

TRANSCRIPTION OF TAPE OF HOWARD WISEBURG

INTERVIEWER: Sylvia Becker

TRANSCRIBER: Sue Epstein

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Q. Your full name?

A. Howard Wiseburg.

Q. Your address.

A. 460 Jerusalem Road, Cohasset, Mass.

Q. Your date of birth?

A. 8/26/15

Q. What, who were you attached with in the army? At the time you liberated

A. 65th Division.

Q. And what was your rank?

A. I was a staff sergeant.

Q. And how old were you at that time?

A. Twenty?

Q. Approximately. ~~In 1945 I was 30 years old.~~

A. In 1945 I was 30 years old.

Q. ~~And~~ You were 30 years old and you were married to Ronnie for how long at that time?

A. I was married four years.

Q. Where were you in Germany when you first heard you were going to Dachau?

A. We never heard, we were there.

Q. You just all of a sudden....you didn't know where you were going?

A. No.

Q. Did you know about the concentration camps? Had you heard anything?

A. Yes.

Q. What had you heard and how had you heard?

A. I think I heard before we left the States.

Q. You knew what was happening with the Germans?

A. Yes, I believe so.

Q. Was..when about..can you give me some sort of date that you went into Dachau?

A. (Silence)

Q. Well, how long after liberation, for instance. You were not among the first American soldiers to reach Dachau?

A. No. I think probably two weeks or three weeks.

~~Q. What were the conditions in the camp.~~

Q. What were the conditions in the camp when you got there?

A. Pretty well cleaned up.

Q. It was pretty well cleaned up?

A. Um-hum.

Q. Did you..were there any dead bodies around still?

A. I did not see any.

Q. You didn't see any? What about the inmates? The prisoners..the survivors?

A. We didn't see any survivors.

Q. You did not see any survivors? Where were they?

A. I don't know. I guess the International Red Cross or whoever had already taken them out.

Q. So when you got to Dachau what where you..why was your group...what were they going to do at Dachau?

A. We were guarding ^{the} installation.

Q. What sort of installation was there that needed guarding?

A. Prison camp.

Q. But there were no prisoners.

A. The prisoners were the SS troops now.

Q. I see, so they took Dachau and changed it into a..very interesting. I didn't realize that. So what were your duties and what did they have these prisoners doing.

A. Well, we were...

Q. Approximately....

A. in the town right outside of the camp.

Q. The town of Dachau?

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A. No. It was a different name. A small..we were in...I don't even know what it was a town. We were in a sort of castle there that we had taken over and we were living there. Our company. And every morning we would send a truck to the camp and bring in SS troops into our company and they would do all the menial labor for us.

Q. At the castle?

Q. Were your troops going from the castle into Dachau to do administration work?

A. Nah. It was not my company's function.

Q. What was your company's function?

A. Nothing. Just to be there.

Absolutely nothing?

Q. /Just to be physically present..what, as a guard?

A. Well, they might have had some guards there but I was not part of that detail.

Q. What were your duties?

A. I was a supply sergeant and my duties were in our company area where I took care of the supplies for the company.

Q. So you actually did not see any of the survivors?

A. No. ~~I have pictures of them. (?)~~ Not even pictures of them. (?)

Q. Were you in touch with any..was there any troops there who had been in at the beginning of the liberation?

A. I don't remember. If there were I don't know.

Q. What I'm trying to find out is...

A. You want first hand information.

Q. Yes. Was there anybody you talked to who had first hand information? Did you have any contact at all with any people in the village? Germans?

A. Oh sure.

Q. Was there any talk about....

A. No. No talk. ~~xxxxxx~~ They would tell you nothing. If you asked them what was going on they didn't know. They never knew.

Q.

Q. Couldn't find anybody who knew?

A. No way.

Q. Were you, as soldiers, given any sort of briefing?

A. No.

Q. Nothing? No instructions, no briefing, no nothing?

A. Silence.

Q. Was there any discussion amongst you that you can remember?

A. I imagine there was.

Q. Well, anything that was impressive enough to remember?

A. Well, only that we talked about what happened at the camp.

Q. Yes.

A. But that was—— that was just hearsay acctually but we never did see it ourselves.

Q. Did you see the crematorium?

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. Was there any evidence of any kidd left?

