

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Ernest James
July 13, 1990
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PREFACE

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ERNEST JAMES

JULY 13, 1990

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: I'm Ernest James.

Q: Where were you born and when were you born?

A: I was born in Ord, Nebraska, on April 23, 1920.

Q: Would you tell me something about your childhood and family, growing up?

A: Well, I came from rather a large family. There's nine of us, and incidentally they're, all but one are still living and we get together a lot. Uh, uh, I was the next to the youngest of the family. We were in a farming community in uh, central Nebraska. Uh, I had a very uh, good childhood. Uh, uh, graduated from high school in 1938, and immediately thereafter uh, in fact the day I graduated I got on the train and left for California, where I worked in uh, the U.S. Forest Service. Uh, I worked there until about 19 uh, oh 40. And then with the war coming along uh, I decided that rather than be drafted I would uh, join the Army. I joined the California National Guard. Uh, uh, we were called into active service at uh, in March of 1941. I was in the infantry and had uh, basic training and rose uh, by uh, the time the war started I was a sergeant. Uh, we were uh, uh, right after Pearl Harbor we were called in to uh, be the defensive troops along the the coast in San Francisco and I had a lot of experiences in uh, running patrols, uh, trying to uh, set it up so that if the Japanese came, why we could uh, keep them away. I uh, uh, was uh, I applied for officer's candidate school in the engineers in uh, June of 1942 and was accepted. Uh, went through training in Fort Belvoir and uh, uh, was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant. Uh, I went up to Plattsburg Barracks in New York where I had uh, I was assigned to a com...engineer combat battalion and we trained our troops up there uh, uh, from about 19 uh, 19...through 1942. We then went uh, uh, overseas. Went down to North Africa about the time of the uh, that uh, Roosevelt was at the Yalta Conference, and uh, at that conference they decided to uh, that they're going to invade Europe so rather than go to the Far East, we went up to England where we prepared for the invasion. Uh, after uh, uh, going for about several months in England training for the invasion, we were ready and in uh, June we uh, uh, got on our ships and our trip, our troops were some of the first that landed on D-Day uh, uh, in Normandy. Uh, we uh, were involved in virtually all of the uh, combat operations of the 1st Army in 7th Corps. Uh, captured Cherbourg and and the uh, uh, Battles of St. Lowe (ph) and uh, uh, moving on through over to Paris uh, we turned north and went up to Belgium, through uh, uh, through Belgium and in Aachen (ph) we were uh,...one of the things that I remember was uh, how wonderful the people were in France and Belgium, but the minute we hit Aachen uh, people were somber. They resented us and uh, uh, it was there we first started uh, getting the feeling that uh, uh, the Germans were more...uh, were worse than just a uh, enemy, that uh, we started hearing stories about uh, uh, the uh, concentration camps. Uh, I might

go back to a couple of recollections that I do have of uh, uh, the uh,...what was happening over in Germany. Back in 1938 uh,...well, maybe it was earlier than that, '36...

Q: We really would like to stick with your story and what you experienced.

