the people in Weimar did not know that this camp existed or what was being carried on.

Q: It was right near them?

A: It was near them, less than five miles away in this forest.

Q: When did you first hear about the camp? When did you know there was a camp there and you were going in to help liberate it?

A: The day after we went into Weimar.

Q: That's the first you heard of this camp?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you expect to find there?

- A: We really didn't know. There was nothing said too much to us. They just wanted to see it. After this happened we used some of our trucks and we went into town and rounded up some of the civilians -- the old people, the women, and some of the teenagers -- and we brought them in there and showed them this.
- Q: And they didn't know anything about it?
- A: They were appalled. This was something that let them know, because they did not know what was going on or just what Hitler was doing. They were supporting a government that they didn't know what they were doing.
- Q: What did you actually see when you approached? What was your rank at the time?
- A: I was a Tech Sergeant.
- Q: You were a Tech Sergeant, and you carried your group in to view this camp.
- A: Yes sir.
- Q: What did you actually see? What did you first see when you arrived there?
- A: When I first got there, you could smell the stench of a peculiar odor which was the burning of these bodies, and the ovens were still warm. I made some pictures inside of these partially burned bodies that was in this oven, but not having a flash camera they didn't come out. They had huge ovens that had a steel flat on wheels that ran on a track. There was perforated holes right through the steel, and they laid these bodies on there and they would slide them over these gas jets that were fired up under there and it would burn the bodies up. All except for the ash. I have a picture here of the ashes from those burned bodies. Of course, there was a calcium bone ash that...this is a pile of ash.
- Q: That's just a pile of ashes from where they burned the bodies?
- A: That's right. It was dumped out back of the crematorium.
- Q: Did you learn anything about how these people come to die before they were

cremated?

A: Yes sir, they carried them in to a basement like thing underneath this crematorium and they questioned them, and I guess after getting all the information they could from them they clubbed them to death. On the walls were ring handcuffs and [unintelligible] wall where their nails just clawed in. There was blood splattered all over that wall, and this table here had this club that had blood on it where they clubbed them to death after they tied them up. They then put them on this conveyor that carried them up. It was like a small elevator that ran from there up to the floor. They loaded them on these flat steel carriages that had wheels on them like a small -- about this big -- railroad type wheel that ran on these little rails that went in the oven. They closed the door and turned on the jets and the fire, and these ashes fell in the pit and that's where they cleaned them out. Now this is a picture of some of the bodies stacked there ready to be burned.

Q: Stacked up like cordwood, aren't they?

A: There's another one.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to see or talk to any of the people that were running this camp?

A: No sir.

Q: They had all gone before you arrived?

A: They had arrested the ones in charge. I also went over to the headquarters of this. There was a guide that was taking us into this and showed us the lampshade that the camp commander's wife had made from tattooed skins. They'd skinned the tattoo off of the prisoners that had them. You probably read about that or heard about that.

Q: You actually saw that shade?

A: I saw that shade. Yes sir. I sure did.

Q: That was a vicious and vile thing, wasn't it?

A: Yes, it sure was. This is a crematorium and that is the chimney to the back of it. That's on the south side. The main entrance was on the north side. I'm just trying to give you a little direction on those pictures there. This is some of those survivors there at the barracks and there's one who put on...see how well he fits those GI clothes?

Q: Did you have an opportunity to talk to any of these people? These people survived the camp, didn't they?

A: They spoke mostly Polish and German and I wasn't very up on that, so I couldn't talk to them. I just took pictures of them.

Q: What was your reaction and thoughts to viewing this thing?

A: You was in a shock so to speak. You felt like you was in a slaughter pen, like you had gone to a packing house or something where they kill animals and process them.

Q: Except they're Jews and human bodies.

A: Just human bodies, yes.

Q: And then destroying them by fire.

A: Of course, these bodies that are stacked here were just outside piled up. There was also two trailers. They had rubber tires like the old Hoover wagon type trailer. It was just piled with bodies, too, and I don't know why those pictures didn't come out.

Q: You got some very good pictures there. Especially good pictures of the bodies piled up there.

A: You can see how skinny they are.

Q: What effect did this have on you, Mr. Nash?

A: It sort of changed my outlook on what war is all about -- why we have entered various wars when we have seen persecution by one force overrunning another

that's weaker. I guess that's partly the reason we got into the Korean War. Also some of the reasons we was in the Viet Nam War, but those two wars seem to have been bungled a little. We didn't go in to conquer, we just went there to serve as a police force seems like. We didn't go in there to fight like we did in France and Germany. We went there to conquer.

Q: What was your occupation before the war? What did you plan to do? What were you doing when you went into the Army? Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

A: No, I was drafted. I grew up on a farm and then when I came to Atlanta I went to work for the old Genesco [unintelligible]. I had worked there two years before I got drafted.

