

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. This evening, we have a very important visitor, Charles R. Sandler. Charles Sandler was a army liberator of two concentration camps, of Mauthausen and Gusen, on May 5, 1945. Charles, would you please tell us about how you got into the army, what division you were in, and what led you to that time when you actually liberated the camps?

OK. I'd be glad to, Toby. I volunteered under the draft and entered the service in April 1941 as an enlisted man. By way of describing background experience which led me up to the camps, which happened some five years later, I served as an enlisted man in the ranks of private, corporal, sergeant, and so on, and then went to the officer's candidate school for the Army Infantry Training Center at Fort Benning, Georgia. I graduated there as commissioned second lieutenant.

And I reported to the 11th Armored Division and served my entire balance of my term with the 11th Armored Division, which was an armored team at that time. I was with them for three years. And it was the 11th Armored Division, or a combat team of that division, that liberated Mauthausen.

And I guess, the next answer is how we got there. And just very quickly, this division served in the European theater of operations. We fought through the rugged battles of the Battle of the Bulge, the Rhineland campaign, and the Central Europe campaign. Three battle stars were awarded to the division as a result of those combat tours. I personally made out quite happily. I consider surviving being a good result. I was wounded in the course of combat, but was not of a major consequence. And I was able to continue with the division.

And I guess, the tale would bring us down towards the end of combat. Our route took us from France through Belgium to the Bulge, from the Bulge in a corner of Liechtenstein, then into Germany to the Rhine River, crossed the Rhine River, and then headed in a southeasterly direction towards Czechoslovakia, and went into Czechoslovakia, pulled back from there, and then headed into Austria. And that was the tail end of the war. As you know, V-E Day was May 8th, as I recall. And we got into the camps in May 5th.

Before you get to the aspect of the camps, did you and your peers, your buddies, have any feeling or any idea as to what was happening to the Jewish population of Europe?

No, no, it was a total unknown quantity to us. We had no knowledge of it.

Did you ever meet any of the survivors?

The first incidence of it, as I recall, would have been about mid-April, a history-- my recollection's a little weak. But the date that we heard that the commander in chief, then President Roosevelt, died, which my recollection was in mid-April, on that very day, and just a coincident that this stays in my mind, we saw for the first time, along a route march-- you have to picture an armored division moves with very heavy vehicles, medium tanks, light tanks, half-tracks, and supporting trucks, supply trucks. And it's quite a visible scene, stirs up a lot of dust.

And I remember very clearly seeing some stragglers in the fields and along the edges of the road, who were obviously very unkempt, and most in prison garb, and very emaciated, and very sickly. And of course, when my column stopped for one reason or another for a few minutes, we had men hop out who spoke fluent German and interrogated these men as to who they were, where they came from.

Did you think that they were-- well, did you have any idea as to why they--

No idea. We had no idea what they were, or who they were, or where they came from. And in brief, that was the first time that they described us that they were members or they were former inmates of a concentration camp, a small camp in upper Austria, the name of which has since escaped me.

But that was our first description that there were such things as concentration camps. That was in April of '45. And until that time, we'd heard gossip or stories. And the army's great for gossip, but no one paid much attention to it. But that's the first time we really saw it.

Now, we're in the month of May. And you're approaching Mauthausen. Do you have any idea as to what will greet you? Do you have any? Do you smell anything? Do you see anything, any hints at all?

No. We had just finished in early May, probably around the 1st, we had finished what was probably the last serious firefight, that is, a serious engagement with some armed forces of the Nazis. And it wasn't a big battle, but probably lasted a day or two, just a skirmish. And we wrapped that up. And then the rumors started getting pretty strong that the war was about to come to an end. That would have been in the first week in May.

And everyone was starting to relax pretty well and figure, they're finally near the road's end. And then we received an order at that time-- I was the executive order, executive officer of the 21st Armored Infantry Battalion of the 11th Armored Division. So I was working right at the headquarters' group.

And we received orders to proceed to organize a combat task force and liberate a camp known as Mauthausen, which-- and that was located by map coordinates, which was maybe, oh 10-15 miles east of where we were at that time. And that's the first time we heard about Mauthausen. That's the first time I ever heard the name.

And that was our orders. At that time, we organized a task force, which included a tank unit and armored infantry units, some artillery units, and approached the Mauthausen camp.

Was there any fighting going on?

Yes, there was fighting. But after what this outfit had been through, it was not too much to talk about. It was a very minor skirmish. It didn't last over a half a day. The resistance was that which was put up by a remaining few, maybe a couple of dozen of diehard SS members who were still assigned to Mauthausen.

And they fought as they usually did, vigorously. And as the statement goes, to the death, which we obliged them with. And it was over before early afternoon, as I recall. And at that time, we entered the physical area of where Mauthausen was situated.

What were your first impressions?

Well, as we approached, you mentioned before odors. As we approached, one of the strongest impression, which I still very clearly recall, was that of the scent. One has various senses-- feels, sight, odor, and so on. But the smell, the smell was a horrendous smell, which none of us could conceive of what it was, nor could we anticipate.

