

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH JEROME ZIMMERMAN
Interviewer: Lorrie Mell

Q: May I ask you your full name?

A: Jerome Zimmerman.

Q: And your address?

A: 3515 Pace Ferry Road N W, Atlanta, Ga.

Q: And the date of your birth?

A: 21 July, 1921.

Q: And how old were you at the time of the experience we are going to be talking about?

A: In 44 or 45, so I would have been 23 or 24.

Q: What were your professional goals at that time? Your plans for when you got out of service?

A: I just graduated Emory University ~~and~~ in Business Administration, and plan ned to go into some form of business when I returned to Atlanta.

Q: And what is your present occupation?

A: I am in the lumber business.

Q: So, you did go into some form of business?

A: I was in the hardware business when I got back from the army, and then I went into the lumber business in 1948.

Q: What military unit were you part of? At the time of the experience we are going to talk about?

A: I was in the 95th Infantry Division in the 95th Quartermaster Corps attached to one of our Infantry Regiments... I forget what number it was.

Q: And your rank at that time?

A: At that particular time, corporal or sergeant.

Q: Okay, tell me about the experience you wanted to share with us.

A: We - I was with Patton - and we had -- Patton had volunteered us, you know, for ~~relieving~~ relieving the Battle of the Bulge, so we walked up to the _____ (Leige?) and
 helped relieve the Battle of the Bulge, which was I guess the one _____ where the

A: Germans were in the last surge, trying to cut off, or separate the Allied Army. After that, we were attached to Montgomery's Army, which consisted of both British and American. We were advancing rather rapidly - uh east in Germany, and snow was on the ground, and we had a spotter plane overhead that told us there looked like there were some civilians ahead that were running towards us, and to be careful not to shoot them by mistake, because in the snow you might have mistaken them. There wasn't any real problem, because when we came upon these girls, they were nude, shivering, bald-headed; naturally everybody pulled their raincoats and overcoats and blankets and everything that they had - and were giving them to these girls. Uh, we advanced on. The girls were taken back to a city, I don't remember the name of the city now.

Q: Do you remember about where you were at that time?

A: We were east of Muchingottfag (?) ...

Q: Okay.

A: And we had pulverized the ^{Aachen}~~Aachen(?)~~ and once you got by, going around there, and the armies were advancing very rapidly. We were capturing so many German soldiers that they were having them walk that way, as ordinarily they take them back in trucks, but they were in tens of thousands of them, just walking along the road - there were very few people really guarding them.

Q: This was around what date? Do you recall?

A: It was something around - probably 4 to 6 months before VE Day. And we went on and captured whatever our objective was at that time. In a small city we passed this factory with barbed wire around it, and went in, and nothing left there ... it wasn't worth We would pull back for a day or two... and I went over to visit this city where these girls were. This was about, ^a ~~1~~ week or ten days, maybe two weeks, afterwards, and they had cleaned out the city, and said all the Germans were out, had taken it over, put up a road bar, and each one of them had a bicycle - which they had taken away - and I was talking to them in Yiddish, which was the only mutual language we had. They were all young, and I guess from 16 to 23.

Q: About how many?

A: I'd say in that particular city, because I don't know how many there were altogether, there were about 100. Whether some of them had moved to another city, I don't know. But they had begun to grow hair and had used American soap so that now the skin blemishes were clearing up very rapidly. They were ugly looking people in the beginning.... in the context of how we think of people, no hair, full of skin blemishes, there were no fat ones at all, skinny and hungry. Well, anyway, ... you know, we talked, they told various tales, but what they had escaped from was a work camp, where they had been working making textiles, uniforms, and somethings; the best I could understand it. The Germans had actually declothed them and lined them up to shoot them (I am repeating to you what they said, and then ~~xxxxxx~~ the American spotter plane came over saw what didn't look like anything was proper to them, they swooped in on them, and the guys (the German soldiers) ran into the barracks and at the same time, he advised Aircraft who came in and I guess while the Germans were hiding, the girls took off. Whether any of them were killed or not, we never found any bodies. We never found any German soldiers either. We found weapons, but they were gone.