A: Well, this is what I experienced. (Oh, OK.) Uh, uh, I discussed uh, the World War I with some uh, with a gentleman that had uh, been in that, and he told me that uh, he felt that we weren't finished with the Germans, that the Nazi uh, the Nazi uh, that were coming in uh, in power, uh, that there was going to be a war, and he impressed on uh, on me this. Then uh, in 1939 I met my first, I had my first contact and inkling that there was uh, something happening over there. I was with a church group and they sponsored a Jewish uh, family that came over, and I remember this this family...very brilliant people, and uh, wonderful people and they uh, they were Jewish. This was a Congregational Church. Well, they came in and uh, we got acquainted with them, and I remember talking to uh, the daughter and she was telling me about how they were taking the Jewish people and putting them into camps, and this was in 1938 or '39. And uh, we couldn't, we couldn't comprehend that that type of thing was happening. However, the church did sponsor several Jewish people coming uh,...Jewish families coming over and uh, wouldn't it have been wonderful if we had of known then what actually was happening, but that my...the first inkling that I had that anything such as this happened. Now, getting back to uh, uh, getting back to uh, going into Germany, I had several uh, instances where we we found uh, people who were uh, displaced people from Poland and other uh, countries and uh, but not a not a lot of them. Apparently, as we moved on through Germany, these people were uh, were uh, carried back behind the German lines and as a consequence, only those that may have hidden someplace uh, uh, were the ones that we saw. Uh, I do remember one time...uh, it was uh, not too long before uh, we hit Nordhausen that uh, we went into a large uh, oh German farm. It was a...there was a baron that was that had an estate and uh, he had virtually a castle, a small castle. Uh, we went into into this area and uh, uh, there were a lot of uh, well, slave labors. Uh, uh, they were probably uh,...they were Polish, uh, possibly some Russians and there were some Italians there. Why there were Italians I don't know, but uh, uh, the baron uh, came out and asked me if I could do something about these horrible people that were uh, stealing all his food and we uh,...I I was a platoon commander at the time, and uh, so he invited me in for some wine, and so I uh, went over to my uh, sergeant and asked him to get uh, two of our people. One was of Polish uh, extraction and could speak Polish and German. The other was Italian. His name of Pecares (ph). Well uh, they went over and talked to these people while I went in to talk to the baron. Well, I went in there and he had these beau...these beautiful uh, arms, guns and uh, medieval type armament on the wall and then uh, he had apparently been a big game hunter. Uh, the uh, baron told me how horrible these people were and uh, uh, how the Germans were uh, being uh, victimized by them. Well, in talking to this man...he had uh, he had been an editor of a newspaper uh, somewhere in Germany and uh, in asking him about the Nazis, why of course he didn't know that all these things were happening. Uh, uh, and he pointed out that he had opened up his, part of his home as a hospital. And he did. He had a hospital there. They were all uh, either wounded Germans

or wounded civilians uh, that were in there. Uh, after uh, I had my glass of wine with him, I went back to talk to the uh, to the Polish and the Italian men. Well their story was quite interesting. These people were kept in virtual slavery in this in this farm, and uh, they uh, uh, they weren't allowed to have religious services. They weren't allowed to marry. And one of the interesting things was uh, one of them told how they uh, if one, if a man and a woman wanted to get together...incidentally they all lived in in communal uh, uh, barracks in effect...a man and woman wanted to get together and become man and wife, why they uh, stood and told each other that they uh, were were man and wife. There's of course no religious services, but to them that was a marriage. Uh, but uh, uh, these these people were hungry. They had nothing to eat, and the only food was what the baron had and so we told the baron that he was going to have to feed them and that we could do nothing about uh, them stealing, uh, well actually taking food, that uh, we were going to leave and that uh, uh, we we gave instructions to the people to be reasonable and fair and whatever happened after that I don't know. But this was one incident that we ran into uh, rather often in uh, to one degree or another. Uh, uh, it was amusing that uh, the baron was uh,...of course, he knew nothing about what was happening. Uh, the same as uh, another place where there's a man that was an umbrella manufacturer, and he knew nothing...uh, we took over his house to stay...he knew nothing about the what the Nazis were doing, and he wasn't a Nazi, but in the house we found him in a Nazi uniform uh, as a local official, and we even found a picture with he and Hitler. (Laughter) But it was uh,...I relate these to show the the people over there almost universally in quotes did not know what the Nazis were doing, and they were not Nazis, yet we found most of them did know. Now getting over uh, towards the concentration camps, uh, uh, in uh, one town, uh, very close to Nordhausen...it couldn't have been more than oh thirty or forty miles away, up in the Hartz (ph) Mountains, we came across this almost bucolic scene. A beautiful uh, landscaped uh, uh, estate and homes around uh, and walking around were girls pushing uh, baby carriages and uh, uh, young pregnant women. Well, we found out later that these women had become pregnant with uh, uh, German soldiers and the children were uh, taken after they had reached a few years old and put into a school, taken away from their mothers and put into a school and later on as they grew up, there was a small military camp. Now the military camp...these kids were actually put into the camp and trained uh, as soldiers. Uh, it was kind of interesting that when we came upon the town uh, we had uh, we had a little fire from uh, uh, back uh, behind some barricades, and we found out that they were they were kids fourteen and fifteen years of age, but we talked them into stopping it, and these were actual children that were uh, uh, that were out of this this little area. The town I don't know, but it was in the Hartz Mountains. I relate this to show that three or four days later we came across Nordhausen. Uh, a diametric uh, scene. Uh, we were uh, our troops, the 238th Engineer Combat Battalion uh, was a uh, attached to the 7th Corps and we normally were then attached to any division that needed combat engineer uh, needed more combat engineer troops, primarily if they had uh, if they had bridges to build or roads or any type of engineering work, but we were assigned uh, uh, in this area to the uh, uh, the 1st Division, the 104th Division and or the 3rd Armored. Uh, these troops, the infantry and armored, would move ahead of us and we'd come in and uh, repair the roads so that the uh, the support troops could