A. Not when we were there.

Q. They had completely cleaned it all up?

A. Well, I don't know whether they did or whether the U.S. Army cleaned it up.

Q. But it was gone.

A. Yes. They ^{may have had} had the Germans clean it up but everything was in pretty good shape when we got there.

Q. When you heard about it and saw even just the camp, regardless of whether there were no survivors or anything at that time, did you feel it more deeply seeing it?

A. Oh yea. Sure. Sure. ~~XXXXX~~ We felt it all the time we were there.

~~Q. Who is it (cut off)~~

Q. So you felt it much more?

A. Well being a Jew, of course I felt it even more than some of the other boys

I imagine.

Q. Did y'all talk about it?

A. Yea. I guess we did. I don't remember exactly what

Q. How did you feel?

A. I felt like killing everybody there You get a very tense feeling that these people are no good and that they deserve everything that they get.

I treated the, there was three SS men assigned to me every day and I treated them like dogs. I made them sweep the floor, and wash the floor and clean and paint and do everything, anything, just to keep them busy doing something.

Q. Menial labor?

A. Yea. And I asked them if they knew what was going on. They were ?, they didn't know. They only followed instructions. That's all you could get out of them.

Q. Did they speak English?

A. Nah.

Q. You had no problem communicating?

A. Oh yes. Sure. But being Jewish, and German. There are some similarities in the words so you could make yourself understood.

Q. _____

A. I talked to some of the village people and asked them why, where, when? And the only answer that was given was, "We never knew what was going on." which of course was a lie, I believe because they couldn't help knowing what was going on. They were fraternizing with the soldiers and, of course they knew.

Q. Did, when you found all this out did ^{you} find any anti-semitism in the Army?

A. No.

Q. I was just curious as to whether....

A. Oh, I think there was some bigots around but I didn't really find anything...

Q. You know, whether you might have seen some changes in the others' attitudes because of this.

A. No.

Q. Do you remember whether anybody had extreme reactions? Were there any cases of American soldiers doing something that they should not have done, to persecute the Germans, in anger?

A. Not that I remember.

Q. Not that you were aware of?

A. You must understand that we were a company, a part of a whole, and we were, I think our full compliment at the time was 150 soldiers, divided into uh...(tape off. then on) See, as a company, we had our own little, our own house that we lived in and we had our own duties. That's all. Now other companies had other duties and they were living over there, over there, over,there,-all different places. So you didn't get to see much of the other fellows. Actually in the army you don't get to see much of anybody, only the boys in your own company.

Q. So there really is not much communication about what's going on anywhere else.

A. No. The only time you met others was if you were at the Red Cross installation.

Q. Was the Red Cross or any of the relief agencies around at the time you went in.

A. Well, they had set up a Red Cross ⁷⁰ ~~near~~ Dachau. Donuts, coffee...when the boys had some time off they went into Dachau and spent a couple hours around the city.

Q. Did you write home about what was going on and your experiences at that time?

A. No.

Q. Did you ever think about why you didn't?

A. Well, there was nothing to...well, no, I didn't, I never wrote home about that stuff. No.

Q. When you came home did you talk about it?

A. ~~xxx~~ Yea. (Softly)

Q. What kind of reaction did you get in general?

A. Same reaction. They were no good and they were bastards, all of them. The Germans are no good. That's the same feeling that you have or have had up to now I imagine. Oh, I think most people didn't know what happened.

Q. You didn't find people not believing it?

A. No.

Q. Or feeling that you were exaggerating or overreacting?

A. Well, I don't think anybody in this country could really understand the whole force of war and what it meant and what went on in Germany, Even if they saw pictures of the destruction and of the camps and so forth. It was just hard to realize that human beings could be that way toward other human beings.

Q. Do you feel that that experience of the war, of the camps, of your being that close to Dachau had any deep affect on you?

