United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with William Alexander Scott III

RG-50.010*0082

PREFACE

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Transcribed by Amie Thrasher, National Court Reporters Association.

WILLIAM ALEXANDER SCOTT III

Question: Now, I've got a form we just try to follow. So if you would state your full name and the address where we are, which is 145 Auburn Street, and then date of your birth. And your full name is?

Answer: All right. Well, I'm William Alexander Scott the third, and I was born 15th of January 1923. And we are presently in the office of Atlanta Day World at 145 Auburn

Avenue. My father William A: Scott II, was the founder of the paper, in 1948, August 3rd. At the time -- the time that I passed --

Q: Buchenwald.

A: At the time I went through Germany, I was with the Third Army, 183rd Engineer Combat battalion. I was attached to a corps, and I was reconnaissance sergeant and photographer, and pertains to this story with this unit. And as I have been reminded, the day that Buchenwald was overrun, it was April 13th, 1945. And my headquarters -- I was in the headquarters company battalion. It was at Eisenhower, and our company was scattered throughout the area around Eisenhower. And the Army issued an immediate order for any man within access to Buchenwald to go to it before anything was really moved. We spent about an hour and a half trying to find if we were going the direction by various MPs. And we felt that this was a misrepresentation, that there was no such thing as a Buchenwald atrocity camp, as we had been shown in some indoctrination theater. And you might note that possibly a number of troops in that area had been shown this film even before we got into Germany. And we didn't believe it. So it had taken us about

an hour to find the place. We thought maybe they were just fooling us again, and it would be not worth trying to find. Finally we found it. And as we approached the entrance, we looked at the outside. We said, "Well, this place isn't what they said it was." And I might call for a minute --

[Break in recording.]

Q: Sure. There. I think we're back on now. So this was amazing. You had seen some --

A: We had seen what they term at that time, as I recall, orientation sessions. We would get some pictures of -- and some film, actually, of what was supposed to have happened in Germany before we got there in the late '30s and early '40s up until the end of the war. And we just didn't believe what we had seen, and as I recall it, we was driving around into the entrance. And I still said, "This place is nothing." It looked almost like federal penitentiary here in Atlanta from the outside as we approached it. And then as we turned in the gate, we saw a number of the small wooden structures that housed the prisoners. And I later found out that Buchenwald had been a correctional penitentiary, you might say, similar to the federal pen, prior to the confinement of prisoners of war, Jews, but mostly they were Jews there. And there were -- as we began to go in, and people were just milling around ____. I was, as I said, a photographer also with my unit and I took some pictures of some of the ____ still in the incinerators. And then I took pictures of a pile of bodies that were still outside the windows of the incinerators, and ____ trucks to take out some of the ____. Actually these were kids maybe range of about 12 to up, and some of the ill -- wounded or ill, you might say, or injured people, who were still alive there. And we were told that about 30,000 were killed in the two weeks just before we

got there. And there were only 20,000 left of the Jews that were held there. And we noticed about a thousand or so people in a wide fenced area it seemed to be in pretty good shape, as compared to the other 20,000 we walked among. And they were showing us some of the things that happened, and we said, "Well, what about those people? Are they --" we were in the spring -- pretty healthy looking, and we were told that they were Russian prisoners and that the Germans had been afraid to really do anything to them. And two -- we felt two of the SS troops had remained there too long, because just as we moved in, they were trying to move out. And they were running. They were caught. And these two men were taken into a basement. I did not go into it myself, because I just was just -- I think walking around in sort of a daze. I was about 22 at the time, and some of the men in my unit came back and told me that there were about six of us that got there, I think, at that time, that these two SS troopers were beaten to death by the inmates who were still able to raise a fist, and one or two of the Americans might have knocked him down. He said each time he got knocked down, they got back up to attention. He stood to attention, until he couldn't get up no more. And I still sort of wandering around in some part of the barracks, and I was shown possibly -- I was in a barracks almost similar to the one that was shown on the holocaust film of the last year, some of the things that were done would not be believed really, even by saying it, because I understand people say this was all prefabricated in their response to what they saw in the holocaust, but ____. I have even developed an attitude sometimes that sometimes if you say some things that are done, I don't know whether it helps to stop it or if it might even cause some people of unbalanced mentality to repeat it. And I don't know what the answer is to what we ran into in Buchenwald. As a matter of fact, it gave me a different attitude, a perspective, I suspect, on some of the ideas that we had always heard, and that is that one of the best ways to get away from the -- this type of attitude or functioning by humans was to become more educated. And here we were in a country that we had always been lead to believe was one of the most educated and literate nations in the world, producing great scientists, far advanced in art, literature, having great names of music, classical music: And it came up -- well, after I saw what I saw, possibly the worst crimes that you could imagine humans committing and this was done, I don't know in what -- in what was the conclusion of how they arrived at an idea that this should be done, but it just lead me to have a reevaluation of this whole notion of what we refer to as literate and education, because I don't think I was -- been unique in this really in my -- because as I say, I was just sort of moving along with the tide and not really thinking a great deal about it at that time, but since I've been back -- and this was over 30, 35 years -- 34 this spring -- I had been an interested observer, not necessarily a casual observer of the idea that would relate to education and how we use people. And I know during this World War II, my unit was comprised mainly -- I started out with really as a photographer at an air base squadron at Tuskegee, AlabamA: And incidentally at Tuskegee it was the training for black pilots. About 1,000 were actually given wings at this institution. It really was not at Tuskegee