come up or we would go ahead and build bridges so they could move across them. Uh, the 104th uh, Infantry uh, uh, and I believe the 3rd Armored went through the town of Nordhausen. Uh, when they arrived there they found the most horrible situation that uh, a person can ever explain. Uh, I came in probably a day or two days later. It it couldn't have been more than a day later. Uh, my first recollection was moving in with my uh, with my platoon into a uh, railroad yards, and German civilians were uh, well looting the trains. They would break open the box cars and take any food out and of course they hadn't had any food and uh, so they'd uh, go get anything they could in the trains. Well, there over on a siding there was this one train that uh, nobody had broken into and we went over there and uh, the smell incidentally was horrible, in the town, all over. The closer we got to this place uh, the worse the smell got. When I got over there I saw fluids dripping out of the the uh, boxcars. We opened one up and uh, uh, all I can compare it to is a group of fish slithering out of a net. These people were packed in uh, and they were dead and they had started into deteriorate. The uh, the body fluids were dripping out and we...uh, well, many of us got sick. Uh, other uh, groups of our battalion were in uh, other parts of the uh, of the town. What uh, we did uh, was to go into town...after we'd found all this, we went into town and uh, ordered all the able-bodied people to...men, to come out and help bury. Uh, the town uh, uh, as I've heard since...there was actually two camps but I I have no recollection of that. I...it all melds into one...uh, uh, I didn't know it at the time but one was Camp Dora and the other was uh, was Nordhausen. Well, Camp Dora was uh, I believe near a suburb and uh, uh, the town uh, you could be in the town and look into the camp. Well the people all swore they knew nothing about it. Uh, each of them must have been blind because we could see into the camp and see the dead bodies. Uh, I remember a couple of things. I remember opening a furnace and seeing partially burned bodies. I remember the bodies in the barracks, uh, some alive, some dead. Uh, in some instances there were people who were alive but barely alive that were laying right next to people that were dead. The uh, we got uh, all the able-bodied men that we could and we dug rough trenches with our bulldozers and then we made the Germans and the German civilians uh, shovel uh, the trenches and make them perfect. They were beautiful trenches. Uh, straight up and down, across, up and very clean. The dirt was piled uh, up above the trench. They...we allowed them to have masks over their face, but we didn't allow them any kind of gloves. They had to handle the dead bodies with their bare hands. We felt uh, rather strongly about this. Today I don't know whether I'd do the same thing but uh, at that time uh, there was a a hatred, if you will. We uh, made them carry uh, each individual body uh, they, on stretchers. Now they made stretchers out of oh doors, uh, they'd take two poles and put uh, a coat in between, or take real stretchers...any type of makeshift stretcher, but one person on a stretcher, four people carrying them. They took them over. They laid them out neatly. We made them lay them out neatly and where they could put their hands over them, and then carry them and lay them in line in the trenches uh, and then I don't know how they were buried because we left because the uh, before they were uh, covered up. But we tried to stick them with detail. Uh, I'll never forget seeing partially burned bodies. I saw a few little children. Uh, uh, everybody was emaciated. Uh, these people apparently had been, well obviously were workers in a V-2 factory, in a Mescherschmidt (ph) factory that they had there. Uh, the Mescherschmidt's

