

This is November 1994, and we are going close to next spring when it will be 50 years after the liberation of the concentration camps in Europe during the Second World War, at the end of the Second World War. And we have with us one of the liberators of Dachau concentration camp, Mr. Fred Long. Mr. Long, tell us about when you went into the army, where you were born, and where you went into the service and the year, and then how you got to that place, that time.

Well, I went in the service in 19 and 42. And I went in the local board 58, Harlan, Kentucky. And I left there and went to Fort Thomas, Kentucky. And I was sent then to Camp Butner, North Carolina, where I took my medical training. And then we left there and went overseas to England. And we took more training in England. And now--

You were how old when you-- at this point?

I was 19 years old at that time. And we went from there on to Omaha beachhead. And from Omaha, we went up through Saint-Lo. And we went through Southern France. That would be Southern France. We--

You were with the Third Army.

I was with the Third Army.

And the regiment and the--

Yes ma'am.

--that you were with?

The regiment, well, the army, Third Army was--

In the Medical Corps.

--Medical Corps, yeah. And I was with the 92nd Medical Battalion.

Right.

And we was supposed to treat for gas, phosgene, chloropicrin, and all that kind of stuff, if the Germans had used gas. Instead of that, they didn't use gas, which I thank the good Lord they didn't. They'd have killed a lot of people.

And we left there and went to Bastogne. I was in the Battle of the Bulge. And when we got-- the war was almost over. Well, they captured some medical troops of the US-- I'll just say US medics. I don't know who they were. But they captured them. The Germans did. And they left-- I don't know. They generally, when they captured anybody like that, well, they'd shoot them, just get them out of their hair. You see?

And anyhow, we went through the Battle of the Bulge. And after the Battle of the Bulge, we left Bastogne. And we went directly into "Duchau--" Dachau concentration camp.

Did you have any-- you had a special insignia that you wore as a member of the medical team, right?

Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. That-- which is medical, US medical over there, the-- [PAUSES] [SIGHS] oh, boy.

The special medical insignia that you wore to designate what group were with.

What group I was in, yes ma'am.

Had you heard anything about a place like-- that knew what you were getting into as far as concentration camps? Had

you heard rumors along the way or anything?

No, ma'am. Never heard any rumors whatever about Dachau concentration or any of the concentration camps. But I do know that the concentration camps were something else. I was told that now. But in "Duchau--" Dachau, I guess, why, you-- it really opened your eyes. And I didn't realize that one human being, regardless of its color or creed, could do another person as they done the Jews and the people that they didn't want nothing to do with. The Germans did. So--

Do you remember the date when you got to Dachau?

Somewhere around the 16th or 18th of April.

1945.

1945. And we went in Dachau concentration camp early in the morning. It was before daylight. And when they opened-- when daylight came, well, we looked around, and there was dead people laying all around, all around this fence-- all around the fence, dead people. And there was a pile of bodies right close to the-- [PAUSES] close to the incinerator, where they burn them.

And they had this shower. The shower was set up as a gas chamber. And there was all kinds of lice and filth of all kinds. And we had-- over here, we had a railroad cattle cars in here, that run off in this sidetrack. And it was full-- it was full of dead bodies. This whole car was full of dead bodies, with nothing but-- they were skin and bones. That's in my language.

And they had billeted us. There was a platoon of us.

Which would be how many, approximately?

Well, approximates--

Several--

Well, I was out of the platoon, A Platoon, Company A, and also Company A Platoon. And when we was billeted in this concrete-- or not a concrete, but it's a brick building right there that housed us. And we stayed in there 93 days, 93 days.

And these huts that I have drawn here, you could see, they were used for people. They were used for people to, well, to sleep in. And they had straw beds. They had straw beds in there and boards nailed to the wall, all in these buildings here. And they was boards, and they put straw in there for the people to sleep on.

And soon as one person died, why they'd-- this gentleman here, he was more or less the undertaker, I suppose. He would put them on a cart and haul them out the gate. Now, after they got through the gate, I don't know where he went-- where they went to. I guess they took them out there and buried them. That's just a--

Or there were piles of bodies.