I do recall a number of us-- this is not too far from Linz, Austria, which is a very-- on the other side of the river. And that's a big urban area with a factory. We thought it was kind of a factory order. But as we got nearer, the odor got stronger.

And in brief, what we smelled was the smell of death, of bodies rotting, hundreds of bodies stacked like cordwood, bodies still in the crematoria. Later on, we get some pictures here, I there's one picture that demonstrates the shot of the bodies, shot just lined up and decaying. I might-- there's the picture there.

There's no flesh on any of those bodies.

No, well, they-- nobody had much flesh on them there. I might add, for historical purposes, of someone looking at this reel some days in the future, and maybe when I'm long gone, that these pictures are not contrived photos. They were taken by one of my sergeants in the battalion with me, either at his shoulder or in the vicinity, and seeing him take the photos. These are bona fide. And there's no question of them. And some of them, I guess, I even appear.

What's happening in this picture?

Now, this is just a random shot of the way the prisoners were kept pinned like animals, barbed wire pens. And you'll see

that one man in the foreground is trying to scrape some chow out of a little pot that they shared almost on a communal basis. And these were some of the stronger, hardier men. These could stand up. Some of them could stand.

How did the survivors-- how did they greet you?

Well, with unmistakable, just never to be forgotten joy, and screaming, and hollering. And the gates were open. After it started out, after we got rid of the Germans, the gates were open, was it. You have to picture this huge monument. This is not just a shack. Mauthausen camp proper was a huge castle on a high ground, a very permanent-- if it weren't a concentration camp, I'd say it was a beautiful structure.

Here's some more bodies. These are just-- we found groups of bodies lying about at random throughout the camp. This was probably after we were there, a day or two, and got our bearings, and tried to settle down the thousands of inmates so they didn't run a random and kill themselves or starve to death. We finally got these bodies. We had brought in a bulldozer, dug the common grave.

And we went down on the little village of Mauthausen and Sankt Polten, which are little towns right below the camp. And the good bourgeois of those village, villagers in Austria, all to a man and woman, denied ever knowing there was a camp there, denied the smell of death, denied what was going on there. And so one of the things we did, you see the civilians putting the bodies in. We commandeered many of them, brought them up, and we let them do that work. So maybe they could pass on to their children the folly of their ways.

Were they antagonistic?

They weren't-- not at that time, no.

They probably had no choice.

We were all armed and they weren't. So they didn't have much to be antagonistic about. What you see now is the famous Mauthausen quarries. Now, these quarries are used for over 50, maybe 75 years. The story goes that the streets of Vienna, the capital, are paved with the stones that were mined at these quarries. Anyhow, the inmates of the camps were required, among other horror tales, to work in the quarries.

And the work itself there, I don't remember, about 175 steep steps. And these little undernourished guys would have to put these rocks on their back, something like the Moses and his followers in Egypt, and go up the stairs or down the stairs with these rocks. Many of them fell to their death. Many just collapsed from malnutrition.

And then in addition to that, at days when the SS guards were running out of other ways to entertain themselves, these guards would get together 100 or 200 inmates, not necessarily all Jewish in nature, a lot of non-Jews, and they'd put them at the top of the quarry, and have them link arms, and then prod them from behind with weapons, with rifles, and force them to jump off the top of the quarries to their death.

Oh, dear.

And then they ironically described those poor souls as parachutists. That was a sense of humor of the German mind in those days.

Were there any captured Americans there?

There was one American survived that his name was Jack Taylor. He is a former OSS man that had parachuted into the Balkans, had been captured. And somehow or other, he was shipped up into Mauthausen. And I think Jack served as a witness in some of the-- either in Nuremberg or some of the lesser trials.

When we got him, he was scheduled-- they're really methodical, the Germans. They had the list of the people to be killed in the ensuing days by name, and rank, and name, and number. And Jack was scheduled to be killed the day after

we got there. And he weighed about 100 pounds at the time. He was very sick. We weren't able to talk to him too much. But we spoke to him at some length. He was evacuated to a medical facility. And to my knowledge, he's still alive and well out in the West Coast.

What actually did your group do when they came into the camp?

Well, after the firefight, as I say, it was just a massive job. You have to picture a situation of 15,000 souls that were just beyond description-- starving, beaten, abused, and they just wanted to break out of captivity. And they were running out the gates into the countrysides, where they were just bound to the neighboring villagers. If they caught them, would have killed them too.

And we first thing, we kind of rounded them up, as gently as you can round up people that were demented, really, and got them back in, and explain that what we're going to try to do for them. We're going to help them. And with-- oh, with very rare exception, they listened. They were reasonable.

We got them back in the camp. And our first job was just to get these poor souls separated into the various priorities-- those that were dead, of course, were dead. There were many that were dying, that could not possibly be saved, kind of set those aside, and got them what medical attention they could. But they had about a 90% death rate of that. There were several thousand in that category.

Did you come in with medics?

We just had our battalion medics, was just a small force. We radioed up to higher headquarters. And they sent in specialized teams, field hospitals, and companies of nurses, companies of nutritionists, people who were well-qualified to try to bring order out of chaos. And they did it in short order. Now, our troops stayed on as kind of a-- seems ironical, kind of a guard unit to help the others, just to keep control, and to facilitate the people who are going to do the work.