A. I don't think so.

Q. No?

A. I don't think so.

Q. Have you ever told Billie anything about your experiences? (Daughter)

A. Not really. Not really. I never told anybody actually what I..the only thing I really related was the good times I had...I, uh,..of the good times you had. That's the only thing that stays with you. ^{Actually,} The ba-d times you don't remember. You know, maybe you just shut it out.

Q. Um, when you were in....

A. I'm trying to remember where I rejoined the company because after I got, uh, after I was wounded

Q. When were you wounded?

A. I was wounded in..right before the end of the war.

Q. After you were at Dachau?

A. No.

Q. Before Dachau?

A. Before Dachau. Yes.

Q. You were wounded and then you recuperated and they kept you right on active, put you back on active duty?

A. Yea. Sure. After I was in the hospital..

Q. Where were you in the hospital?

A. In France.

Q. You don't remember exactly when you were wounded? Well, how long did it take you to recuperate?

A. Oh, I was gone from the company maybe six weeks.

Q. Yeah. Now, was this your original company they put you back with?

A. ^{ye} But then they disorganized, uh, deactivated the 65th Division and I was put in, we were, we were put in with the 9th Division which is actually where I ended up, in the 9th Division and uh, it was when I was in the 9th Division when we ended up in Dachau and that's where I was (long pause)

Q. When you....

A. It was from Dachau I was sent back...

Q. Home?

A. Home.

Both talking at once....Q. Dachau was liberated on April 29th so if you were there two or three weeks after..

A. April, May

Q. You must have been there in May sometime.

A. And the war ended in June didn't it?

Q. Yes.

A. April 29th.

Q. VE day was June 6th wasn't it?

A. I think so.

Q. And when did you come home?

A. Oh, I spent till the following April there.

Q. So you didn't come home until April of '46?

A. That's correct.

Q. Were you at Dachau ~~that~~ whole time?

A. Yeah.

Q. You were there ~~that~~ whole time? So you were there almost a year?

A. Yeah.

Q. What changes did you see in that year Howard?

A. Ntohing.

Q. Nothing?

A. Silence

Q. Were the SS troops still prisoners at the end of that year?/Any idea of how many they had?

A. No.

Q. When you had free time did you or any of the boys go into Dachau?

A. Oh yeah. We went into Dachau quite often.

Q. And what did you do when you were there?

A. Nothing. Roamed around. There was nothing there.

Q. Did you have the freedom of the camp? So you could talk to the Germans?

A. Oh yes. I had a woman doing my wash that lived right outside of the camp. We were right outside the camp. You know maybe from here down to the corner of the street. We had taken over a castle then and the rumors were that it was a home for women, pregnant women.

Q. German women?

A. Oh yeah. Pregnant women.

Q. And what about the woman who did your laundry.

A. Well, they were farmers. I guess they were farmers. And (long pause)

And I used to go down to their home and give them my wash and they used to wash it and I'd come back in a day or so and pick it up. But you couldn't get anything out of them...

Q. Out of any of them?

A. And I asked..plenty. But the only story was let was that we didn't know what was going on. What do you mean you didn't know? ^(disgusted) ~~What was going on~~ You lived within sight of it. How could you not know? They didn't know. But they did know, every one of them knew.

Q. Of course they knew.

A. Every one of them knew what was going ~~on~~ on.

Q. What was the attitude of the Germans toward you?

A. They were beaten people.

Q. They were a beaten people? The soldiers as well as the civilians?

A. Yup. They were subservient, they followed orders, they made no protests, nothing. They were like whipped dogs.

Q. When you came in to...

A. We couldn't believe that they were that proud a people. In that time they were terrible. They were not human. They were whipped, thoroughly whipped.

Q. When you came into the village or wherever it was did you notice, did they have, was there a shortage of food?

A. Yes. Yes. We could get anything for a pack of cigarettes or a chocolate bar or anything we wanted we could get for very little.

