

## **RG-50.030.0996**

### **Summary**

Richard Marvin Connick was a Jewish American soldier who witnessed Dachau after it was liberated. He was born on May 31, 1926 in Buffalo, New York. His father's family was from Poland and his mother was born in Moldova, Bessarabia, but his maternal great grandparents were also from Poland. Connick's father, Menashe, emigrated from Poland when he was a young boy. His mother, Ethel (Yosefitz), came to the United States via Argentina. She still had relatives in Warsaw, Poland, however, who were killed in the Holocaust. His parents spoke English at home except with his grandmother who spoke Yiddish. Connuck's grandparents spoke Russian in Europe. The Connucks lived in a mixed community in Buffalo with Jews and immigrant Germans. He experienced some antisemitism as a boy from his German Catholic neighbors, in part due to the broadcasts by Father Coughlin, but he shook it off. His parents were politically minded and listened to radio broadcasts of American elections and of events in Germany during the 1930s. Richard's first awareness of Hitler and Nazi Germany was from newsreels at the movies, especially on Kristallnacht. His family was observant and went to synagogue regularly. His grandfather loved Stalin until the Nazi-Soviet Pact. When war broke out in 1939 Richard was at home. The general feeling of his family and the Jewish community was to stay out of the war, but this changed after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Richard enlisted in the army when he was 17, but the army sent him to study first at Harvard. He was put on active duty at eighteen and after training at Fort Bragg and other locations in the U.S. he was sent to Alsace in France as part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> infantry. He remembered crossing the Siegfried Line into Germany and having Passover service in April 1945. When he crossed the Rhine, he began to see slave laborers from Poland wandering the streets. His unit kept going east ending up eventually in Munich where he ran into the Hitler Youth defending position. They were only fifteen or sixteen. He came to the town of Dachau, but he had barely heard of the camp. He went in a jeep with other soldiers to the camp and was horrified at the smell and sight of rotting bodies. He saw a German guard being stoned by former prisoners and felt they could not stop it. Eventually, a G.I. shot the German. At a railroad crossing in Dachau he also saw cattle cars filled with dead bodies of prisoners. They had come from Buchenwald. After seeing this, Richard felt a hatred for all Germans. But in July or August 1945 he went with another officer to visit the officer's parents in Bremen. While the soldier was visiting his parents, Richard visited the local Red Cross. There he learned that a German couple who maintained the local church hid a Jewish woman who survived the war. Connuck then realized that not all Germans were evil.

It took a long time but under the coaxing of his wife Connuck began to speak to groups, especially to students, about his experiences. He was deeply affected both by his experience during the war and talking about it to others.