Q: Went into the Army.

A: That's right. I was working in the maintenance department and also doing the shoelasting, forming the toes of the shoes. I ran a machine there for a good while and I worked in the maintenance department.

Q: You are now operating a garage and an automobile agency.

A: No, just an auto repair shop.

Q: Auto repair shop here on Candler Road. Did your experience in Germany change your thought or change your work in any respect?

A: No, not really. I came back and took up life about like I left it. I was married at the time. I had been married two years. I came back and I still have the same wife.

Q: Congratulations.

A: Yes.

Q: How long did you stay in Germany?

A. I was from June until October 4. We left [unintelligible]. That's south of Munich. We were there until October 4th then we went to Nuremberg. From

there on into Le Havre and back to the states and came back on the Queen Mary.

Q: Buchenwald was the first camp you went into?

A: That's the only concentration camp I saw over there.

Q: Did you see any other prisoners of war, or near any other camps?

A: No, I didn't [or I didn't] know that they had been prisoners. There was a lot of people after the war ended that was with a pack on the back, walking in some direction, possibly towards home. Whether they had been prisoners or Germans, I don't know.

Q: You didn't know their nationality?

A: We also saw a lot of trainloads of prisoners going back to Poland, heading north over there near Nuremberg.

Q: Did you see any American prisoners of war?

A: No sir. Not during the time they were taken prisoners.

Q: They were already liberated?

A: Yes.

Q: And the camp had already been liberated that you had an opportunity to visit. But you was right behind the liberators and saw everything there and what they left.

A: Yes sir.

Q: What else should we record about this?

A: You're more or less interested in this camp.

Q: We are interested in people like you who was there and saw it.

A: Yes sir.

Q: We're very much interested in what you saw and what you think and what your reaction was to it.

A: I thought what I saw here in this camp was the most terrible thing I had ever witnessed in my life or even since. I just think that it's something that came

along in my lifetime that I never want to see a repetition of it, because it's terrible. It's awful. It's unbelievable what one human being will do to another when they have the advantage to do so.

Q: What was your reaction and certainly you discussed it with your buddies? What do you think the German people was trying to do in doing this kind of thing?

A: They were trying to eliminate the Jewish population that was in Germany and in the countries they conquered, such as Poland and the other countries that they had overrun.

Q: Was it your understanding that most of the people, all of the people, in this camp were Jewish people or were there other people there?

A: They were Jewish and perhaps some of them were town officials that had opposed them. They had resisted the German movement into these places, such as the towns in Poland, Belgium, Holland, Russia, France, any of these towns that they had overrun. But I couldn't single out any of them. I think that most in this camp here were from Poland.

Q: Polish Jews or...?

A: Yes sir, I don't have any knowledge or record of any of the people that were executed in these camps as being prisoners of war, like the American prisoners, because of the Geneva Convention, because Germany knew we had a lot of their prisoners and we could retaliate had they done something like this to our prisoners.

Q: Is it your understanding that some of the victims in this prison was officials in other places that were opposing Germany?

A: Yes sir, Like the mayors or....

Q: Then, they were not Jewish people?

A: Some...

Q: What were their nationalities?



A., They might have been...I don't know their religious faith or what have you. They most likely were Catholics or some Protestants perhaps, but most of the people we see here were Jews. That was his method. He would just round them up and take them into the camp and this is what happened to them.

Q: Kill them any way they could.

A: In some of the camps they gassed them. They told them they were going to march them in to have a shower, but instead of water coming out of the shower heads there was cyanide gas.

Q: Did you see any of those victims or any of that operation?

A: No sir, I just heard about those while I was over there.

Q: From your information here, the victims here were carried in and murdered.

A: They were murdered, I am pretty sure, or starved to death.

Q: And then burned the bodies.

A: Then they burned the bodies. In some of the camps, they dug mass graves and put them in and just covered them over, just a huge trench.

Q: Did you see any of those?

A: We saw one at Gotha, Germany that was covered over but I didn't see them dig it up. We were just passing through at that time. I was told that that was a mass grave there.

Q: Experience you'll never forget.

A No.

Q: What's your reaction to the thing today? What should be done?

A: I understand there are a few that have escaped from here that was involved with this. If they catch some kind of officer perhaps or some guard or anything that was pertaining to this, I think they should be dealt with in practically the same manner they had done to these folks. Just like they did Eichmann when they caught him. They hanged him.

Q: Do you think all these people that was involved in any way, even a minor way, that can be identified should now be executed?

A: They should be charged with murder and executed if they prove that they had had any involvement in committing any of this crime.

Q: Can you think of anything else we ought to put in the record this morning?

A: No, not necessarily. That's about the extent. I was a soldier going through and I carried out my orders and this is what I came across and saw when I was going through there. I saw why we was over there fighting.

A. Thank you very much, Mr. Lauren Nash.