Institute as much as it was an air field near there. Tuskegee is no more an air field now. It's named for General Chappie James. I was there for my first six months in the Army. And the Army started what they call specialized training program, ASTP, in '43, and it came through and tested individuals. And I said, "You know, maybe I'll try it." Because they were offering a little commission if you complete the particular program you can get into. And after two more weeks of testing in North Carolina at A&T College, I ended up in Howard University in Washington D.C. I completed the program along with six individuals, a pilot. Six of us completed the program, and really two-thirds of the time -- a 300 group. But we were called and told instead of commission, we would be given PFC commission. They changed the program, and we were sent to organize an engineer combat battalion in Mississippi, and that's really how I ended up, you might say, going into the phase that I did. I ended up getting some more training in camera FLIR at engineering school in Balfour Virginia, and went overseas with this unit after. The fellows really were ready to eat nails. They had 14 weeks of infantry basic training before we joined them in Mississippi, and they had 14 weeks of engineering -- engineer combat battalion basic training -- and they did not get past it. And a number of them were from Philadelphia and New York, they were east coast youngsters. One was me, who a reconnaissance sergeant, I was only 19, junior ground. And getting back to the whole reference to the idea of education, a number of them were classified as illiterates prior to coming into the service, but with the intensive demonstration training in the short period of three months, they were using highly educated equipment of destruction, but very effectively. And at the same time, some of them even developed improvements, innovations on some of the firing mechanisms on one of the machine guns we were training with. And I think in my own conscience mind I was beginning to develop some thoughts and surfaced later and that is the whole idea of how to evaluate a person, and as to dealing with them effectively and honestly. And I -- recent years, some educators might be familiar with people who have come up with this whole approach of reconsidering our whole educational framework here, in particular from the ground up, and it -- we may be losing some of our more innovative minds through credential requirements. And our country, of course, was founded by a number of what could be really termed unqualified individuals to date. And even we're beginning to see -- there's more on our television specials -- individuals who have contributed a great deal to expansion of the human condition dropped out of school.

Q: At an early age.

A: More recently the one was Einstein. I guess, I'm getting away from --

Q: Let's go back to the time where your unit reached Europe. Did you go to -- where England? To France?

A: Actually, when I first got to Europe, I got there by way of Liverpool on a ship that carried 14,000 troops, this was the U.S.S. America, and I think it was called the West Point at that time. It was our largest ocean liner. It wasn't the United States. It was the AmericA: And we took five days to cross. We were unescorted. We zigzaged from Boston to the North Africa direction and swung north to England. And the -- getting off the boat at Liverpool at night -- and we -- I can remember being greeted by some of my fellow American soldiers on shore, and they were saying, "Oh, Black Joe," as we were coming down the gangplank. And then we got on a train and went on to a little place called Fordingbridge, which was sort of southwest of London and just below Salisbury. And from there we had an opportunity to get our equipment together and take a couple of weekend passes to London. I think I got to London about six weekends, and contrary to what some people were lead to believe, I don't know why our OWI, this was Officers of War Information, misrepresented participation of my unit and a number of other units I know. I happened to have run into an individual who was an OWI guy. I ran into him when I was a student at Howard University. I ran into him again in London, and it was a weird situation. I ran into him a third time in Merced, but in London he decided he wanted to do a feature on me because he was a son of a publisher of a newspaper that my father printed here in Atlanta for Des Moines, Iowa, called the Iowa Observer. And he got the photographer to shoot me, and this was about the first weekend or second weekend I was in London. And about the fourth weekend, he let me see a copy of the picture and the news release that was attached to the back of the picture or printed on the back of it, really. And it said, "Here Sergeant Scott is sitting in a warehouse getting ready to get material and equipment to ship over to the continent, to the fighting men on the continent." And I said -- and I said, "Wait a minute. This isn't true." I said, "What's this?" He said, "Well, this is the only thing that they would allow me to print."

Q: Yeah.

A: And I said, "Well, we getting ready to get on the boat ourselves." And we went over across the channel. And we got off at Le Havre. We went up through Le Havre. The forces had moved on in, and we were able to go up to get off at Rouen, as I remember it.

Q: This was, what, in July?

A: No, this was late --

Q: August?

A: This was in the fall.

Q: Fall?

A: Because we had got in -- fall of '44. And we were – I guess this might have been by November.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because we got out, and we actually camped in the woods near Rouen about 38 or 40 kilometers outside somewhere, and my unit was self-contained motorized. We had -- all of our companies had their own transportation, but we were immediately incorporated in the supply for units being assigned to various Armies. Mine was a freelance engineer combat battalion, and we got all of us to join the Third Army, which was headed toward Dijon. But at ____ during the night, we got an MP motorcycle that came in and gave us new orders. And instead we headed north to ____ in Metz. This was in north France, heading towards the battle of the boards, which brought ____ the Third Army headquarters. We talked with the driver for our battalion commander, after he went to the Third Army headquarters and reported for assignment to one of the corps. And our battalion commander was just a 28-year-old West Point, and all of us, as I say, were young.

Q: He was a white guy?