Q: You did get to the camp? The work camp?

A: Yes. In talking to the girls, it was same story.... it is hard to tell you what I remember from then and what I picked up in the 30 years since then.

Q: Sure.

A: But it was a story.... ^{it was} ~~not~~ really, /the first time I heard of concentration camps. I had not, in the army, heard any information whatsoever of German concentration camps. And they were describing. They were describing how they had been -----this group was out of Warsaw, how they had been put on the trains and sent to concentration camps, how their mothers' had given them their rings, how they had hid their rings in their innermost body, how they had been selected out because they were young, vigorous, none of them ever admitted being harassed, they were all, ? /and they had gone from one work camp to another, working 12 or 14 hours a day as long as they could work them. This particular camp had no lights /if I remember so they had to work them in the daytime, and that they had just -- sixteen year old ones were the new ones, the 23 year old ones were

- A: the ones who had been there four or five years... four years. Each of them had their story of ~~h~~ who they had lost, and how they had gotten there, how they tried to escape and had got caught, and what they wanted, now they wanted to go to the U.S. all of them had relatives in the United States, or claimed they had. They would not take them back ~~xx~~ any more. We went ^{on, and then,} /... on occasion I went back by about ~~ix~~ two or three weeks later, which was about six weeks afterwards, and they all looked like entirely different people.
- Q: They had gained some weight?
- A: What's that? Yes, gained weight, they had hair, their faces were all, their skins were all completely clear.
- Q: Was the skin problem part dirt? Was it ~~like~~ lice?
- A: Just a little soap. It wasn't so bad - they just had no soap. What they had was really of no value. They kept bars of soap - most of the high greens then and this & that & the ^{other} but it was due to their living conditions, that's all. Sort of a lice that was in there, and I guess after a period of time, if you don't wash, you begin to get skin disease. Just sit on the floor, etc.
- Q: You said that none of them indicated that they had been harassed? I wasn't sure what you meant.
- A: Well, none of them indicated they had been used sexually, not they were not physically harassed and with every move they made,
- Q: But not sexually harassed?
- Is there anything else about your contact with these girls themselves that you want to share? That you recall that you might....?
- A: I spent probably two whole days with them, but w guess it was mostly listening.
- Q: What was their reaction to you? You did say they all wanted to come to the United States?
- A: They were all ready to join me and come back to the United States.
- Q: So they were very friendly....?
- A: Oh yes.
- Q: They were obviously pleased they were liberated?

A: They were pleased to have been liberated. They wanted to know if what they had heard about the - how the Jews lived in America - was true. Whether they had freedom and it was hard for them to conceive, because they being young, they had been - probably did not remember when their parents were much freer ...

Q: In Warsaw?

A: In Warsaw? Well, in other cities, in small cities.

Q: Then they weren't all from Warsaw?

A: Oh no. To the best of my knowledge, they were all Polish, but they did not all come from Warsaw.

Q: You said you went on to see the camp. Can you describe the camp some to me?

A: Just uh... well- almost a rectangular, the Germans were very precise, rectangular with gates "Work Makes Freedom", which is the same thing that I saw over the concentration camp at Dachau.

Q: But there was nothing about the camp itself that was worthy.....? (?)

A: It was a building, stone, with a roof, but I don't know. It looked like it must have been someone else's building. They didn't particularly build it. It was just right out of a village, the girls were sleeping in one corner and working on the machines in the same building. I guess they could possibly couldn't stay in there very long, and moving, and once you find there is nothing to shoot at.....now you keep moving because it gives them a target. They know where that building is, they can zero in on it and drop shells into it without ~~see~~ ever looking.

Q: Yes, so you just didn't stay there long, got out...

A: Yes, you got out in a hurry.

Q: So you are saying, by and large, they worked and lived in the same quarters.

A: Yes - and there was a wall, where there may have been offices or something, not more than two or three bathrooms for several hundred people. There were the officers' quarters outside of them.

A: You mentioned Dachau....did you go there after it had been liberated, or were part of the liberation process?

