TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH BERT WESTON

INTERVIEWER: Lorrie Hall 3/10/79
CAMP: Ebensee

Q. Your name?

A. Bert Weston.

Q. And your address?

A. 4310 Conway Valley Court, N. W., Atlanta, Ga., 30327.

Q. And the date of yur birth?

A. May 9, 1919.

Q. And your age at the time of the experience we are going to talk about?

A. 25.

Q. Atthe beginning of the war, what were your occupational plans?

A. Probably, to....upon getting out of service?

Q. Yes, what did you plan to do when you got out?

A. Well, I really didn't know what I was going to do. I was thinking about going back to college and studying medicine or else going to work for a department store, which I ended up doing.

Q. Okay. Is that what you are doing presently?

A. No. I'm a manufacturer's representative of men's apparel.

Q. What was your military unit?

A. 30th Field Hospital, during this experience/ The Third Army, 20th Corp.

Q. And your rank at the time of this experience?

A. First Lieutenant.

Q. Which Camp are your going to tell me about?

A. Ebensee in Austria.

Q. When did you first hear about the concentration camps?

A. I heard about the concentration camps when I was a senior at New York University majoring in Political Science and we took a course called Hitler's Germany. That's when I first heard about it. Principally, from a book by Lowenstein, called Hitler's Germany.

Q. Did you know ahead of coming to Ebensee that you were coming to this Camp or did you just stumble on it?

A. We found out the day before that there was an Ebensee and that our outfit was scheduled to take over the medical facilities.

Q. What did you expect to see there? What were your expectations before you got there?

A. We really didn't know - we had heard that, prior to that date, the 80th Infantry Division had overrun...it wasn't Dachau...it was another infamous camp in Europe, and that General Patton was so taken by the conditions in the Camp that he made the entire 80th Infantry Division go through the Camp on foot. I have it written down if you are interested - the name of the Camp is written down inside. And that's when we heard stories. Word got back to us that the 80th Infantry Division had gone through one of the first concentration camps liberated. It was probably the first that had been liberated. It was liberated by the Third Army, not too far from where we were. And General Patton had the 80th Infantry Division go through on foot, just to see what they were fighting for...one of the things they were fighting for. And word got back that this had happened and we started to hear about concentration camps. And when we heard...we didn't know where we were going on May 7th, but on May 8th, we were ordered to go over to Ebensee, Austria. From whereever we were in Europe; we were very far North of there and we were diverted. Our entire Unit was diverted to head South. We spent the whole day - V-E Day - going down to Ebensee and we didn't know what we were going to see when we got there.

Q. And you didn't know what to expect even though you had had a course in.....

A. Nobody knew what was going on inside the camps.

Q. Did any stories get back to you about this other camp?

A. No. Not that I can remember.

Q. Well, of course, it's a long time ago. Do you remember anything about the mood of your Unit as you approached the Camp?

A. Uh, well...what happened was that I was the Detachment Commander and Adjutant; we had a Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Francis R. Sandford of New Jersey, an M. D., who had taken over about a week before from our previous Commanding Officer. He and I, and another Jeep, were in the lead of our convoy. We got to the town of Ebensee first. We went straight out...we made the mistake of going straight out to the concentration camp after

we hit the town. It was on the other side of the town.

Q. What do you mean mistake?

A. Well, because of what we saw. We weren't prepared for what we were going to see there. And we got in there and we walked into the first barracks and it was just awful. The odor is still with me today. The Colonel was infuriated - a Gentile, Col. Sanford. Major Siegel was our Executive Officer. We went through there. The Colonel was so infuriated that we left the Camp and went to the burgomaster's office in the town - the mayor, the local mayor. And he demanded personnel to come out to the Camp and do menial labor to clean it up. He demanded certain concessions for the Camp - he even saw a beautiful radio sitting on the burgomaster's desk and he told him that he'd be very happy to donate this to the Camp, won't he? The burgomaster very timorously said, "Yes, I will." We took the radio back with us and went back to the Camp and started to organize things.

Q. Were you the first Americans into the Camp?

A. No. It had been liberated the day before.

Q. The day before -- okay.

A. Which was very, very fresh because the liberating toops had, uh.....they didn't know what to do. I mean there was no set operating procedures for what to do when you take over a concentration camp.

Q. This wasn't in the manual.

A. Right. It was just raw...very raw experience.

Q. What did you all do?

A. Well, we went out to the Camp. The first thing we did, we started - we had a portable shower unit. What did we do for service for these people?

Q. You tell it in your way.

A. Well, the first thing we did was we went into the barracks and we saw there bunks - double tiers of wooden bunks and everybody was lying in bed. There were a few guys straying around outside - you know - who were the big machars; they, all of a sudden, became machars. Somebody had to take charge, you know, so the self-appointed guys made themselves leaders to escort us. They took us into one of the biggest barracks. There were about

thirty-six inmates - 36,000 inmates at Ebensee. And we walked into one of the big barracks and.....