Piles of bodies, yeah.

Is that what you saw? Are you--

Yep. And this a-- these pile of bodies here that, well, I say were two semi trailers couldn't haul them all in one load. They would be 200 or 300 in that pile. They couldn't-- as fast as they died, they couldn't get rid of them fast enough. And they would just ship them out this gate on these carts, on this cart. And then they would burn what they could to get rid of them.

And [SIGHS] the stink was beyond anything I ever smelt in my life. And I'm an old farm boy, was kind of raised on a

farm, and I've smelt a lot of stuff. I've smelled dead cattle and stuff like that. But this-- a human being has a smell with all of its own. It can't be-- can't be said, well, they smell like a dead cow-- not so.

Because each-- they got a smell of-- they just-- it's something terrible that you-- and you walk in there-- we went in, and when we went in, we was given a mask to go on, to go on our face. It had just a little old cup like, and it went on your face. And [SIGHS] they were-- there was like all kinds of diseases there.

There was tuberculosis. There was--

Dysentery?

Dysentery probably. Dysentery or--

Oh, God, yeah. That was-- well, that come from them folks not eating. See? They was-- you know, they had--

You said here, there's no water to be found.

No, no water, no. There was no water in here to be found. No.

So they were just literally without food or water or anything at all.

Now, when we got really organized, why, we would send-- take these people up in a line. And we had a table there for the-- we'd give them shots of typhus and so forth, them that we figured had a chance.

Right.

But their little arms and hips and so forth were so small-- I mean by being small that they were skin and bones.

From starvation and--

Yeah. And it was pretty hard to find a place to give them people shots. And so we done the best we could. And I have been asked the question, why did you-- why didn't you do more than you done? Well, when you are a Private First Class, PFC, well, you do what you are told and not anymore.

Right.

If you do too much, while they'll say, well-- they'll give you a good scolding, you know. And that was why that they told us when we went in there not to give these folks anything to eat. Now, that is a hard thing to do.

Right.

You see people starving, and they're on their way out. You know they just-- they'll be walking along and just fall over dead.

So many, many more died after you got there because of their--

Yeah. Lord, yeah, plenty of them. Yeah. And they were-- well, they were laying all over the place. You couldn't-- behind the building, beside the building, beside the fence, all over, they--

Thousands? Thousands?

It was thousands of them, yeah. And then when we got organized to where we could, well, we went outside of the camp and dug holes, long holes, with a bulldozer. The English did that. And they buried, oh, thousands and thousands of our troops, or the Jews and whatnot, the people there.

And I have been asked this before. How could you tell that they were English? Well, you couldn't tell that they were English unless they spoke in English and told you where they were from and how. So that's--

Did any of them talk to you? Did you talk to anyone to know what had happened before you got there? Or were you not able to?

No ma'am. The most-- I couldn't understand French, and I couldn't understand Jewish.

Or German.

Or German. And I had a few choice words for the Germans, but it didn't work out that way. But--

Did you see any German troops? There were none left by the time you got there. There were no German-- I mean, German soldiers?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, the Germans, the SS troopers, cleaned up the dead folks in here.

As your prisoners?

Yeah. That's the SS troopers was prisoners. That's after.

After you got there.

After we got there and liberated them. And they would come in, and they'd drag these people and pick them up and carry them and whatnot. The SS troopers had to do that. And they didn't look so high and mighty then, you know, because they'd lost their prestige, I guess you'd call it.

Wasn't it hard to keep American soldiers from just killing them, just--

Well, yes.

They were so angry.

Yeah. [PAUSES] Angry has everything to do with it, you know? I couldn't-- I couldn't get angry at even my worst enemy. But several times that I could maybe done something that I been sorry of now.