A: I went to Dachau in 1971.

Q: I was there in 71 or 72.

A: Never saw a concentration camp, so I went to Dachau.

Q: Okay. After the war.

A: Yes. After the Second World War, anyway.

Q: You said - let me see, I am looking at some of my questions and trying to see if it fits in into what you have shared with me. You said you hadn't heard about concentration camps until you actually saw these girls and heard the story, did you hear more about it afterwards?

A: Oh yeah, you mean after ? You mean while I was in the army?

A: No, it was.... We were there until V-E Day, and then shortly after that we were reconsigned, to come back home and to go to the Pacific.

Q: So you didn't hear or see any of the other so-called death camps?

What did you think about ...

A: We probably went too high for them anyway, ^{most} ~~the most~~ of them were further down south of where we were, and east of where we were.

Q: What did you think about what was happening from this one experience? Do you remember your thoughts at that time?

A: I found this hard to understand. I found it hard to believe, just like other people that this was going on. have found it hard to believe/ ~~XXXXXX~~ You knew that there were camps, you knew that there were prison camps, there was a lot of that, but/ ^{for} them to describe what I had many times read and seen since then, was hard to accept.... that they actually created death camps, that they took people - they separated them, they killed them, they burned them, and they buried them, and it's possible I may have seen in the papers, the army papers this - that and the other, but I don't recall having heard of it before these girls. They had actually, even though they were separated, they had seen ^{it}, they had participated, they knew exactly what they were. At some time of the other, either at the time they were captured or were with their parents when they went into these camps, or afterwards when they were possibly captured when they were trying to escape. But they had been ~~with it~~ witnesses.

- A: They were looking for a little sympathy.... they described them very dramatically, but afterwards, I don't think they were that dramatic.
- Q: At the time you thought it was dramatic?
- A: ^{I thought} Yes, it was. I couldn't imagine it.
- Q: It was difficult to believe?
- A: just not in the concept of ^{Kind of} If it's /civilized Americans to think that ^{Kind of} thing exists.
- Q: So, it wasn't until later on that you really could accept and understand and believe what they were ~~a~~ telling you? Quite a thing to have experienced.
- A: Yes, I have since talked to other people, we have a lot of people here in the city of Atlanta that are from concentration camps, and I talked to some people who have told me what they did, before, during and after they were captured, that when one particular case was after a traumatic experience - this was when I was in Philadelphia, Miss. If you will remember that's where the ^{three} ~~free~~ civil rights workers were buried in the dam, and we had gone to something and he got to talking to one of the Indians that are common to that area and that are similarly treated as blacks, or maybe worse. And he got very upset, and we were supposed to spend the night and he said, can we go back? And after looking at his face, I didn't question him.... we just headed for the airport and fortunately caught a plane that made a connection that finally got us home. And on the plane, he was telling me what happened to him. Later I mentioned it to him, and he looked at me and said "I never told you any such thing." "I never told anybody any such thing." He was molested. I asked his wife, who I knew well, before I knew him, when she was a kid if he had ever told her much about his experience? She said I never knew he was in one.
- Q: ^{there are} We found that ~~where~~ people had never talked ~~about~~ about it, until recent years, they haven't been able to, looks like they had to push it out, too horrible, I am talking about the survivors. Even a lot of the people, the liberators, that came upon some horrible ^{sights} ~~sights~~, some of them have never talked about it - their experience.

/Q: Until now....

A: Yes, maybe it's peculiar to the Jewish people - you know, after I saw Roots... I thought to myself, well, I never talked to my mother and father about where they came from and to describe the city, and my aunt was here, she must be close to 80 years old, and my wife, who is also an excellent interrogator, and did this in BU and Harvard when ~~she~~ she working on her Doctorate there, interviewed her, and for the first time there, ^{I am 58} ~~she was 60~~ years old, I found out that my grandfather was in the lumber business. Her father never bothered to tell me and he and I worked side by side in the lumber business for 10 or 12 years - and no one else.