factory was uh, uh, in I believe three tunnels and uh, I won't go into detail about the about the factory, but needless to say we went into uh, we went into these and uh, they were the the ultimate of German precision, but all of the work was done by slave labor and the slave labor was uh, worked until they got sick and then they were and then they either died or they were killed. Uh, there apparently was no medical attention or any other type of attention and there was no food any place around. Possibly the Germans had taken what there was but there definitely was not any in the uh, barracks. The barracks themselves that the that the uh, that the uh, uh, camp or where these people were housed were large uh,...I don't recall whether they were brick or wood buildings...but uh, filthy, uh, dirty, and it was just...the entire the entire uh, experience was something that even though we had seen uh, some of the things such as the slave labor camps out on the farms, where the people weren't treated quite as bad...uh, this was...we just never even conceived of this type of thing happening. Uh, we did not know at the...I didn't even think about it, whether these were uh, were Jews or displaced people from Poland or uh, where they were from. In the camps out on the farms, they mostly were displaced people, but in Dora, I think that the last of the Jewish people were uh, were in there in addition to others uh, but it...I just can't remember uh, uh, any of the stories. The the picture was so horrible. Uh, to this day uh, I'm normally a uh, person that's rather complacent, and I do not get into controversial discussions, but the one place where I get angry, and obviously angry, is when I hear people question that this existed, and I've had this happen several times and my answer uh, with expletives is that yes, it did exist. I saw it and I smelled it and I've got pictures of it. Our battalion photographer took uh, uh, oh twelve or fourteen photographs of which I've uh, given to the uh, Holocaust Museum and uh, uh, it's kind of interesting. We had two photographers. Uh, one one's name was Garfinkel. He was a Jewish fellow, and Garfinkel could speak Yiddish and German and uh, we used to uh, have Garfinkel come over and interview German prisoners and he delighted in speaking Yiddish to them and uh, of course they could do nothing, nothing about it, but we we never controlled that type of thing. He uh, he usually interviewed them and and got what we wanted out of it. Garfinkel may or may not have been the one that took these. We had two photographers, and I think we have it on record uh, of who did. Uh, the photographs were taken by the 238th Engineers and they are uh, the original photographs. I know that they were taken. They were sent...they're probably in the uh, in the archives, because we sent uh, the copies of them through channels as we did any document we had. Uh,...

Q: Did you...did you through an interpreter perhaps uh, speak with any of the survivors?

A: Uh, no. Uh, the reason was that the survivors were uh,...they couldn't speak, the ones that were there. They were, they were almost dead. Uh, and uh, what we what we did, we took care of burying...we took care of seeing that they were buried. Uh, apparently there were troops that came in after us that took care of the medical...uh, gave them any medical uh, uh, treatment that they needed, but we didn't we didn't have contact with uh, any of the ones that were left alive uh, as far as I know. Many of these things fade back and I I really can't remember.

Q: What did you do about food or lack of food?

A: Well, uh, this this was kind of interesting. Uh, we ran across many people that were starved and uh, uh, I remember in in one place shortly after Nordhausen, we we came onto a uh, slave labor camp where the people were very hungry, and in this they had uh, uh, Russian prisoners of war as well as Polish and others. I don't think there was any Jewish people in uh, in this, but uh, they immediately of course asked us for food. And uh, uh, we started feeding them. Our doctor came over and blew his stack. He said you do not feed those people. You will kill them. And this actually happened. I am told that it actually happened that if you fed them, they'd die and uh, in one in one uh, case we met uh, we came across an American prisoner of war camp. Actually we came up to it, and it had already been liberated and the American prisoners of war were coming out of it, and of course we immediately, we'd give them anything we had. Again our doctor uh, uh, put out orders that nobody was to feed them. We were to take them, put them in a compound and that the medical people would come in and feed them uh, to bring them back. Uh, some who were uh, given food immediately got sick. Uh, I uh, only recall a couple of times where we did give them food. I remember one time when when some uh, some of those people found some meat that uh, was that uh, had worms in it, maggots in it, and they took it and brushed it out and started eating it and we had to forcefully take it away from them. Because they would have almost certainly died. Those were uh,...I do uh,...uh, I wrote my wife, who...she was my girlfriend then...I wrote her quite a few letters and uh, we couldn't discuss many of these things in the letters, however I do have uh, uh, I have one uh, uh, little piece that I wrote. I'd like to read if you would. Uh, this is April 23rd, 1945, and this is about ten days after we were in Nordhausen. My wife's name was Faith. I said: Faith, I'm one year older today. Twenty-five. At least I think it's the 23rd of April. You loose track of those things. No gray hairs yet but if this work keeps on uh, there will be. (Cough) Uh, this is...today is one of those cold dreary days that would be best spent by a fireplace. That kind of life is far away, especially when everyone is hating each other. These last few weeks I've seen what the Germans are really like. You see the people from the concentration camps, the camps themselves, and you wonder if the master race is really human. What is in congruous, the civilians complain to us that the forced laborers are looting their homes of food and uh, moving in on them. Uh, the very same thing the Nazis did to their enemies. They have such an innocent manner. All I can say to them without losing my temper is, you brought them here. What a far cry from home. Now we couldn't write details uh, of the of the camp, and so I never put it down in writing, but this does, behind the lines you can see what I was thinking uh, after that experience. Any other things that you might uh,...?