Right. Were there men, women, and children that you could tell? Or was--

There was-- there was children in this camp, men and children in this camp. And to see a child that's starving like that, why, it's something else. It gets to me. I--

You actually spent 93 days within--

93 days within that camp, yes ma'am. We spent 93 days there. And I hit-- I could sit here now, I'm shaking all over-- shaking all over and talking about it 50 years later. But it never never goes away. You know, you-- I dream of it. And I also have back-- what they call backlash--

Backflashes.

--backflashes. And I can be going down the road and-- or driving down the road, the highway, or anywhere, and if I smell burnt meat or anything in that-- that you-- you know, you'll burn meat or something like that if you cook. And then all this other stuff just flashes right up before my eyes.

It looks so real that for a second you think you're there. See?

Right.

And it's hard to get out of your mind. And I don't think that anybody will ever, that had that kind of experience, will ever get that out of their mind. I go to the psychiatrist now, once a week-- or once a week or-- well, every week, once a week.

At the VA.

At the VA.

Because of that experience, that--

Because of that experience. And I guess I'll just keep going. But it don't really seem like it helps any much.

It had to leave a terrible impression on a very young man, American person who had never witnessed anything even close to that kind of [CROSS TALK].

Well, the most I ever saw when I was a kid is a dead cow or dead horse or something like that. You know? But I never never realized that human beings could be that rough on anyone or--

That cruel.

--that cruel.

And being there, you still probably couldn't understand how it could happen.

No. Huh-uh.

Did you talk at all with the other young men that were with you? You probably were all just sort of shocked.

Well, we-- when we went in there, why, we was all given a job to do. And I never talked to anyone except maybe the sergeant come down. We had a sergeant out of Virginia. That he was a Sergeant Williams, Maurice Williams out of state of Virginia. And he went crazy right on the block, right on the-- right in the camp. And they had to send him back. And I don't know where they sent him to.

You saw the ovens. You saw everything that was--

Yes ma'am. I saw more than I wanted to. And [PAUSES] I get choked up about it now. You know? It's hard to talk.

Right.

I understand that. We do this, as difficult as it is, because we want-- for history, we don't want it to happen again. And we want people like you that were American soldiers from this country, who saw what had happened. We need their testimony. And we are deeply indebted to men like you that went through what they went through and finally brought liberation to these places because it would have gone on and on. So we are indebted to you. Is there anything else you would want to say?

I missed one thing, that these bodies outside of the crematorium-- well, I didn't put it on here, I guess. [PAUSES] Oh, yeah, furnace, right there. And they had a thing running around here, a rack like, that help these hanging-- held bodies on them. And they would put them on there. And they had this chain, would-- there would be a guy there that would run them into the furnace on that chain, on the hooks.

And when we got there-- I'm skipping all over the place, but that's--

That's all right.

--the best I can remember. When we got there, why, there were still three bodies hanging on these hooks close to this furnace. And like I say, I don't know why that one human being can be that cruel to another. I don't care what color they are or what race they are or whatever. But the Jews I think took the worst beating of all. [PAUSES]

By that I mean that they-- there was, I say, 6 million of them killed. 6 million Jews killed in this [PAUSES] Holocaust.

It's hard for other people to see it in there. But you see it, you know, every day because you lived through seeing the results of what had happened during that period of time.

Yes. Yes, ma'am. I sure did. Yeah. And we see this-- we see it every night, almost every night in our dreams. We wake up wringing wet with sweat, [PAUSES] jump out of bed, sit on the side of the bed, get up and walk or get, you know-- everything.

When me and-- I'd like to add this. When me and my wife got married, I come home December 13, 1945. And I used to get up. I have these dreams, and I'd get up and go, well, just go in and walk, you know, wherever, just for a walk. And I come back and relax a while and maybe have a cup of coffee, cold coffee, for instance. And then I would go back to bed, you know, back to sleep.

And [SIGHS] that's about the extent of our life, I guess.

Well, we honor you as a liberator. And we wish we could take away the pain. And unfortunately, we probably can't. But just know that what you're doing now so that other people will know what happened is extremely important. And we thank you for doing it in spite of the fact that it's very, very difficult for you to do it.

I hope somebody, or all the people benefits by what I have said here today.

Thank you.