

MARVIN PALANKER

Marvin Polanker joined the US. Army in 1943 when he was 18 years old. After basic training he was sent to England and participated in the Normandy invasion as member of the 438th battalion under General Hodge. He was an operator of a 40-mm gun and a half track machine gun. There is a picture of the gun after the landing and one of himself and a friend in Germany. They advanced and were the first US. troops to enter Germany at Aachen. It was around Rosh Hashanah and they had the first Jewish service since Hitler; there was even some shelling during the service. He and his friends had heard rumors about the concentration camp but could not believe them. They advanced so rapidly until December that they ran out of supplies and had to retract. After the Battle of the Bulge, they had to retreat about 150 miles, re grouped and then advanced again through Germany to Cologne. In the middle of April they reached the camp Nordhausen without resistance and there were no people in the streets. At the camp, they found bombed out barracks and about 2400 bodies of people who were shot just before they arrived; only one was still alive. He shows a map of this part of Germany. Most of the dead were not Jews but political prisoners from occupied countries. None of the town's people admitted even to suspecting of what had been going on in the camp; they thought it was some kind of work camp in spite of the smoke and smell. They also found skeleton remains near the ovens. It was his most horrible experience of the entire war. He shows pictures of a large number of dead bodies and of some town people.

The army proceeded to meet the Russians 10 to 12 days later. Their own unit stayed in Grimma near Leipzig where he found groups of Czechs and Polish women who had been forced to walk forward and backward between the American and Russian fronts. He has a picture of a group of Polish girls. He was the only Jew in his unit and by speaking a little Yiddish tried to communicate with them. Two Czech girls asked him to write to their cousin in Buffalo whom he happened to know from school. The girls went back to Prague, against his advice, to look for their parents and relatives. Another officer American also was in Europe with the American Army and he went to Prague and brought them back. Both came to the United States and got married.

His company then went to Nancy, France, expecting to be shipped to the Pacific but the war ended soon and he came back home. He was never wounded during the war but later caught polio and he is now confined to a wheelchair.

He is reluctant to show his photographs too much and has no particular message. The pictures speak for themselves and there are already too many messages.