Q: Is there anything you want to add about Nordhausen, any other recollections that you want to tell us?

A: Well, Nordhausen is in a beautiful area. Uh, in fact all of the area in the Hartz Mountains and I guess Nord...Nordhausen is a little south of there, but all of those areas are beautiful. The uh, the dichotomy of a beautiful, beautiful, and things such as this

happening. I'd like to go back to Nordhausen, and one of these days I shall. Uh, I'd like to I'd like to see if there's any type of uh, uh, of monument where we buried those people. I assume there is. I hope there is. Uh, it it would be interesting uh, uh, to go back. Uh, no, I I don't think that there's uh,...oh, uh, there is one thing. The uh, tunnels that were back in there, as I said were a they were a uh, uh, Meserschmidt factory or actually a V-2 factory, and uh, Werner Braun uh, von Braun (ph) was one of the top men there. I've often wondered if Werner von Braun were one of the people that we made carry those dead bodies out, because I'm certain that he was around the area. Uh, in all probability the people that we made carry the bodies out were some of the scientists. Uh, they had to be, because they couldn't have all gotten out and we took every able-bodied man. I did read a uh, a very interesting uh, uh, piece about three years ago in a newspaper. It was in relation to one of the uh, German rocket scientists that had been brought over here and had been very instrumental in helping develop our space program, and uh, he was from Nordhausen and a contemporary of Werner Braun, von Braun. Apparently he had uh, uh, been instrumental in sending some of the people to the uh, to their death there and uh, was being charged as such. Who he was I don't recall, but he was he was sent uh, being sent back to Germany, and the thing that was interesting to me was that there was a commentary about it. Why should we send...uh, this man had done so much for our country. Why should we send him back to face those uh, uh, the uh, courts over there? Well, it made me wonder how quick we forget. I don't care what the person did, if he was instrumental in uh, in perpetuating that type of a situation, he's got to face his accusers sometime. And how many others of the scientists that came over were instrumental in doing that sort...they mu...they had to know it.

Q: I wanted to go back to you and to your experience during the war, if I may?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh, after you left Nordhausen, uh, you told us in this interview and you told me before you were in other slave labor camps as well. □ □

A: Oh yes.

Q: Would you tell us about some of those camps and what you saw?

A: Yes. Uh, uh, I think the one you're referring to is actually a uh, a German prisoner of war camp. As the uh, when we uh, in May, just a month or so after uh, the war was over and troops were put in as uh, as uh, well for military government and uh, I for instance was assigned a little town uh, by the name of Wimbleberg (ph), uh, and I was in effect the military governor of that. It's near Iceslaven (ph). Uh, we were uh, uh,...again, none of the people knew anything about uh, uh, the concentration camps. None of them had been Nazis and uh, by this time we were sort of hardened to that type of an answer. It was uh,...we we almost..we were amused because uh, where were all the Nazis? Uh, where were the...how come they didn't know that the that there were slave labor camps? Uh, this

area, they'd had trains going through there. Uh, it was on the main uh, uh, railroad lines. Well, one...uh, we were uh, pulled out of that duty for uh, two weeks, a week or two weeks work in guarding a uh, large military prisoner of war camp. This uh, camp had uh, at the back of it was a large slag pile from coal uh, from coal mines, and you couldn't climb up it, so that made a uh, a way of barring that side. Then we had barbed wire all around the camp. Uh, there were probably eighty to a hundred thousand prisoners in there. Uh, one portion of the uh, camp had a separate wire cage. Uh, there were three rings of concertina (ph)...that's the round barbed wire...two and then one atop around this. Then there was a bare area and then there was another line of concertina. Now uh, we had our uh, guns, what we called uh, anti-aircraft multiple mounts...four fifty calibre machine guns that were lowered down and aimed along there. If any one escaped, they were shot uh, and that's the only way we could control a hundred thousand people with probably two or three hundred uh, troops, and at night they had search lights that went down these. They'd have what we called a field of fire...one down here, one down here and that zig-zagged around. Uh, this one particular area that was separated uh,...there were civilians in it. They were all uh, uh, war criminals, uh, people who had been guards in the camp and various other types of things, of uh, positions that they had held and they were in there for reasons. We didn't know why, but uh, uh, many of them were guards in the un probably in Nordhausen, because this wasn't too far away from there, or Buchenwald. Uh, and uh, these people uh, were...they were the some of the meanest looking people that I think I've ever seen, and I don't know what happened to them. I do remember that uh, we had one uh, of our guns that were aimed down there, and if anyone come close to the wire, they let loose with the guns. Uh, we had obviously had a uh, a very strong feeling towards the civilians that were put in that cage. Uh, the German soldiers, we kept telling them through their own officers and their own uh, uh, non-coms that they were being held there only so we could process them to let them out, which was true. Within weeks they were all out and at home, but I'll never forget those uh, people in that that portion of the concentra...or of the uh, the uh, prisoner of war camp. What happened to them I don't know. I assume that they are the ones that went into some of the trials, but they were in there because there were documented reasons for them being there. Uh, we uh, after after we were in the Nordhausen area and Iceslaven area, from then on why uh, we heard a lot of stories but we had no no direct contact with any uh, any type of slave labor or concentration camp uh, camps. We were on...we left for uh, for France uh, a couple of months later, but all that time we were just in military government and uh, we were keeping things uh, some sort of of government until the civil government could come in, and when they came in why we moved out.