Q. 36,000, you said?

A. Yeah, 36,000. And everybody was moaning and groaning and they were so happy to see us and their arms were going up toward us. And there was one bunk there and there were two men lying there and one of them was dead. And, of course, uh, we took pictures all across Europe; our outfit had been in the Pacific first. We were in the Aliutian Islands in the invasion of Kiska and then we went back to the States and over to England and through Europe. We were all pretty hardened guys. We were always taking pictures of everyone... so here come the cameras and right along there was a picture taken of the guy lying along side of the dead man. And all the smell of the Turkish tobacco and the smell of, the stench of everything mixed together.....to this day, I can recreate that odor in my own mind. If there is such a thing as being able to recall an odor, I can do it....just the odor of that barracks. So, we started talking to people and we found that one of the inmates was a doctor, who was in charge - was a superintendent of one of the largest hospitals in Paris - a Jewish doctor, who had been an inmate at Ebensee. We made plans to clean up the place and.....(Pause).....let's see - the next day we brought in our portable shower units, which is part of the table of equipment for every portable field hospital. We were a highly mobile outfit. And we set up the portable shower units and attached them to the big water tanks that roll along with us in the convoy - and we started giving them all showers; all that we could, the ones that we were able to. And, uh..

Q. Why were you not able to do some of them? The numbers?

A. Yeah, there were so many of them and we only had about eight showerheads. They would stand in the shower for quite a while and then we had to reheat the water and all; and one man died from the shock of the shower - or else he would have died anyhow, I don't know, but that's how I recall it. And we walked through the crematorium. We were taken through the crematoriums - and one of the attendants of the crematorium swore to us that he had seen several bodies put in there alive. We looked in the crematorium and there were piles of ashes and bones inside the crematoriums. And outside of the crematoriums, the

bodies were stacked like firewood -- like hides and carcasses you see hanging of half a cow in a butcher shop - the spine, you could count every vertebra in the spine and every rib and these were the dead, but the living looked exactly like them. The living that were walking around were so gaunt; their heads were shaven; they had sores on their bodies. Some were walking around naked in a daze; others had blankets wrapped around them held together by a belt and their facial features were normal size, but everything else was completely out of proportion. Of course, everybody was thrilled to see us. Within the next few days, an American Public Relations movie team came in to take movies of the Camp. We tested everybody in the Camp for tuberculosis. I think 98% of them, as I recall, had symptoms of tuberculosis. General Patton found out about the Camp and he set up a German atrocity cemetery outside the city of Ebensee. He had every citizen of Ebensee dig a grave and furnish a sheet to bury a body in and the third condition was that a tremendous sign be put up at the entrance to the cemetery, to be headed "German Atrocity Cemetery." And this was done and we started taking pictures and then I started to collect all these pictures. No, I didn't collect any pictures at all. We took over - we found a photography shop in downtown Ebensee and we went in there and we started looking over the books and the guy had been a Nazi. He had torn pages out of the book and had torn out entries of famous German generals, gestapo, and people like that - SS that he had taken pictures of. It infuriated us that he was altering his records and we kicked him out of the shop and we took over his facilities and General Patton's headquarters found out about the pictures we were taking and he ordered 5,000 prints made of the pictures we were taking. I used the Colonel's Practiflex camera and I took most of the pictures myself and we made 5,000 copies for Gen. Patton's public relations department.

Q. Do you know what ultimately became of those pictures?

A. I have a set of prints, but what ultimately.....every man in the outfit had a set of prints because, in addition to Patton's prints, every guy in the outfit wanted them. We had about 250 men. They all took them home with them; they all took them back to Paris when they went on furlough; I took a set back to England and people couldn't believe it. They said it's propaganda. The GIs who went back to Paris had the same experience...they

said people didn't believe them - that this had happened. So we stayed up two nights and three full days making the prints. Whatever happened to them I don't know. Whether they everyappeared in any archives or whether they have them now in Washington, I don't know. We turned them over to Third Army Headquarters, which we were in constant contact with through the entire war, because we were a unit of Third Army. And, uh...let's see - there was a tremendous empty swimming pool in this place, where all this old clothing was thrown into.

Q. At the Camp?

A. At the Camp. But we set up the medical service for the Camp and the sanitation of the Camp under the direction of the man who had been the superintendent of this very large hospital in Paris. We were told that it was one of the largest hospitals in Paris.