A: Yes. Actually, all of the officers in my unit were white, except three black one officers. And the battalion commander was a real straight soldier. He was a West Point man, valid, talented young person. I would say not valid but intelligent young person, and fair in his attitude toward dealing with his troops. And he even set up a procedure for reduction in grade, which really wasn't necessary. I guess it wasn't – I don't know whether it was standard Army procedure or not that an individual who is to be reduced or recommended for reduction had an opportunity to choose counsel in the Army. But, anyway, in talking with the driver, we found out that somebody in the intelligence -- we don't think it was General Patton -- wanted to know why our unit, which had come so highly recommended, was black. They thought we were white. We were so highly recommended. And they wanted to reassign our designated activities. And our battalion commander said, "No way. We were trained for this job, and this is what we're going to do." And we move out a couple of days, and right up to within a few kilometers of Bastogne, which had been surrounded, and we were about 1:30 at night, and we could see all of this trace of fire and everybody running all around us. And we were wondering what was going on, because we hadn't been apprised of all of the action. We thought we were going toward one direction. We changed that overnight. Reems it gets to 2:00. It was stalled for a moment, but the driver told us that there was terrific excitement around the Third Army Head Quarters, because they thought there were German paratroopers and others dressed in American uniforms all around the areA: So it occurred to us that -- this is in the aftermath of everything -- that maybe this was one of the major shifts in the change in policy toward black troops, because as we moved in to Arlon, which was about 25 miles south of Bastogne, we saw, and I recall this, a young black driver of a Jeep. And I think it was a 578, the way I remember it, femto unit, and we weren't aware of it.

Usually, you know, some of the units around, but he said that he had left his unit at Bastogne. They were surrounded at Bastogne. And we said, "What's going on?" And they said, "Well, the Germans are overrun everything." And then our battalion commander, as I said, he was ready -- and we even come to say that he was going to Dijon in the next war, after World War II. He had us, as soon as we move into Arlon, as I said, about 1:30 in the morning -- to drive north toward Bastogne and do our designation of rigging oil and checking bridges and the status of the road work that needed. And I went with two captains and another sergeant, George L. Johnson. George was a fellow, who we can recall, he says he doesn't drink and neither did I, but we got into the Ryan Valley, and he had to drink what they considered greatest champagne in the world. And I can recall him just saying, "I'm a good boy." And he's well tanked. But, anyway, George and I and the two captains went up towards Bastogne. We saw this trace of fire again and clothes and spickets, and we said, "Well -- we're looking at a map --" this road is where we should turn to our left going southwest just before we got to Marlange, which was about 19 kilometers south of Bastogne. And the trace of fireworks still are visible to us. We were start swinging southwest on a curve in a road we were on. There was snow on the ground at that time in the moonlight. And as we rounded the curve, we were on a stretch maybe about 1500 yards -- 1500 yards -- no, 1500 feet, maybe -- maybe thousand feet, and we come across the bridge that we marked on our map, but as we approached this bridge, we were stopped. We went -- one weapons carrier, if I remember correctly, it was large enough for four. Well, it had gotten so cold, and I -- we'd been traveling all day to get into that area, and I had been one who was really adverse to cold weather, I had taken off my boots, and I had wrapped my feet in newspaper. And I wrapped both feet in a lot of newspaper, then I wrapped two blankets around each foot, because that was the only way to get warm. And the two officers got out and were met by the sergeant, and he was talking with them for -- our two officers -- for a long time, and finally I'm nudged by Sergeant Johnson and I said, "Look, find out what the story is," I said, "because we'd be sitting here all day." And Johnson went up and introduced himself, and this sergeant that was standing guard on this bridge, opened up. He said, "Well, sir, I tell two officers --" he said, "We have got a trap sitting back over there in the woods. And we've got several little small guns trained down this road, because according to our information no other Americans were able to get by and they were surrounded at Bastogne, and you were coming from the direction of Bastogne." He said, "Only reason we didn't shoot you all out when you came around the curve is because we felt we had no time if you got five or 600 yard -- five or 600 feet closer, that we can stop you and block up the roads. But we just waited since nothing was behind you until you got this close, but you still -- you came this close to being blown out. And then you reveal everything." But we found out after that that there was a great deal of confusion, and wherever a black American was visible, it sort of stabilized the confusion in that immediate short period of time. And I later found out that that -- in that whole area of operation there was another unit

commanded by a Morehouse graduate, who was at Morehouse when I was a senior in high school just across campus at Atlanta University Laboratory High School in 1941, and I had been on the news in Louisiana around Polk -- Camp Polk, and DeRidder, Louisiana, and we ran into this unit. It was an anti-tank company commanded by George Bubba Mitchell, and Mitchell was given a citation by this in the Stars and Stripes. And, again, the Army, I guess, they -- the guys of security or something -- sort of misrepresented a little bit. They did say -- they gave his name, and they gave his fact that he was a track star in college and had used that to a great deal to knock out four Panzer tanks with these 57-millimeter pee shooter. And the way they described him as having done it is to knock the tracks off. Because he couldn't stop the track with that big gun, he knocked the tracks off and immobilized them, run around the sides and plant chargers underneath. And his unit was mark in Luxembourg, Belgium area around Bastogne. And I talked with a person who was to have been at Bastogne, and I did not know until even in recent years that the airborne divisions had a black battalion of airborne paratroopers. And they were at the areA: And I have a copy of a book that was printed about black tank regiment that was at the lead of Patton's operations 76, the first tank graduate, which they lost about half of their men. And they actually had, as I remember reading this book, 33 battle stars, which is like more -- we only have three -- I only got three, but they supposedly had 33. And they printed this record on the journal printing press after we moved into Germany. And my -- at the time, my liberation -- they were asking my rank, my unit was, as I said, engineer combat battalion. We maintained bridges. I would drive over a corps area, and sometimes with a corps intelligence officer. I drove over to the area because on an occasion I was the only photographer available in the corps. And I took pictures of some citations of men in other units, because they couldn't get another photographer. And I developed a process for my film on the field in bags. And on one occasion, I did get into an engineer topographical unit in Bastogne, after activity had gone beyond Bastogne and started into Germany. And I was just a bug size, it has often occurred to me, and maybe I'm due some back pay, because I was supposed to be a technical sergeant, staff sergeant.