Q: ^{You've} ~~you~~ got an interesting point... just as we are taping this for history, for posterity, because otherwise these stories are going to be lost, we have asked people if they had shared their experiences with other people. Just as you talk about this man as having denied sharing this experience with you, when his wife didn't even know he was a survivor, so much of this is just not talked about. Important enough to have a record of...just.

A: I regret very much, and since then, I have asked her, and we found out that they lived in the type of village they lived in, this main road led right down to a stream, that they did not consider themselves poverty, they considered themselves well-off, lived in, I mean, now, if you compare it - we were not well off - the girls were educated along with the boys, which is unusual in those days, that they ate well, that they dressed well, lived on a street that was all mud. ^{that} ^{living on a street that} Everybody/lived on that street was all mud, so it wasn't, you know. They just did not consider themselves as poor as we looked back on them and see them.

Q: It's all relative.

A: Sure it is.

Q: You were telling me about this experience with this man in Mississippi in relating it to the civil rights movement. Have you in any way thought about the Holocaust? In relation to, for instance, the civil rights movement? What happened in Germany - I should say. In relation to the civil rights movement in this country?

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A: The civil rights movement was rather an upward movement but there was
broad backing by segments of the community, whereas the Holocaust was certainly a
downward movement, a progressive movement in which they were pushing people into
leaving, starving, converting or dying. ^{The} A civil rights movement, I see, as the
opposite.....I mean, these people are moving upward with support, broad acceptance,
a chance.... uh.... I can see a comparison, but I can see them as being opposite.

Q: It's a good way of putting it.

A: I would certainly not say that the black is not - has not - or is not being deprived
of acting normally like anyone else. And I think ~~it~~ in probably cert ain amount of
areas, ~~the areas~~ you still see it going on, but you see it going on with other
ethnic groups. I just came back from Vancouver and big cry up there is to stop the
East Indians from migrating into ^{the area.}..... They are uneducated and thieves and they
constitute the crime, and they mess up the neighborhoods, and everything else.
What do

Q: ~~What do~~ you think the objection to the East Indians really is?

A: Is what?

Q: What do you personally think the objection to the East Indians really is?

A: They will work for less money, the same thing as the objection to the black, just as the
poor white objected to the poor black.

Q: Economic then?

A: I do business with ~~these~~ ^{East} Indians up there - in my opinion, they are some of the most
professional people that I've ever done business with — Some of them are
extremely wealthy and all the wealthier ones - just like the Jews - they take care, they
work almost exclusively East Indian labor and then they take good care of them.
Take good care of them. They work. I would say in relation to the amount of ~~the~~ work
that the black does today in relation to these East Indians that are coming in - they
are more productive.

Q: Basically, your are seeing the objection, no matter what ~~the~~ is being said, the objection
is economic factor predominately.

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A: Oh yes, because you take Vancouver - which is a very ethnic city - they have the big Chinese, the second largest Chinese population next to San Francisco. Robinstrasse, which is the German street, which most of the merchants/^{on}there are German, and they speak German, they still come in there and have their tea and whatever type of pastry --- on Sunday. My wife and I have been in there and they sit there, talking German, just as German-looking as if you were sitting on some street in Berlin, or you have Chinese, you have Japanese, you have the East Indian, it's just a very mixed population. Naturally, the old families.....there's nothing like them in the old days, but that's because a lot of these people have been very successful economically.

Q: Do you consider yourself a particularly religious person?

A: No.

Q: I wondered, if what you know...

A: You mean in faith or in observance?

Q: I think we have to use your definition of how you answer that.

A: In faith yes, in observance no.

Q: Okay. What you since learned about the Holocaust, have you ever tried to put it together with your religious belief?

A: Well, I just go through reading Chiam Potok's "Wandering" and after you finish reading

xx this book, the Holocaust ^{is} just another episode in the 3500 year history of the Jews.

Some of the incidents in there - population - wise, Romans-percentage wise probably

killed off more Jews when they were cleaning out Palestine than percentage-wise the

Germ ans. They did not bring them to a particular spot and organizely kill them.