Q. He was one of the inmates.

A. Yes, he was one of the inmates; he was interred during the war and thrown into a concentration camp. He told us that the dysentery during the war in that Camp had been horrible. We asked him what did you use to treat the dysentery and he said we had nothing to fight it with. He took a box off the shelf - this apfelfulger in German, this apfelfulger. I said, " "What is that?" He said,"It's apple powder. It's a powder made out of apples." That's all they used to fight it. Well, Ebensee --- most people have never heard of Ebensee. I figure take it you've never heard of Ebensee. Ebensee was one of the most infamous camps of all - not from the standpoint of the atrocities and the gas chambers, because I don't think there were gas chambers at Ebensee - they used crematoriums. But from the standpoint of the labor that they exacted out of the inmates. They worked in the salt mines. You've heard the expression: Back to the salt mines. Well, they worked in the salt mines until they dropped is what they told us. If you were sick or if you were crippled, it was no excuse. They would go out every morning and put in a full day in the salt mines until they dropped - and it was a horrible experience, too. But, as far as the impact on the young GI mind and on my mind at the time, we were infuriated initially and then it was just work. We had a lot of work to do there. We didn't live at the Concentration Camp. We took over public buildings in town and used them as billets. And in the

evenings, after the day's work, we played ball and the guys went out with girls and had fun. They were regular American boys - there was no actual crushing impact on the mind of the American soldier except that the memory would always live with them. If we had been fully indoctrinated before the war as to what was going on, I imagine the war would have ended sooner, but the experience at Ebensee at the time.....the inmates all started to leave the Camp and float around town, which was what we didn't want them to do. We were losing control. Some of them would get out on the highways and start hiking and drop dead along side of the road from exhaustion and malnutrition. Their bodies couldn't handle the shock or the trauma - and some of them went to work for us in the kitchen. I have a picture of four guys that I adopted and we fed them and clothed them in GI clothing and brought them back into very healthy human beings.

Q. How long did this take?

A. It took about a month.

Q. How long were you at Ebensee?

A. We were in Ebensee from May to....I think we were in Ebensee about two months. At the same time, we splintered off into a little separate group that I went with to go to the (?)St Noibau - Hausching Air Base in Lindz, Austria, which was a German POW detention center. It was not displaced persons; it was German military. And a typhus control team came from Washington to check for typhus - they didn't find any, but we found a lot of TB at Ebensee. So we stayed there about two months and then we went on to other areas, displaced persons camps. But, we saw...I got up one morning and left my room and went outside and here comes a Jeep. I don't know where these displaced persons from the Camp got this Jeep, but they came roaring up to me and draped across the hood of the Jeep was the body of a man. This had been one of the guards at the Camp and they found him hiding in the town. We had to control these guys because they would go wild looking for former guards and SS men who were in the Camp. We had a few German military - I'd say maybe two or three German military xxxxx stayed at the Camp, but these were good guys like medical men. But all the guards - they left, you know, before the Camp was liberated. They beat it and some of them were hiding in the town. This one particular guy - a

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couple of the inmates found. And that's the overall experience that I can remember.... the pictures, the initial impact of going into that first barracks, and then the crematoriums. We looked on those bodies very impassively...they were stacking on the carts... they were stacked outside the crematorium to be burned...but, of course, we took them and we...they were all going out to the new cemetery. We had a Catholic chaplin, Chaplain O'Hearn. They uncovered a grave with 1,700 bodies in it...they had just been dumped. I think it was within the confines of the Concentration Camp. I'm not sure, but they dug up a mass grave with 1,700 bodies and Chaplain O'Hearn wanted to inter - I guess that's the word - exhume, exhume each body and give them a military funeral and rebury them. We had to talk him out of it. I don't know what they did with the mass grave. My memory is too vague - whether they left them in the mass grave or took them out and buried each one individually or in a sanitary mass grave, I don't know. But that was one of the experiences. (Pause) I don't know if anyone is interested in my pictures. I've shown them over the past - how many years has it been now - 45, 33 years? 34 years? I guess around a dozen people have seen those pictures. I just keep them here...I did show them to a few people while the Holocaust was on TV.

Q. But that's very recently. And all this time they have just stayed put away.

A. My family has seen them.

Q. You've talked with your family about this?

A. Oh, yeah -- you know, nobody wants to hear war stories. (laughs) They shut me up whenever I start my war stories.

Q. Right after the war was over...did you write about this experience? Or at that point in time, were you writing home about it? Were you telling people about it?

A. I wrote to my former wife about it in detail. I might have written to my father and mother about it. My father, I think, has kept every letter I ever wrote him. He might still have the letters. The day by day experiences I recorded somewhere...I don't know. I know the letters I wrote to my first wife were destroyed...but the letters I wrote to my father - he's going to be 89 - he might still have them stashed away somewhere.

Q. Well, if you have pictures you would like to share with us that we can copy and return

the originals to you - and the same with letters - we would like to be able to copy these materials. If you choose to share them, we will return them to you. But, yes, we are interested.