[Audio cut out.]

Q: The day you got into Buchenwald?

A: Right.

Q: And whatever you could recall about the condition of the prisoners, how they responded to you, identified the Russians as they turned out, who were not quite so bad off, and then the actual inmates of that prison, who really were in pretty bad shape.

A: Well, actually they wanted to let us see what had been done to them, the inmates at Buchenwald, that you go back and look, I did skirt around saying actually what happened

to some of the inmates. I know in northern Luxembourg, just before going into Germany, we had gotten some Christmas packages after the bulls were stopped and turned around. And we got a chess set, and I learned how to play chess. And when we got into Buchenwald, just a few weeks later, we saw some of those prisoners who were just seemingly, we thought in a trance, playing chess. And I later realized that they weren't in a trance, this was the only thing that blotted out everything around them. They were in a -- they was in another world, when you really develop and are capable of understanding it and playing it, but this is what some of them were doing with their body exposed and sores, just running out. And -- but some of the things they did -- we did see what has been referred to as quite often the Bitch of Buchenwald lamp shades. We saw some of the lamp shades that were made out of the human skins. From in the business -- we had tattoos -- and what she liked -- she thought it was cute to have a lamp shade made out of -- and we had, as I guess, as black Americans had known some things were considered inhuman. But I don't know if I've ever been -- well, I know I've never been exposed to anything like what we saw in Buchenwald. I've seen some photographs, again, and I say sometimes photographs can tell a story, but actually seeing something --

Q: You mentioned the children.

A: I ___ ___ that. I have photographs. As a matter of fact, I still have one or two that I took of some of the kids -- well, this is a picture I took of myself in Arlon, and this is a picture of some of the units that some of the people were staying at. And this is one picture of a line of people crying out. This is where some of the kids were.

Q: This is at Buchenwald?

A: All of these.

Q: Here are the GIs?

A: Right.

Q: The prisoners still in their striped --

A: Right.

Q: -- striped uniforms.

A: And this is a picture of an old high school classmate of mine. This is probably the principal of Atlanta Laboratory High School. He finished high school here in '41, and we ran into one another in Marlange. I often felt I was lucky to be back, because I was so happy to see him. And he had remained on the beach for two weeks, when he was just -- two weeks. He got off about a week or so after D-Day, and he said it took him about two weeks to get off the beach and most -- a number of his friends were killed because they jumped on silver mines and everything. And we had a reunion there. I took a picture of

him here with two young Belgium girls who were reluctant to get in the picture with him because -- they said, "Suppose the Germans come back again" -- because this was just after we had stopped them and turned around in Marlange.

Q: They were that afraid of the Germans and retaliation?

A: And they didn't want their picture.

Q: Did he survive the war?

A: Yes. He came home, and he wrote a book called Beaver Slide, and I know he's living in New York now.

Q: Is it about his experience?

A: It was a combination, I think more than just a war, it was about Atlanta, and I never saw the book. But he wrote it. He wrote it, and he told me about it.

Q: Beaver Slide?

A: Beaver Slide.

Q: And what was his name?

A: His name is William Albert Robinson, I call him War.

Q: That's an amazing photograph.

A: And I took this photograph.

Q: We'd love to put it on a slide, because I have another purpose coming here, to see if you would come on television and talk about Buchenwald and talk about your experiences.

A: This is one of the photographs that I was able to save here. Most of the photographs I had to turn in. As a matter of fact, I had to turn in all of the negatives, and my principle -- I had duplications on a rare occasion, but this is the box for my camera I used old 45 speed graph.

Q: That tells a story right there.

A: But, as I say, I just -- I don't know how you could explain Buchenwald except that this made me a little leery about rejecting any man based on credentials or based on familiar aspect or attire. In other words, I tried to write a little poetry in the direction of discouraging that area of clanism. We have this all over our society. In other words, I was at a school and our colors were maroon and white, when I'm talking about clanism, I'm talking about seeing c-l-a --

Q: Not the K?

A: Not the K clan. But I'm thinking in terms of what's going on in the island of Tibet or Spain, where you have really the same race, but they have various clans, and this has always been, you got your colors. And I've often said that during the 60s, I kind of got the feeling of what the individuals who were rejected by society, referred to as hippies, were trying to say. That they did not want any identity with anything, other than to just -- we are just a part of the total picture with no identity. And then they suddenly faded from this activity to the extent I felt that in their conscious, or if it was a conscious, that all of a sudden they had become a clan themselves. That they, in other words, they had to dress this way to look like the hippie, then you're not alone. Then you're another group. Then that failed again. So I don't know how you can get away from that, other than that maybe you don't emphasize it so much.