They killed them where they found them. I don't think it was - really - any worse

than the other. It was m an, woman and child. They weren 't safe at home ---

they were saving pretty girls, a pretty girl, but I don't think they saved

anybody else. The ^{Assyrians} ~~Syrians~~, the Persians, peculiar enough - when the Moslems invaded in

580 - 590, they didn't, because the Jew was a monotheist, like them. They would

tolerate them for a head tax, but if any of them/^{that}weren't ~~monotheist~~ monotheist, ~~they~~

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A: did not convert, then they quickly cut their head off.

Q: Are you sort of saying = it is just in the nature of Jewish people to be persecuted down in history?

A: Well, I don't know if it's the nature of the Jewish people to be persecuted, but I think it's - it seems like whatever the cause may be - and I think it requires more explanation than I can give it, they have been severely persecuted 3500 years. And my wife is trying to explain to me how you get up to 5000, 5,200 or something. I haven't been able to figure out those ~~things~~ ^{dates}.

Q: I turned this back on and get — back to a letter that you wrote to your mother and father after you saw these girls.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And do you remember what you wrote, what you said in the letter?

A: Oh, I probably said some of the same things that I've told you about, but the only other things that I had added to them, was that well, when they are collecting money for the U J A, or for other charitable subjects, you might tell them that here are people, who have lost everything, stand penniless and mostly without relatives in the world and that I think could certainly share with the benefits that they have - certainly better off than these people. And then I said some other things, I don't know. That letter got lost, just like things get lost ^{here} put it somewhere.

~~Voice from elsewhere:~~ You didn't throw it out, did you, Jerome?

A: Got it?

Voice: No, I don't even know where to start to look for it.

Q: Well, if you find it, and care to share it ^{with us} we would love to have you.

Mrs. Zimmerman, if it turns up, we would love to see it.

Okay. Let me see if there is anything.... One of the questions I didn't ask you, and you have already answered is that you had talked about this experience with anyone, and you wrote your parents right after this about it. So you were rather amazed moved by it, I would think.

A: Did I do what?

Q: You wrote to your parents about this right after the fact, so you were rather emotionally caught up in some way, would that be a fair statement?

A: Oh, of course.

Q: Do you think that it is important, for instance, your wife and children to know about these things? These experiences?

A: Well, let me say that my wife leads me into involvement nowadays. She's far, far more caught up in the whole thing. In fact, my wife's on the Holocaust Commission, the President recently appointed _____

_____ she's Secretary, so I don't need to get her interested. She stays that way, in fact, most of the time we need to calm it down a little bit. My son went to Israel as a non-believer in 1974, just for a visit to Europe, he had gone to Sunday School, he got very little - no religious feeling out of it - and, but went to work there on a kibbutz there as a lark, and ended up spending three years there; met a girl from the United States at one of the kibbutzim, got married....

Voice: - loudly exclaiming something...

Q: She must have found it, or is it something else?

Voice: you won't believe it.... (watching game on TV)

Q: _____ Okay...

A: We are picking you up on
tape in here, honey. Very enthusiastic girl. This girl is from Palo Alto,

And they have a burning desire to go back to Israel and my son writes about it, he is getting a doctorate degree in Middle East studies, speaks Arabic and Hebrew fluently, so I don't have to get him emotionally involved. My middle daughter, who is a physician, was deeply involved in all of this; now I think she probably has less time for it. I haven't discussed it with her - as a specific. I would think that she certainly understands it. My oldest one has little concept of it.

Q: Did you watch the Holocaust show? The television show? What did you think about it? And what was your reaction?

A: Well, I don't think they told me anything new...I think it put it in a new context -- from most of the literature, etc, in that it brought a German family into it and took them all the way through it, which I think was excellent because reaction that I have read of the German people, that is what really affected them. The fact that it was an average family - two average families, and that one of them, because he was unemployed and wanted to be an attorney was willing to kill as many people as was necessary to be successful. And the other family was killed by him. The film that they showed - you know, I've seen so much and read so much - Babi Yar, the whole book of Babi Yar - rather than the one scene of Babi Yar, that the ~~one~~ one scene bring to my mind the whole book, also in another study the whole story of no, I've read so much that each incident brought back, you know, a lot of memories. I could imagine that the people watching this and seeing it; the Germans - it happened in their own country. I can understand the reaction they had - some of them thought it was absolutely necessary to see this and their children to see it and that their children understand and others who feel they should forget it. The whole world is full of this grouping of the people. Unfortunately, I have some good friends who don't want to hear any bad news; if you want to tell them about the problems of the Jews in Israel, etc, they just say "tell me how much money you want - I don't want to hear about it."