A. I think the world ought to see my pictures.

Q. Tell me why. I agree with you, but tell me why.

A. I think they ought to know what a human being is capable of doing to another human being so that they can keep people like that in check in the future.....The crazies who say that you have got to have a Hitler every generation. I think that guys that come out and say things like that - I think people ought to realize why they shouldn't say things like that and why it can never happen again.

Q. You said that you tried to talk about it and that people didn't want to listen; they didn't want to hear war stories. Was this pretty much your own family?

A. They get tired of it.

Q. And this was pretty much your experience until recently with the Holocaust show?

A. Oh, I can talk to other GIs and we never stop talking. I mean we get together over a beer or something...

Q. Tell me about that.

A. They want to know all about it. What outfit were you in; where did you go? You know, I even ask guys, friends of mine, who were wounded...I've run across friends of mine who were taken care of by my own field hospital over there. I never knew them, but when GIs get together - ex-soldiers get together - it's a little corner of their life that's private and the only time they can share is with somebody else who has had the same experience. You see, I was in a shooting war....I was in two different theatres of war. I was the highest ranking first lieutenant in the entire European theatre of operations. I had 52 months in grade as a first lieutenant because every month overseas counted time and a half. I didn't get a promotion because I wanted to stay with the mobile field hospital; I wanted to stay in the field. I could have transferred to a general hospital or an evacuation hospital 30 or 40 miles back, but I wanted to stay in the front line field hospital. Gen. Patton used the 30th Field Hospital as an experimental unit; he wanted to prove that

definitive surgery could be performed, under fire, on the front lines and he used the 30th Field Hospital to prove that point. We were a very highly mobile unit. We'd stay in a spot and take care of casualties; we'd leave all of our equipment, get fresh equipment and jump to another spot; then a holding unit would come in and take care of our patients and our equipment. And we kept jumping around doing definitive surgery on the front line...and we talk about these experiences when we're together. But, I was not a combat soldier - we were armed - the 30th Field Hospital was the first medical unit to ever be armed by an official act of Congress. When we went into the invasion of Kiska, every man in our outfit was armed. It had never happened before in medical history because of the atrocities that were committed by the Japanese on the Island of Hattu. They overran a medical unit and slaughtered all the doctors and nurses and patients and everybody in their sleeping bags...and they couldn't fight back. But, having been in a shooting war, I want to share experiences with other people...but the only people who are really interested are other GIs, who had the same experiences. You get together and shoot the bull and you talk about it. Other people can't comprehend what it was. What I started to say was I was in a shooting war in two theatres of operations, but it was not a horrible experience. Outside of the times when you had to dodge buzz bombs and shelling and take cover, it was a very happy experience of my life - the comaraderie of my fellow enlisted men and officers. The idea of traveling around the world and, you know, being greeted by the liberated.....it was not a horrible experience; I don't look upon the war as a horrible experience. It was a happy time of my life. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed soldiering. I loved it - I loved the uniform. I was very patriotic. My father used to send my letters to the daily newspaper in Mt. Vernon, New York to be published. So I was a patriotic guy out there fighting for my country and the traumatic experience of the camp, uh, it didn't....I wasn't left with anything traumatic. It did not alter my life or change my feeling of being a Jew any. I was always Jewish, I was born Jewish. It was a terrible thing Hitler did to the Jewish people, but, outside of the first instant of coming away fighting mad from the concentration camp, we went about out daily duties and we remained good ole American boys.

Q. Did you or any of the men in your unit talk about having any nightmares from this experience?

A.. Having nightmares?

Q. Yes. Do you recall any of that ?

A. Have I ever had any nightmares?

Q. Yes.

A. I can't say that I have.

Q. Or any of the men in your unit...did anyone ever say anything about that?

A. I don't remember anyone ever having any nightmares about it. You know, we'd seen dead bodies; we've seen guys just blown apart from the shells and everything. We were medics. Now other people...I don't know if I'm the first medic you've ever interviewed...well, it's a little different being in a medical outfit where you're accustomed to seeing blood and guys brought it...you know. People talk about - you read a paper about a war and people say "so many casualties today - there were fifteen casualties on the beachhead." Casualties - a casualty people think is a guy got a bullet in his leg. So he's in a hospital bed with a nice bandage on his leg. They don't know what a German 88 shell can do to a guy's leg. They have no concept of what it means for the human body to be torn apart or the miracle of modern medicine to be able to cope with that situation of a human body and to make it whole again, to treat it - to operate on somebody in that condition. But, I had no nightmares...just every once in a while being able to ....whenever somebody smokes one of those lousy European cigarettes, I can associate the smell again. I can...I can...

Q. It brings it all back.

A. I know the smell of it...it was, it was an awful odor.

Q. You've told me a lot. I want to look at some of my questions to see if there are some things we want to pick up on that we have missed. How...while you were at the camp, how did you see your unit treating the survivors? How did they react to them?