Q: What -- what did you think as you got into that Buchenwald camp? For example, you mentioned that there were so many Jews in there. Did they tell you --

A: Well, actually, yeah, we were told they were Jews were -- catch it, but --

Q: Did you realize there were other people in there too? A: No. This was the thing, we thought it was mostly Jews, when they told us these were German --

Q: Russian --

A: Russian prisons, but there were a few individuals. And I think this individual right here was a German criminal who had been imprisoned before in the mass inclusion of us. And so some of the -- the way we understood it, men like this, some of them had been allowed to have women put in the cells with them. And these women would be their play toys for a while, and then they would be taken out and killed and some others would be put in. Some of them -- I don't know about if this individual participated because the prisoners might have beaten him to death had he been one to participate in that activity.

Q: It's interesting that he only has a pair of shorts on.

A: He was in pretty good shape.

Q: A lot healthier than this type of person, who starved to death.

A: We saw several walking around like that, and they evidently had not stepped on anybody's toes, but these people who were survivors couldn't do much anyway. They were –

Q: Could you see that there was any feeling at all in their faces, or was that --

A: Well, they were -- there was emotion. It was emotion, and the kids were waving when they were walking. There was a line, they were waving because I was taking pictures and smiling, but the emotion was there, because they wanted us to see.

Q: What it was like.

A: I saw one display of some of the activities of the, you might say, the medical lab where a brain had been sliced. A man had been sliced down the middle. So his brain had been put face to the glass, so he can look into this crevasse. This whole thing in one piece, it was like taking a -- I don't know what type -- we were wondering what type of instrument they could have used to make a clean cut, seeing no raggedy edges. And you can just look right into the brain of the person that had been cut up. And I might as well sit and talk about some of the things. They took us into one of these barracks, just showing us something that was really more sadistic -- I won't call it sadistic because sadism is supposed to be the torture of a loved one. I don't know what kind of torture you call it. But the men were actually castrated, and their testicles were put into preservatives. And their names were put on and labeled and put on the shelf in the back, and it --

[Audio cut out.] ___ in Belgium, we went straight and a man's leg was practically severed by a 50 caliber machine gun off a plane, and I went in to take pictures of it. But I put my camera aside. I guess I really wasn't up to shooting those --

Q: -- those types of things. But you all had seen war, really. You had seen men killed and died, but, yet, when you got to this Buchenwald thing, it was different?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Did you see the crematorium? Did --

A: We saw the incinerators.

Q: Did you see the gallows?

A: No. Actually, I guess, after I went through the incinerators and the baths where they had some showers, they said this is where some of them were taken to die.

Q: Those were the gas chambers?

A: Well, showers. I guess, they converted them.

Q: They looked like showers?

A: They looked like showers.

Q: But you saw --

A: And I went back through to see some of the things I talked about. And then the fellows tried to get me to go where they had taken these two SS troops, and I said, "Well, I think this is my end. I'll just wait until we get ready to go."

[Audio cut out.]

Q: Other points, for example, did you see any other camps beside this one --

A: No, Buchenwald was the only one.

Q: You all moved on through. And did the men change? How many of them saw?

A: To tell the truth, I don't know whether we ever talked about it a lot.

Q: What was your reaction? What happened when you went back?

A: I don't know whether I really got as sick as some people might have gotten. I just don't know. I know -- I look back on it sometimes, I said, "I think I was stupid in some respects toward certain things like death, the face of it." But I know I ran across the look of the dead German soldier in the forest near there, and I could have been blown away, because there had been talk to us from training all the time about booby traps. As a matter of fact, we lost two officers who decided when we were in northern Luxembourg that they were going to pick up a German Riegel mine, and our unit was responsible for taking mines out of certain areas. But we were to use a particular mine disposal company, a platoon really. It was just a small unit, and these two officers wanted to demonstrate to themselves how intelligent they were, I guess, because they didn't -- they took this Riegel mine and put it back in the station wagon and took it to one of the sites, one of the companies, and we had been ordered not to pick up any mines anywhere, just blow them in place, if we couldn't get them to the special unit there. They were properly told to move on by the officer in charge of that particular site, that unit. And they moved to another site, and that officer told them to move on from that one. And the driver of the truck said when they moved on about 150 yards away, they told him to stop. And when they told him to stop, he got out and walked to the front of the vehicle, because he was aware of the danger too, and he got about 50 feet in front of the vehicle, and he heard the two officers talking, one said to the other, "Don't do that, because --" and the other one said, "Well, if I do, won't --" and that was all. They said both of them were blown, one of them beyond recognition. One didn't find much of his body, because it was a Riegel mine that was for tanks put in about 350. But now as far as the attitude, I went into the Army at age 20. And I -- I guess I have been familiar with the number of forms of discrimination that blacks were subjected to. I've lived all of my life in the south. I was born in Johnson City, Tennessee, but I moved to Atlanta in 1928 from Shreveport, LouisianA: And I can remember in my early days, I think I was even seven years old. I was slapped by a policeman. I can remember thinking that he did it for my own protection, because I was

running along the side of a truck that was throwing confetti out, and I thought it was candy. But when I got into this engineer combat battalion, we had a variety of quiet officers. And as I said -- say, our battalion commander was only 28, we had some that were 40. I guess a 40-year-old person to me looked like an old man. We had one -- we had three Jewish officers, and this is when I began to find out that they were subjected to discrimination, pressures, even in our own Army, even though I didn't know it at first. And it was three different types of individuals. Although, all Jews, one was a medical officer, and one was a company commander, one of the line companies, one was an intelligence officer in my section. I was in the S2 section of the company, and there were three different types of individuals. The S2 officer, was a real nice, easygoing, submissive person, and he was treated in a very disrespectful manner by his peers. And we often said that our peers would have to go fly a kite if they treated us the way he was treated. But he accepted it. And the line company officer would not have accepted it, if he didn't have to come into that type of situation, because he was responsible for the activities of the battalion. The other officer was a doctor. So they couldn't give him any fight because he was assertive --