Q: Did you come in contact uh, with refugees during this period?

A: Oh yes. Yes. Many refugees. Uh, uh, in fact uh, that was one of our big problems of movement was uh, the refugees would be coming back and we'd being going forward. In uh, in over in France and Belgium, they were of course French and Belgium people...

Q: Let's stay in Germany...

A: But getting over into Germany, uh, these people were uh, primarily they were uh, Germans whose towns had been totally destroyed and they uh, they had no place to go. We did run across uh, refugees who were non-Germans, primarily the Poles and uh, uh,...it always comes back Italians but I can't imagine why Italians...they may have been, they may have had uh, laborers come in. I don't know. Uh, then uh, there were Russians, and it was hard to separate the Russians who were uh, military prisoners from Russian civilians that had been sent back, but uh, they were always hungry. They uh, we'd give them food sometimes but uh, there were so many of them. Uh, it just uh,...I don't I don't have too many reco...detailed recollections except the masses uh, of them. We made them get off the road when we were moving our military forward though. And...

Q: I'd like to go back to Nordhausen if you don't mind one more time for a minute. Uh, when you went into the camp, uh, □ you described some of it for us. Uh, can you uh, tell us at all about uh, uh, the the layout of the camp? How was it, how was it set up?

A: Well, this...no...I've tried, I've tried to uh, to bring that back but I can't. Uh, uh, I do remember the large barracks, and I do remember uh, uh, opening an oven, but what...where that was in relation to other things, I I don't recall. There were so many things happening and and frankly we were so tired. Uh, we had, we were moving sometimes uh, fifty or sixty miles a day and working day and night and uh, we were just uh, uh, we were just dead on our feet, and uh, one of the problems that we had in relation to this type of recollection is that uh, we were numb. Uh, we were emotionally numb. And so uh, many of those details are are difficult, uh, difficult to remember. Uh, some of my memories are stimulated by the photos that I have, but I can't tell whether it's a it's a remembering or whether it's looking at the photo and that is impressed as a memory. Uh, uh, I do know that uh, you can see into the camp from outside of the camp. That is definite. Uh, I couldn't figure how in the how the people in the town didn't know what was happening. I had heard uh, others say that they had been, that people had been shot right out or killed right out in broad daylight there. I didn't see it but that's uh, uh, that does tell how how open uh, it apparently was. Uh, additionally I'm not sure whether those trains that we saw were coming in or going out. Uh, uh, I would assume that they were coming in, however I've heard later that the Germans were moving them back, but we were getting awfully close to the ___ River so they didn't have very uh, very many other places to move them, and whether they had come from Buchenwald or not, uh, I don't know. I assume that some of them had come from Buchenwald.

Q: When you left Germany, could you just tell us briefly where you went?