A. They were very gentle with them and the ones that needed medical attention, that were feeble and, uh, they were very sympathetic; the American boy is very compassionate, very

warm, very friendly, and tried to make them feel good, as I can recall.

Q. What were your own feelings toward these survivors that you saw in the Camp?

A. Pity them, I really did. It was a terrible thing. Of course, I had known before I went in there that my mother's mother's (my grandmother) side of the family, I had lost several relatives in Poland in concentration camps. I knew that before I went in. I think they were lost early...in the early forties, when they first overran Poland. I had so many cousins and uncles. You know, people I had never known. But I pitied them and felt sorry for them. There were no shows of any great bravado on the part of the inmates. Most of them were in a daze. Some of them were as normal as you or I - they were able to talk coherently and talk to you, but the overall atmosphere of the camp was one of.....I don't know.....they were.....deprived of everything; their clothing, their health, their means to survival. They were completely helpless. They had to be fed, clothed, and treated for their illnesses, their sores - their bodies had to be built back. They all suffered terrible malnutrition. Some of them were, "Hi, buddy, you got a cigarette? Hello, Joe, you got a cigarette?" -- and they were happy. But the most of them were a lost, lost group of people.

Q. Did the kind of physical condition they were in make it difficult for you to think of them as human beings?

A. The real bad ones, I would say it tended to have that effect on you - the others you looked on as poor European civilians, who had gotten caught up in this thing. But, no, they were always looked on as human beings - I would say by me, anyhow. Now some of these farm boys from Nebraska in our outfit, I don't know. We didn't talk about it. I mean, you know, they....

Q. You and the men really didn't talk about this?

A. Not that I recall.

Q. From what you can recall.

A. All that I can recall. I don't remember getting back into the town at night - because we stayed out. I don't know what happened at night. I don't recall that we left anybody out there at night. We might have left medical orderlies out there at night. But we came back into town at night and sat down at the dinner table and damned if I

know what we talked about. We usually had a softball game out in one of the fields and then we went to a local movie run by the Germans. Guys went scrounging around. We took over the beer hall and we drank that warm German beer, but I don't remember ever sitting down with another guy - I guess the officers did - we talked about it, how horrible it was. Some of the nurses played cards at night. But actually sitting down and saying, "Gee, isn't that awful - what's gone on out there." I don't know if we ever actually said that...if we had the depth of character to really try to analyze at that time what was going on. Maybe it was just another war experience. Like we'd see groups of Prisoners of War walking along toward the rear on the highway and they looked awful; they were all covered with dust and they were, you know, down in the mouth. Some of them were happy their war was over, but the overall reaction...I just don't think we knew at the time....I guess one of the things Dr. Crawford is trying to find out was what was the overall impact of this on the American liberator. And I'm not going to be much help to him, because I don't really think that, at the time, it just didn't sink in other than its military aspect. That here was a group of people that had been taken over by the lousy Germans, that Hitler had done this to these people and this was part of the war. Here's your military prisoners, your American prisoners, here's your German prisoners, here's your concentration camps, there's the air force up there bombing and strafing everything, there's the artillery over there - it's all part of the war; another little piece of the war. This was part of World War II. This is what had been going on in Germany, in Europe, all these years before we got there. And then, after the war was over and we started reading about it and they started writing books about the Warsaw Ghetto and things like that -- then, it started to sink in. Mila 18, things like that - when you start to read about this stuff.....(pause).....that's when...and then I married a Methodist girl, my second marriage, and she converted to Judaism - not formally, but she became a very good Jew and I was a born Jew, but I had never studied Judaism. I was Bar Mitzvahed and never knew what it was all about until my wife started to study Judaism and she started to try to make a good Jew out of me. But my experiences had no impact upon my Jewish consciousness, except anger.

Q. Anger about what?

A. About what Hitler had done to my fellow man. Not all of them were Jewish, but some tremendous majority was Jewish.

Q. Because they were Jews or because they were people? So you're using your "fellow man" meaning mankind, or meaning fellow Jewish...

A. Mankind -- done to mankind.

Q. Did you consider yourself a religious person back then?

A. No.

Q. Do you consider yourself a religious person now? Your own definition.

A. Not organized religious. I am a religious person, yes. I am a religious person; I always have been. I was a religious person then. I walk with God in my own way, but as far as organized religion, I turned against it a few years ago. At that time, my father was a member of the synagogue and we all went on the holidays and that was it. I was Bar Mitzvahed, I took Hebrew lessons from the age of seven with a private tutor. I don't know what your definition is of a religious person. I don't know whether I would be considered a religious person by some people.

Q. I was using your definition. I said according to your definition and you answered that very adequately. Did you -- do you recall any conscious thoughts about God or about religion while you were at the Camp?