Q: Medical --

A: -- in his own position. So I ran into three different types of persons in the same ethnic classification, and not until that Army experience, did I realize consciously, that I recall, in my life that they were subjected to pressure.

Q: The same discrimination, so much like --

A: Discrimination.

Q: -- when you came home?

A: When I found out that from a friend who had been in Atlanta until World War II. He had been in the service also, and he moved back to Atlanta from New York. And he eventually came to work with us. And we were just talking about various experiences, and he was telling me that I was just a little behind in my knowledge because he had finished high school here in Atlanta in 1926 or something, and had gone to NYU in New York. And he could recall that the American track team, which blitzed with Jesse Owens for the '36 Olympics, had two Jewish dash men that they would not allow to participate because the Germans didn't want them and they didn't allow them to participate. So we discriminated against Jews, and I didn't know it. He told me he knew it, and he knew the people that were on the team. And he -- well, it just reminded me of a lot of things that were going on, and, plus, I know that a lot of people don't remember that Germany, even though Owens was the big story, Germany won in 1936 Olympics for the country. And I can recall when we did go through Germany, we got all the way over -- my unit did -- finally, all the way past Nuremberg to Postbauer, which is south of Nuremberg really,

and -- before we turned around -- and the war was over. And we came back up to the industrial area around Dusseldorf, when we went into some of the homes of some of the German citizens, they were just reaching out, friendly. And a number of them, which surprised me, would pull out scrapbooks and programs from the 1936 Olympics. And I saw some of the most beautiful color photographs of Jesse Owens, and these books, they wanted me to see this, of Owens with other German track people and just letting me know that --

Q: He was there.

A: And he appeared in the particular prints that I saw, to be the center of attention of the German athletes, and there seemed to be a genuine show of respect for him, because, like I say, he had a fantastic fluid motion. And the other runners had been brave, but his motion was just fluid, just a technique.

Q: Do you think the German citizens knew about places like Buchenwald?

A: I don't know whether all of the citizens -- just like in this country, people still would not believe certain things were going on. I know when you say I talk about atrocities -- and we have reports just recently in the news of people – inhuman treatment of animals, but I have looked back through our newspaper files over the years. And I've even participated in some of the reports that we have where Roy Wilkins, as a youngster, in 1931 dressed in overalls and walked down the Mississippi levee investigating what was termed peonage conditions of farm workers in Mississippi. And some of the reports that he got out were not believed, even in this country, and sometimes people don't know. But it's hard to say. People sometimes tend to support ideas to -- or support individuals who would institute certain practices that they might not do themselves, but they might let somebody else do it. And I don't know whether they actually know it, but there's a sort of a sneaking suspicion sometimes that things are going wrong. I don't think that the Germans could do what they did without it being leaked out. Now, the Germans might not have believed it, just like we didn't believe it when we were going in, even though we had these pictures shown to us.

Q: Did they ever say where the pictures came from?

A: Yeah. I think we were told about some of the places, Auschwitz, all of the camps, but Buchenwald, I don't think we even heard much of it before we even got there. And this was to my way of thinking, when I look back on it -- I often think that Patton -- I saw the movie Patton, which I thought was a very powerful movie, but at the same time, looking at it from a black perspective, if you might allow this -- I saw that we were strangely absent and we were there. And I later found out that we were there more than I realized, and particularly after seeing the movie Patton, the fact that it was cut off. The movie did not go to what I call Patton's climatic experience. Patton was characterized as a sensitive

person, a man who did say at the end that he had lived 200 years too late, because war had become so horrible. It wasn't a Jones activity. In other words, to him, he would have liked to have lived in a time where war was almost a matter of honor, rather than a matter of just brutality, where -- possibly you might know the story of the French fighting the slaves in Haiti. According to the Haitian historians and some French, who were familiar with what happened, the French were just slaughtering their Haitians in the uprising. But the Haitians were so -- fighting so valiantly that they called a moratorium on it and gave the slaves battle field citations, because they didn't have any --

Q: Weapons.

A: And any formality for citing themselves. So the French say that these men are fighting so valiantly, we'll have to cite them for bravery. And then when they did it, the slaves realized that they were being stupid to be chopped up like they were. And they spotted the -- did a little reconnaissance work while they were being cited, and they blew up the French ammunition supply and then sort of incapacitated them because they were outnumbered. But getting back to --

Q: Patton.

A: Patton's experience, you never heard from Patton after that. He passed by our unit periodically. As you saw, he'd go and visit all of these companies.