A: Well, we uh, uh, in about uh, June or it must have been July because the 4th of July I spent in Germany. Uh, uh, the civil government came in and took over and we moved back to uh, back to France where as engineers we became the ones that maintained redeployment camps and uh, we uh, kept oh the water supply and roads and everything such as that, and we kept that up until October. Then I finally uh, got my orders to go

home and uh, I couldn't believe it. I got the Queen Elizabeth. (Laughter) And I'll never forget the difference between all the deprivations we had and then getting on the Queen Elizabeth where we had waiters for our tables and uh, we could go to the bar and get scotch and soda and uh, oh that was heaven. (Laughter) And then when I got home, the first thing that I remember is the Red Cross being on the docks with great big uh, uh, trucks loaded with milk, and they gave us all the milk we wanted. See we hadn't had milk for oh two years, fresh milk, and that was the thing that we that we liked the most. But after that I I landed about the 13th of October and I called my girlfriend up and told her I was coming home, and she asked when and I told her and I got on the train on the 17th. Met her the 17th and the 18th we were married. And she's still with me, after forty-five years. Is there anything else that I, that we might...I can't I can't think of anything else...well, I I can add uh, there are uh, quite a few people who are in my uh, uh, in the 238th Engineer Combat Battalion Association. We still meet. We've had forty-four meetings, every year since then. It's a small group - five hundred people originally in it and we still have two hundred that are active. Many of those do remember uh, uh, the incidents. I've made several tapes which I've given to the uh, to the Holocaust Museum and uh, I'm having, we're having a meeting next week and at that time why uh, uh, we've invited a member of the Holocaust Museum to come over and we'll talk in detail. One of the things that that I have noticed uh, (cough), excuse me...uh, over the years uh, uh, why we didn't talk about this, about Nordhausen, I don't know, but it was years before uh, we had any discussion upon it. I never recall discussing Nordhausen in to any degree in any of our meetings. Now it wasn't because we wanted to put it out of our mind. It uh,...I don't know. Uh, it was only after uh, we had uh, uh, found the photographs...uh, the commanding officer had the photographs along with several hundred others of the battalion and we got to discussing that and then I believe that uh, early in the 1980's that there was a trend towards uh, publicizing the fact that all this happened, probably because of what I'd experienced...people denying that it existed, and uh, even today I find that people in that unit are uh, rather reluctant to talk about it. Now why this is I don't know. It may be because their memories have uh, have slipped. Uh, I could only find four or five who would uh, uh, say that they recalled this. I've tried to get them to talk about it and uh, I can't. They'll say well, yes, I remember that but they won't go in to detail. I'm wondering if possibly they may have uh, unconsciously put it out of their minds. It was so horrible. Uh, I can't I cannot believe uh, in my own mind that people are are capable of that, and in my own mind I think I do separate the actual accident or actual incident uh, with the uh, with how it happened. Do you get what I mean? The uh, uh, the fact that people did that versus the physical dead bodies is is to a degree separated in my own mind. I can't uh, I guess subconsciously I can't believe that it uh, that it could have been done, yet uh, uh, the odor is still firmly impressed in my mind. Uh, if I smell a dead body of any kind I immediately think about that. So uh, it did happen. Uh, I I am pleased that the uh, the Holocaust Museum and that others are uh, uh, trying to uh, document all of this. I I believe in my own mind that if uh, if it isn't documented, more and more people are going to come by and say, did it really happen. I can say it happened because I saw it. But those of us that saw it are probably within ten or fifteen years of not being here, and there'll be nobody that saw it. And uh, these documentaries like this are the only thing

that will be existing uh, and so uh, I, every opportunity I get now I talk about it. I don't want to hold back anything. The sordid details are very important uh, because they they tend to emphasize that man's inhumanity to man is there and one other thing that I can say...uh, uh, a little incident happened to me that uh, is unrelated to the Holocaust but it's related to the, to what can happen. We were crossing...we were building a bridge across the Rhine River just before ____ fell, and I was in charge of preparing the the uh, enemy shore. We had crossed ____, come up and had a slit of land north. This was near _____. We were cleaning out all of the uh, civilians that were in the area. We didn't want any German in the area, so we just vacated their houses, kicked them out. Uh, they could have gone over and thrown a bomb on our bridge and knocked it out. Anyhow uh, each officer took an enlisted man and uh, we went up one street and down the other, knocked on the door, uh, told the people they had to get out. They had ten minutes to get out. Where are they going to go? You go that way, and you'll be directed, and that was...that way was back away from the Rhine River. I went up to this one house and knocked on the door and uh, as the person that was in there opened the door, this young corporal from a little town in Kansas uh, was there with me. He snapped to, clicked his heels together, put his gun up like this, and all I could think was my God, a Nazi storm trooper. I have never forgotten that incident, because here was young Mr. America. This is the all American boy, and we're in a position of power and he turned to a Nazi like...man...I corrected him but I've never forgotten that. Given the right circumstances, it can still happen.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you for the opportunity.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

End of Tape #1

Conclusion of Interview