A. I prayed every day while I was in the service. I carried a Sefer Torah in my pocket all through the war and I carried a mezzuzah in my pocket all through the war.

Q. Mr. Weston, you started out saying you didn't consider yourself a religious person.

A. Well, that maight have been....I was not a religious person as far as organized religion was concerned.

Q. Okay, then it was a matter of definition.

A. As far as following the ritual and things like that were concerned.

Q. And yet you carried the Sefer Torah?

A. I carried a Sefer Torah and I carried a mezzuzah. The Sefer Torah was given to me by a friend of the family before I was going off to war. As I walked through Grand Central

Station to go out to Camp in N.Y., an old uncle, my father's oldest brother, slapped a little tiny, brass mezzuzah in my hand...as I went up the ramp in Grand Central Station. I carry that to this day. But, I don't consider myself religious in that sense.

Q. I had asked if you recall any conscious thoughts about God or religion at the Camp, or any thoughts you may have considered irreligious when you saw these people.

A. No, I didn't turn against God because of what Hitler had done to the six million Jews or the other people in Europe. They never talk about anything besides the six million Jews, but there were an awful lot of Gentiles killed, too.

Q. About seven million, I think. I've forgotten whether it's five or seven.

A. Yeah - the people knew the statistics about the Russians that had been killed in those tremendous sieges of those big Russian cities, but...I don't....I prayed every day and what I said in those prayers, I don't remember. Whether I prayed for God to help those people or to punish Hitler or what...I don't recall.any consious thoughts.

Q. Do you think religion had anything to do with the way you viewed the prisoners?

A. I don't know - It might have ....(pause)....I knew that there were....the prisoners that were Jewish, I knew that they were Jewish so there was some Jewish identification that I harbored in myself for that...or that maybe drew me a little closer to the Jewish inmates than to the non-Jewish.

Q. How did you know they were Jewish?

A. I really don't know. I really can't recall, but we knew. We knew. We talked. As soon as they knew my name, they fell all over me. My name was not Weston then -- my name was Weinstein then. I was Lt. Weinstein. When these inmates heard Lt. Weinsteiin, they came over because to see a Jewish American officer was an unusual thing - although we had a few other Jewish officers at the time and Jewish enlisted men also. But I was never ashamed of changing my name because Weinstein was not the family name to start with. My father's family was raised in London and the name there was Vines, which was a beautiful name....and then when my father's oldest brother came to this country, at Ellis Island, they made him take an Americanized Jewish name. They gave him the name

Weinstein. Mr. I. M. Weinstein, who used to be the president of the National Linen here in Atlanta and organized National Linen, his name in the old country was Brenner. So his family must have had the same experience at Ellis Island, taking an Americanized Jewish name.

Q. Do you think religion might have had anything with the way you viewed -- did you have any contact with the SS at all? Any direct contact?

A. Not any live SS, no. I saw dead SS, but I never talked to a live SS.

Q. I hadn't asked you about your contact with German civilians and whether you had any contact with civilians who had been involved with the Camp or lived around the Camp.

A. I think I did have contact with them. I don't recall too well. I was along with the Colonel when we contacted the burgomaster. We hired German help -- people from the town to work in our offices, be our stenographers, menial labor, extra labor that we needed were all German civilians. We felt that they knew what was going on all the time. When they told us that they didn't know, we got very angry with them and we told them off. But this was quite a common experience in the cities. All through Germany, the people, whoever you talked to, didn't know what was going on in the concentration camps. Well, there was no way they couldn't know what was going on at Ebensee. I mean because if they were anywhere near the camp, they could have seen the inmates in there. They could have smelled the crematorium, they could see the trainloads of people going in there and never coming out. The box cars going in and no people coming out. Well, they sure knew about it after the war because of Gen. Patton's atrocity cemetery. And they went into that Camp, and....

Q. What was their reaction?

A. I don't know what was their private reaction.

Q. What did you observe?

A. From what I observed, I couldn't tell what the reaction was. We didn't have too much contact with the German civilian population, not too much. We stayed by ourselves mostly, in our own little compounds. We wandered around. We didn't talk to them too much. I know I never rode around without a pistol and my finger on the trigger when I was

out in my Jeep at night, not knowing what was going to happen. Hostile civilians. We were warned, you know, when we were riding around the countryside to be cautious - and I always was. I always had a 45 automatic right on my lap with my finger on the trigger whereever we went. Sometimes I had to be out all night on the roads.