Q: All white --

A: What -- he would have a Jeep in front and a Jeep in the rear. And he was in the middle Jeep. When he passed by you a few times in Luxembourg and Belgium, he'd pause just to let you know he was on the scene. After Buchenwald, you never heard from Patton anymore, to my knowledge, until he died. And it just ran through my mind, and I think that as through others, that maybe he just allowed himself to die. I don't want to say he committed suicide, but he might not have gotten out of the way of a truck or something. In the movie it tends to give the idea -- I didn't see this particular -- he was the target of an assassin.

Q: That was made up.

A: I don't know. You just don't know, because --

Q: He was something else.

A: Yeah, because, actually, I look at -- I was down in Merced -- never did get through telling about my battalion commander wanting to be general in the next war. We were taken back up or given orders to go to the Dusseldorf area in an apparent occupational capacity. But after two weeks there our battalion commander said we were moving out. And we were -- find ourself in a convoy to Merced. And the war was still going on. We

got to Merced. We get the scuttlebutt from our driver again that we were down in Merced without orders, because how the commander wanted to get into the action in the Pacific, and he didn't want to be hamstrung with an occupation. So this time he ran a file to the command, they said, "Okay, no orders." We just bust this outfit up, and I ended up with a unit -- a different unit called a 1333rd Engineer Regimen going to the Pacific on their way to Panama Canal. About half the men in my unit ended up coming back to the states. Well, I got on a boat, another big boat, 6 -- over 600 people on it, I think it was the U.S.S. Grant, originally the cruise ship of the Constitution -- or the Constellation, and we had 8,000 on that ship. And it ended up going through the Panama Canal, and we were about two weeks out of the Panama Canal when the first atomic bomb was dropped. So we were kind of happy, because we already considered we were on our way for the invasion of Japan, because they piled 2,000 troops on this ship and we were unescorted. We were traveling at a max, we understood, could get up to 32 knots, and we zigzagged on out. After the second atomic bomb was dropped, we were almost sure we were going back to the United States, and we didn't. And we ended up anchored at Enewetak group on Yap Island group on a little island called Maug Maug, which was a recreational island. And we were allowed to get off the boat once a week to go ashore on this recreational island, which had nothing but Coca-Cola stacked up and beer stacked up around a baseball diamond. It was just that large, and we understood that there had been about less than 100 natives on that island that had been taken off and placed elsewhere. And this was to be used as a recreational island for the U.S. Armed Forces. And we anchor off that island for 22 days. And I was on that boat for a total of 65 days. And I stood up to eat three meals a day. And I swore I'd never do it again in my life. But one of the things that -- while we were anchored off that island for 22 days, some men were just stir crazy.

Q: Yeah, because the war had ended.

A: And they didn't want to do anything. So I was lucky enough to get off the boat every day, and I was also lucky that I learned to play chess. And I was enthusiastic about it. In over 8,000 troops about 100 of them played chess all day, every day. So I was beaten across the Atlantic into the middle of the Pacific before I started winning, and I was able to win a few after a while.

Q: That's a marvelous story to let your mind -- you had brought out some other units.

A: No. This is nothing, but some of the material I had with this -- these are some photo prints of paintings. I actually got into painting, and –

Q: These are your paintings?

A: Yeah, I had planned to --

Q: How old were you?

A: I did these in -- I was 30. I had two children, and my children were becoming finger painters, and I wanted to show them the difference between finger painting and oil colors. So I got me a canvas and started painting, and it was sort of a spontaneous painting in that respect. But at the same time, I had taken art in elementary school and in high school from a man who later -- who was also an art teacher and painter himself at Atlanta University and ended up in NYU in the village for 30 years and one of the most prolific painters. I was familiar with it to a degree. This was one of them I call, "Gifts for a Friend." I started out with some other idea before I finally ended up with that. And all of these were painted in a moment of hot weather, and I had arts festivals for the first five years out there. That was called "Informal" or "Without Formality." And some other people call it "People Charming," and that's "Despair."

Q: Isn't that something.

A: That's -- this is "Man Without Hate," I call that one there.

Q: Isn't that something.

A: And some of these are 16 --

Q: Do you still paint?

A: I haven't painted since the '60s. And that was "The Man with the Green Eyes." Actually that particular picture is a blow-up of another painting that I did, "Mankind Being Engulfed in an Atom Cloud." I had three or four little faces like that. I had to pull one out, and then I said, "I paint a larger."

Q: Just seeing --

A: And that sort of came --

Q: Did you think then that these atomic explosions wouldn't bring an end to the world?

A: No. I never have. I don't know -- I don't know whether I thought it, because I -- I'm science oriented in my attitude, and to tell the truth, when you talk about nuclear power today, you consider it to be a little -- if you pull nuclear power, a lot of people want to say that this is always a war connotation, but I'm for it from a point -- I call that one "Despair," he's reaching out for it, but he's bending away from it. In other words, he's aiming for it hard, and he's reaching for it, but he's rejecting it. He's bending back.

Q: And the black background?

A: Well, that's sort of --

Q: Those are really --

A: Containment, because I had one that I didn't find, it was called "A Victim in the Victim." They're both contained in a -- they're both encased in the same cocoon. The victim and the victim.

Q: This is one of the things we've had people tell us about guards in the prison camps, that they were trapped. In the sense, when we say that the victims were dehumanized, it was really the guards and the people who did these awful things who were not human.