Q: Uh huh, ostrich sort of ~~x....x~~ you seem to feel...

A: The world is full of that.

Q: You seem to feel it is important that we don't put our head in the sand.

A: Absolutely. Not. I probably feel more aggressive than we ought to. My wife asked me what I thought of Begin's on Not Meet the Press, but Answers and Issues or whatever, did you see him at noontime?

Q: No.

A: He goes from one extreme to another. First he gives you a lecture on history,

A: and then in this particular incident, I thought he had an opportunity to really help mold a public opinion and he did nothing about it. I thought he ... I didn't like the impression that I got of him, that I felt that most of the people who don't care for him got a very negative impression of him.

Q: He's not a very charismatic man, is he?

A: No. But he doesn't have to be. He can be just factual. I mean they said - "Why Are You Here?" I would have loved to have them ask me that on that program, and I would have said for one thing, I come here to let the American people and the President know that he still has a friend, that we - like most of his supposed-Arab-friends - are not threatening him with a boycott of one of their most vital supplies, that we are not threatening to cut off their oil, we are not threatening to throw out all these people, the Americans, out of the country, we are not threatening to cut off their oil unless the Americans create a peace that exactly suits us, and has all the Israelis leave, and the PLO take over their possessions, we are not ...you know, if I had been prepared, I could have thought

Q: You felt he missed the opportunity?

A: I thought he missed a fantastic opportunity. We are not the people who are raising the price of oil, & it is costing us, we ~~now~~ have now raised the cost of our oil from \$1.80 to \$2.10 - which just happened last Friday. The Arab friends who came to this country and said be our friends - sell us arms and we will take care of you - and it hasn't been but a few months since you did that for them, and they turned on you. We have been a the friend of United States for many lifetimes, and we will keep on being friends with the United States for many lifetimes, even though we don't see eye to eye. I thought he had so many opportunities and he just blew 30 minutes with non-committal replies.

Q: So what your are ~~see~~ seeing again, is something that we talked about earlier when we talked about the East Indians and the problems there, and you are saying - here again, the problem is based on economics, talking about oil, price of oil and the economy.

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- A: I think he was so afraid, so afraid that if he were to hurt Mr. Carter's feelings or would say something that would someone else would say that would hurt that he was just ..
- Q: Ineffectual?
- A: I won't use the word...
Unfortunately too many of us have a ghetto-Jewish personality.
- Q: Do you want to describe that?
- A: I think you may remember where ~~you~~ he came from, unfortunately.
- Q: You want to describe that ghetto-Jewish personality? Or would you rather leave it go?
- A: Well, I think it is just a matter of being constantly afraid or constantly -- uh -- how we must assimilate in our ideas, we must not make waves, we had no right to express our views, because it might hurt us or our family or our friends. I don't think this does anyone any fairness.
- Q: I think in reading some of these experiences in ghettos during the Hitler era in Germany, the idea was - let's not make waves, and let's follow orders...
- A: If they want to put us behind walls, let us just go behind the wall and
- Q: Be quiet.
- A: Yes.
- Q: And yet, I think, perhaps, the uprising in the ghetto in Warsaw was so unique for reason. They said - "enough already."
- A: That's one uprising, after you have' been pushed and slapped to wall and have nowhere to go. I think they did a fantastic job on doing it and their capability was unbelievable, but between the time of what was it - 70 C.E. and 1944 is a long time in between to be ghetto-Jews.
- Q: I hear your message. And relating to what you said about Begin's talk today. I want to thank you on the tape for sharing your experience with us. I am going to turn this off.