Q. Did anymen in your Unit ask to be relieved of duty at the Camp?

A. Because of the experience there? No, nobody. I had a pretty tough outfit. They were hardened medical men.

Q. We talked briefly about the Holocaust show...what was your reaction to the show?

A. I thought it was terrible.

Q. Why?

A. I thought it was weak - I thought....they just didn't tell it like it was. It was all very plastic. When it showed the people walking to their death at Babi Yar, going down that gully, it just was so staged. There was no emotion. The people were walking like ghouls, like zombies. I don't think it was like that at all. I think there was crying, there was moaning, there was struggling, there was xxk a little bit of resistance to get out of that line. And then the whole thing about it...I mean any atrocity scene they showed, it was all clean. It was all too clean, antiseptic. They did not depict the horror, the filth, the agony....I mean people's souls were being torn up and you couldn't get that from the picture Holocaust. I've read reactions where people thought it was great and "Oh, it was horrible." I've been to the concentration camps and I watched this movie and I saw nothing horrible about what was going on. So I don't think they got the message across at all. But I think they could make one hell of a movie if they got the right people as advisors and directors...and if they ever had smellavision. But, it's hard to do on a screen. It would have to be a triple X rated movie.

Q. What doyou think people can learn from something like you, the Holocaust show that was shown or a triple X rated Holocaust movie?

A. What I said before. What you can learn from a concentration camp...that it is possible for man to treat his fellow man that way.

Q. Do you think this kind of thing should be taught in school?

A. Yes, I do. Definitely.

Q. In religious classes?

A. Everywhere - religious, social sciences, history, special studies. I really do.

Q. I have one last section I would like to talk about, but our tape is almost over. Let me turn it over and we'll do the last section on the other side.

A. All right.

THE FOLLOWING PORTION BEGINS THE REVERSE SIDE OF TAPE. THE FIRST PART OF THE CONVERSATION APPEARS TO BEGIN IN THE MIDDLE OF A SENTENCE BY MR. WESTON.

A. _____the life without having had the concentration camp experience.

Q. I can imagine. Do you find this very hard-talking about it now after all this time?

A. I started to. When you first started, I had trouble talking about it.

Q. It's not easy.

A. No, It isn't.

Q. It's now easy to listen to - and I didn't experience it. This last section that we want to talk about has to do with your political views. Do you think the experience influenced your political views in any way today?

A. Ah...I don't know what you mean.

Q. Well, such as looking at the Civil Rights Movement.

A. Oh, yeah, definitely. Well, I've always been - it's been ingrained in me. I've been a very liberal person all my life, so I don't know if....no, the holocaust, the concentration camp experience didn't make me any more liberal. I've always been very liberal. I was raised up North. As far as minorities are concerned, I've always been a champion of the minorities. I always felt sorry for them and wanted them to have the same rights that everybody else did. I hated to see a fellow man kicked around in any sort of way. I used to bring Black kids home for cookies and milk when I was a kid, bedause I was playground director for a Black playground. They try to break you the first year as a playground director by giving you a tough Black playground in Mt. Vernon, N.Y. But, I loved it and I used to bring the kids home. My mother used to give me dirty looks and tell me not to

do it any more. She was not liberal.

Q. So, you are saying your conviction did not come out of this.

A. That's right. This did not change my political thinking.

Q. What about what happened at Viet Nam? The Viet Nam War. Do you think the concentration camp experience affected your view of what was going on in Viet Nam in any way?

A. No., not at all.

Q. The Middle East?

A. It didn't have any effect on that. I don't equate the concentration camp experience with anything. I never recall that experience except when somebody asks me about it or I see an incident about it....I'm riding along in my car on a trip and my mind wanders and I think about things in the past. And then the concentration camp usually crops up.

Q. What would your reaction be if one of your children told you he wanted to be a Nazi? What would you say?

A. That's a hell of a question. If they wanted to be a Nazi....well, I would try like hell to talk them out of it. But I would not disown my own child. I love my children too much - but if one of my grown up sons started to join a Nazi movement, I would really do some very powerful talking to try to tell him about my heritage, his heritage, and what happened in the concentration camps. I would have to do a lot of powerful talking and try my level best to talk him out of it; But, as far as any drastic action is concerned, I don't think I am a secure enough person to actually disassociate myself from my children. I draw so much of my security from their family and thoughts of my family and that's why I have a lot of strength - knowing that the family is here. No matter what happens to me, there is always that family back there backing me. If anything happens, if I'm in trouble, the family's always there; I can always go to my family. I draw my strength from that and I like to keep that family together and, if anything like that threatened it, I'd go to any, any desperate means to try to persuade them from doing it.....because if it happened, it would just tear this family apart.

Q. What do you think we need to do today to make sure that something like this never happens again?

A. Try to suppress all these Nazi groups. There are little pods that are springing up and I'm a firm believer in Civil Rights; the rights of the individual and I don't think we should suppress those rights - I feel that up to a point and I feel that point is .....