A: That's why -- I've had some experiences with MPs in the Army.

Q: Or even segregation and brutality in our own society.

A: Right. I call that one "Introvert."

Q: I like that.

A: There's one more. That one is one -- I call that one "Frustration Rebuffed." I wasn't able to give the -- that's one of the last ones I painted, about third attempt at painting an idea, an individual realizing his beginning, life is a struggle, and end results. Of course, this is nothing unique.

Q: But you've got the -- the thought is there. It's interesting. These are amazing. Have you kept your paintings?

A: I think I have most of them. They weren't very good paintings from the point of view of quality of life. I didn't wax them or varnish them as I should have. And that one is "Prelude." I just call it "Prelude."

Q: Isn't that amazing.

A: And that was "Plea to the Eternal," "Plea to the Eternal" it goes, but I've even written a little poetry. I know that I suggested in that -- in my "Plea to the Eternal" I approach not as an unborn, but as a son, which has a slightly different meaning. This one is one of the last ones I painted. I was beginning to get away from my intensity. That one I call "Yellowstone."

Q: Is that a bear?

A: Yeah. Have you ever been through Yellowstone?

Q: I've flown over it, but I've never been down into it.

A: I tell you a million of them down there. And these colors are --

Q: Are the --

A: The colors are -- if you see the springs, the warm water.

Q: But did Buchenwald have anything at all to do with your paintings?

A: I don't know if I was thinking about Buchenwald that much, but it has to have impact in some respects that you're going through that areA:

Q: That experience.

A: Yeah, but some of these ideas I had been trying to get a friend of mine to paint, because he had technique, talent.

Q: To capture --

A: But I wanted to have -- I had the idea, the words, but if I were doing it daily, I think I couldn't given justice to the ideas.

Q: Well, let me go to this business about our television show, because there really is an effort to let you say what you want to during that. It's only 27 minutes. It's just a regular half hour show, but I was wondering, maybe, if we brought these on at the end of it at least, or someplace, and if you had a pool you wanted to, because you, as a human being, is really what the story is. And your experience in the war and at Buchenwald is a universal thing that we share, but this is universal too. It's purely at your option, but I do think these are extremely interesting to -- in fact, if I had time, I'd love to sit down and just discuss the '60s with you and the kinds of travail and anxiety and stress that were coming through.

A: These were painted from '55 to '60. I started in '54, maybe, with this one. This one, "Man Without Hate," and then I think I came up with --

Q: These really are interesting.

A: Those were a little early too. I have two others, one I call "Infinite Between and the Inner Cycle."

Q: Well --

A: And I could give an appendage. We have other individuals here in AtlantA: I told you I was at Tuskegee. I'm a member of a group called the Tuskegee Airmen, which has a local chapter.

Q: You know, there's a book out.

A: Yes, I have a copy of it. As a matter of fact, I'm selling them.

Q: I just ordered one. Oh, you are.

A: Called "The Lonely Eagles."

Q: I got this one from the military book club.

A: Oh, yeah, an officer.

Q: Four months ago.

A: An officer wrote one on the black pilots, but I have one written by the Tuskegee Airmen themselves. As a matter of fact, I was looking for that to bring to let you see, because the 99 Pursuit Squadron and 332nd have a reputation and a record that no other pursuit squad had in the world. They never lost a plane to any of the fighter pilots. They escorted, and they were given a Presidential citation in '45, near the end of the war.

Q: Well, they also did such things as flying off that Angio Beach end, I think it was the 99th that was assigned to fly off that beach end, which was unbelievable.

A: Actually, they train on a field similar to that in Tuskegee. They had a little small dirt field.

Q: Just to get out of it.

A: And they used to do this in their training, take off in an old P47, lift the pressure on the wheel, dip one wing to the left and let one wheel come up and dip the other wheel and let the other wheel come off the ground. And that was one of their practices. One or two of them were killed in training, but as I say, they did graduate 995 pilots.

Q: I'd love to order a copy.

A: All right. Well, I have several more left. As a matter of fact, I had been keeping them in my car. I'll look in my car, and see if I have one this morning.

Q: Could we copy these photographs?

A: I can copy them and let you have copies.

Q: That would be great, because we'll also put them on slides, and if you will come on, we'll have the slide show.

A: Do you have a photo unit at your school?

Q: We use the medical school's X-ray equipment. It works. We have students who --

A: I was in the photo lab.

Q: And also that picture of you, because I think that's a -- that's an excellent -- if we can -- if we can get that to come out, to get a photograph of you, to let people see your own growth and your own change and how you were that long ago, but I think that --

A: Well, actually I did -- I don't –

Q: Well, we're --

A: 147 pounds --

Q: We're going to tape the first shows on the 23rd of April of this month at night over at Channel 5. They're doing all of our -- they're giving us professional -- professional quality support. So if it were possible for you to come over --

A: All right.

Q: -- that evening -- if not, I can give you a later date, because we're going to do two shows a night for four different evenings about two weeks apart.

A: April the 23rd, that's Monday night.

Q: Yes, sir.

A: That will be all right. I think so.

Q: I'll write you a note, and then if we can pick up these copies, I'd go ahead and have --

A: The slides.

Q: -- the slides made. So that's the best way to get them on the television screen.

A: Right.

Q: And we'll just show them on a television screen, and then you can explain or describe in whatever order you want to. But I do think –

Conclusion of Interview