Q. Was there any damage to the village at all?

A. No.

Q. Any evidence of any bombings or shelling?

A. Not in Dachau. No. In Nuremberg. I went through Nuremberg. It was bombed to hell. Uh, Cologne. I went through Cologne and it was bombed. Of course, this side of the German border, on the French side, it was demolished. Because we were way out in front also. We were, I was, our company was attached to

Patton's 3rd Army at the time and we were way up in Austria. We had gone way beyond the American lines. So, the route that we went actually there wasn't that much destruction because we were in virgin territory actually. When the war ended we were in Lintz, Austria and I spent, I spent some time in Lintz too.

Q. Did you.....

A. That was after I came back from the, after I came back from the hospital (long pause). We were in Lintz and then we left Lintz and went down to Dachau.

Q. Do you remember any hostile Germans? Or was just everyone that you came across beaten (inaudible). I remember when we talked about this last December that you told me that you saw hungry children.

A. Oh, I saw, I saw...I think was probably the worst I ever saw was...and I don't remember exactly where it was now (long pause)...people, women, men, old men, old women would take the slop-when we got through eating we threw the remains into a barrel and they would come and empty out that barrel of the slop that everybody threw in there and were thankful to get it. (inaudible). And that was probably one of the worst sights I ever saw. You know, people taking the slop out of the barrel and it was so precious.

Q. Did you have any, did you ever see any survivors being shifted from one place to the other or anything?

A. No.

Q. Do you remember any editions...what was the army newspaper? The army newspaper over there?

A. Stars and Stripes.

Q. Right. Do you remember any of this thing being written up in Stars and Stripes in the form of communication of knowing what was going on elsewhere?

A. No. I'm sure there was but I don't remember seeing...

Q. Oh yes, I know there was. I just was curious whether..how much coverage it got.

A. I'm sure it did.

Q. If you had to say that you had one really lasting impression or one deep, uh, impression from the experience what would you say it would be.

A. What I saw was ^{the} ~~a~~ bombed out places that I saw and people looking for food and I think that's probably it.

Q. Did the American army do anything to help feed the Germans? Yes, the civilian population?

A. I can't tell you that. I know we never did.

Q. How big was...what would you say the population was of the number of civilians around Dachau? In the village?

A. I would say I don't know, but it didn't look more like 10,000 people or so.

Q. Were shops open? Schools open? Do you remember?

A. I don't believe so. I don't remember any stores. I didn't go into any stores.

Q. No place to go into to have a beer or coffee?

A. Just the Red Cross.

Q. Just the Red Cross?

A. At that time.

Q. What do you think of the ^{rise in} ~~renewed~~ interest in the Holocaust and the study of ^{that are} the Holocaust and the things / ~~issues~~ being done.

A. I think it's ~~good~~. I think people should never forget. I think they should do it every generation to make sure that it continues.

Q. How do you feel about exposing young children, say 10, 11, 12, to these kind of horrors. Since your own child is...

A. I think they should.

Q. Would you tell your own grandchildren, certainly not at this age, but at some point?

A. Sure. Certainly.

Q. Do you feel that through the years you haven't talked about it because you've suppressed it and haven't thought about it because you've suppressed it because it's painful?

A. I think it was that way when I came back home that I didn't want to talk about it.

Q. But as the years have gone on..?

A. Well, the memory dims and I don't remember sharply what really, what I really saw at that time. At this point I don't really remember the details.

Q. Yes. But you really didn't have the exposure to the horrors..

A. I didn't actually see it with my own eyes.

Q. Yeah. So naturally it's not as intense *as if you see it yourself.*

A. It's not as vivid (both talking at same time.)

Q. ..And yet, I'm sure being right there and seeing where it happened..had to have an enormous...

A. Well, you could feel it and you knew it was there even though you didn't see it.

Q. Child's voice asking question and adult shss it.

Q. Do you remember, before you got there, you don't remember when you first.. you say you first heard of the camps really before you ever got to Europe.

A. Oh sure. Before we ~~got there~~ left the states. Because I didn't get into the service until 1943 (long pause)...1943 I went into the service. So we had already read about what was going on and we knew.

Q. So you knew what was going on in Germany?

A. Sure.

Q. Were you aware before or during, of not just what was going on with the Jews, but with so many of the other nationalities that Hitler was killing over there?