Q. Is where?

A. Things like trying to suppress civil rights that can endanger fellow man...potential genocidal actions; I think that the State ought to step in and try to suppress any threat to a person, a group, the nation, society - whereever society's right to exist is threatened. I think that the State should recognize that threat exists in these young modules or pods or whatever they call them - I forget the name they use, these little groups that are springing up. They should be suppressed at the risk of violating somebody's very civil rights.

Q. Do you think we might run the risk of going into something like another McCarthy era?

A. To root out the Nazi groups?

Q. Yeah - you'd be excesses of the McCarthy era in relation to Communism.

A. No, I don't see any risk of that in this country again. I think that there are too many safeguards now - a person's civil rights would....

Q. Is there really a lot of difference between now and the McCarthy time?

A. Yeah - I don't think you could dig up those red herrings as easily as they could before. I think that mere accusation without support no longer would brand somebody. I just don't think it could happen again. I think this nation has grown up out of the McCarthy era - the searching out of all the Communists just like...no, I think the country has grown out of that era and that it is a different country today. I think there is a different attitude, atmosphere, a different temper to the country, to the mind of the American people. I think the tremendous Civil Rights Movement had everything to do with it...the libera- of the Black people and the minorities, which is far from complete yet, I think is well on its way. I just don't think it would happen again.

Q. I'd like to believe that.

A. We've got you on tape.

Q. There's one question I want to go back and ask you. You talked about the prisoners in

the camp; how they seemed to like just wandering around - or in a daze was the word I think you used; do you think any of these prisoners had been drugged?

Q. No, I dont think so. I don't think they had been drugged at all.

A. What do you think this daze was about?

Q. Just, uh....they had lost all their self respect; they had just about given up hope. The day to day existence, what did they have to look forward to? Getting up in the morning and going to the salt mines until they dropped dead. I think they just destroyed their will; their spirits were destroyed.

Q. I asked this question because a survivor that I interviewed, she felt pretty strongly that they had been drugged.

A. We had no evidence to lead us to believe that.

Q. That's why I'm asking. You were with a medical unit and this never came up in any way?

A. Never came up at all.

Q. Is there anything else before we turn off the tape recorder that you want to add; any thoughts that came to your mind that I didn't ask you about? Anything you want to put on tape? For the record?

A. Well, I could waste a lot of tape sitting here thinking about it...(pause) WE had heard that the 80th Infantry Division came off of their walk through that concentration camp in a fighting mood, eager to get back into action and all that. We took it for what it was worth. And, then, after the first experience that we had in the concentration camp, I think that we realized we had the same reaction; but it was a traumatic effect and it wore off I think. There was something else I wanted to say about this McCarthyism ~~Communism~~ thing, but the thought slipped away from me and I don't know. But, as far as the concentration camp was concerned, we were very happy that Gen. Patton reacted the way he did. Now, there was a man who was really upset over what he saw because his troops were the first ones to overrun these camps; Dachau was overrun by American troops. Some of the other camps were overrun by Russian troops. The fact that he wanted to build that atrocity cemetery, we thought was a great thing and we actually saw it taking effect and being done. I will say that Hitler was very, very ironic in putting one of

his most infamous concentration camps in such a gorgeous setting, right in the heart of the Austrian Alps. It was a beautiful country there with the mountains and Traun Lake. Ebensee means sea - it was Ebensee connecting with Traunsee, which was another lake. In the evenings, we used to go on boating excursions down the lake and it was a beautiful spot and he put his concentration camps there. I don't think Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Dachau were in such beautiful spots - but Ebensee sure was. It was the kind of place you'd like to retire to; go on a vacation to - where the mountains come right down to the water's edge and the water is blue and the town is very quaint and picturesque. They had a mountain there called the Feuer-Kugel I don't know what that means - a "fire kitchen" or something. They had a cable car going. Beautiful country - we used to go on hikes, but the horrors that must have gone on there. The only thing I can say about it is that they lived in covered buildings; it could have been worse. They could have been living outdoors. It's the only concession he made to them - to give them shelter. Barbed wire fence was there. But I'm glad I took the pictures and I'll treasure them and I hope my children will preserve them and maybe tell the same story to future generations.

Q. This tape will be preserved, too, for future generations; and I appreciate your re-opening all these old memories, which aren't very pleasant and we appreciate your helping us with our project and I thank you, Mr. Weston. (pause) You want to add, go ahead.....

A. Turn it off. (the tape)recorder)

(long pause and then: This is Lorrie Mell. I just wanted to note that at the point he said he wanted to add something and I turned the recorder back on, then he broke down and asked me to turn it off. I turned it off and he began to cry. Something we had said reminded him of the fact that he had not thought about it all day while we were talking - but he suddenly remembered that his brother had been killed. His brother was in the military - he was in the American Air Force - and his brother had been killed in the war and that's what he cried about and what he wanted to tell me, but couldn't put on the tape. This is the end of this tape.)