A. No. I don't think...no, I don't believe so. I don't think we ~~even~~ really knew about the other nationalities till after the war.

Q. You really thought it was just the Jews?

A. Yeah.

Q. That were being persecuted?

A. That's interesting because Dachau actually was more of a political prison and had a very small percent of Jews.

Q. Of Jews?

Q. Hmm Hum. At time of liberation, the readings I have read, there were 33,000 prisoners, 8,000 of whom were Jewish, but the greater number of them...you know, Dachau was THE first concentration camp. Dachau was established in 1933.

A. We came to another camp too.

Q. Which one?

A. I don't know.

Q. Probably near it (inaudible). Where was it?
Well, that's it,

A. /I don't know.

Q. On your way to or on your way from..?

A. On our way through, on our way to. (Child's voice in background)

Q. Was it a ~~concentration~~ concentration..was it an extermination camp or..

A. Well, I can't tell you that either. I know we went through one camp. We got in there and I saw some people, uh, but we left immediately. We kept going and the ones behind us took over.

Q. Were you the first ones in that other camp?

A. I can't tell you. But I know we were one of the first ones in there. Whether we were first or not...

Q. Was it big, little? As compared to Dachau?

A. Well, it looked like a big camp to me.

Q. Like how far away was it from Dachau?

A. I can't tell you. I have no idea.

Q. How many days? You don't know?

A. I can't tell you.

Q. But..

A. We did go through another one and I saw some young people there.

Q. Survivors?

A. Yeah.

Q. Did they come up to you or..

A. Yes. Sure.

Q. Did you understand them?

A. Not really.

Q. Sign language?

A. Not really. Because we knew what was going on so it didn't really make any difference.

Q. Did they ask you for candy or something?

A. Oh yes. Sure. Sure. Sure. That was, well, we were on the move that time and they really were pounding ~~the~~.

Q. Did you notice anything particularly when you were approaching the camp? So many people talk about the terrible stench. Were the survivors..were they dirty?

A. Oh sure. Rags..they were....as I remember they were drawn and skinny. I really can't tell you too much because we were really moving. It was towards the end of the war and we were really moving...kept going...how much territory we had taken...

Q. Yes. Did you..were you exposed to any other camps that you came across.

A. No there was only two that I remember. Those were the only two actually I believe ~~fundamental~~ that we went to. The first one that we went through we really went through it. We stopped for a little while and then took off.

Q. Just a question of an hour or so?

A. Somethin like that.

Q. Yeah.

A. Might have been a ^{couple} ~~couple~~ of hours. I don't know.

Q. So that was really your first exposure?

A. ____ (Unintelligible)

Q. Do you remember any of your feelings at that time?

A. ~~At first I was just kind of keeping going~~ Oh yeah, just keep going.

To see how much..how many..how far we could go at the time. I wasn't privy to all the details because I was only an enlisted man..and they never told you anything. (Long pause)

Q. When you saw the Holocaust program what was your feeling about that?

A. I had..the only feeling that I had was that I knew it..I was just sort of
(Long pause)
reviewing what I already knew./ I mean I didn't get alarmed by it. I didn't
shocked
get/~~shocked~~ by it. I wasn't horrified by it. I already had known all this.

Q. Did you feel it was inadequate at all?

A. Inadequate? No. It was done very well. (Long pause)

Q. You had absolutely no briefings as to how you should treat the Germans?

A. I don't know..if we did.I don't remember. We weren't supposed to kill them or.....with them.

Q. ~~Did you know~~ Were you specifically told that? Do you remember?

A. I don't remember if we were or not but I'm sure..

Q. (Interrupting) _____

A. I'm sure we were.

Q. Did you have..do you know that you had any responsibility to protect them?

A. Protect them from what?

Q. From whatever violence might occur from other soldiers, from other civilians, from people coming back?

A. I don't believe that we would have stopped anybody from any violence. I don't believe.

Q. Yeah.

A. I know in the heat of battle we didn't want to take prisoners.

Q. Did..

A. I can't say that we actually shot them but..that I actually saw prisoners being