And as they came in, our function cut down. Our toughest goal was maybe the first two weeks or so, although we were there for-- I left for about three and a half months. And this was all, of course, at Mauthausen. There was another picture we might put back on, is a shot of the--

I think of the--

--of the crematorium.

--crematorium. Just on them. And if you can pick up on that, here it is. Now, this is-- again, this is an actual one of the ovens in the crematoria. I don't remember. There weren't a lot, maybe everything's relative.

Were they still functioning?

Yes. They were functioning. There were still fires in them. There were still half-burned bodies on the slabs. And there were bodies burning when we got there, as there were bodies. Now, here's another picture. This is a difficult picture, maybe, to see. But you're looking at the inside of the gas chamber, which was a large gas chamber.

And the right-hand corner with the circle is just a corner picture. And what you see is like bathroom shower tiles. This was a huge, tiled area-- ceiling, floor, and all walls. And they deceived these poor souls, who at that time, were mentally beaten down, that it was time to take a shower. And they ushered them into the shower, into these tiled rooms, which looked like showers.

They had showerheads, like you have at home. The only thing, these Germans, the fine, upstanding characters of history, neglected to explain was that out of that showerhead, instead of water, came gas, which killed these souls in a matter of minutes. And when we got there, those bodies you saw, were bodies that were still in there from the last gassing, which had taken place the day before.

Oh, we have another picture that was just put on.

Oh, all right. Oh, this was just-- this has to do with Gusen concentration camp, which was about six kilometers down the road, in which there may be about 10,000 inmates. Mauthausen had about 15,000 when we got there. And in our honor, they ran a surprise formation. This is my commanding officer and myself in the front line. There are about six of us trooping the line. And they were just paying their respects. This was their way of saying thanks.

Oh, the inmates.

All the inmates-- thank you, god bless you. Might even see behind the two of us is a man in a white smock. He was the surviving senior physician. He was a Czech, as I recall, a fine, fine man. And he survived. And he saved many lives, I was told, during their incarceration. But that was the Gusen camp, which was probably worse than Mauthausen, if it could be worse. The structures were--

In what respect?

--all the structures were more temporary shacks. They had what they called there, in their derisive manner, the Bahnhof, the train station. And that's where they would put the terminally dying, those about to die, and they were on the train to kingdom come. They ran them in. And the Germans spoke of that with great humor and great glee, Austrians and Germans. And that all took place in Gusen.

Did you essentially do the same thing in Gusen that you did in Mauthausen?

The same, the same, that's right. The people that came in to feed these people were-- just had one terribly difficult assignment. But they did. They put them-- they started them out, I well remember, on a 900-calorie ration, which does sounds like starvation.

But they just couldn't accommodate more.

They couldn't handle more. And the 900 kept them very happy.

That was the army that came in?

That's right. The army-- I don't know the exact definition of the type unit-- but there were nutritionists feeding. They were not combat kitchen units. These were people from higher headquarters, who really knew their business.

Have you ever had any reunions with survivors who were in Mauthausen or Gusen years later?

Well, no, the only person I have met, the only survivor of Mauthausen, interestingly enough, is one man. He's a world-famous man, and that familiar to all, is Simon Wiesenthal.

Oh, the Nazi hunter.

Wiesenthal was a prisoner in Mauthausen. He was one of those we liberated. I never did learn that till about 1980, '82. And through there, when he was in Buffalo, I was introduced to him by Morris and Trudy Friedler of Buffalo residence, who honored us with having-- we had dinner with several other couples. And we met the great Wiesenthal, who was a very interesting man.

Did he indicate what his impressions were of the army liberators?

No, he didn't know. He spoke of other things. We really didn't get into that. One thing that occurs to me-- you speak of the reactions of people. I think a significant experience or a memento that I recall that-- you asked what happened the first day we came in there. We, of course, tried to bring order out of chaos. Maybe this was the second day or so. But I was able to get away for a bit from my pressing principal duties.

And of course, at that time, I always consider myself first an American and an American military man, but close behind, of course, I never forgot the fact that I was an American Jew. And I asked where the Jewish inmates were. Everyone I met in the beginning were non-Jews. But even in that type horror hall, the German mind even not just segregated prisoners, but further segregated Jewish prisoners. And they were down what they called the lower camp.

Went down there, there were much fewer Jewish inmates than non-Jewish. And the obvious reason, they were killing them faster. They were burning them up faster. But I got down to the camps. And there were maybe, as I recall now, oh, six or eight barracks buildings. And each building probably had-- oh, there were built over here, you'd maybe put 40 people in them. Over there, they had 300-400 in each one. There was a four-tiered bunks. And they had to sleep three or four on a slat, if you can picture that. They're like animals, worse than animals. We don't have animals in them in this country.

And many of them had contagious diseases.

Oh, yes, dysentery, malaria-- not malaria.

Tuberculosis.

TB and there was another one that was a common-- a fatal, I can't think of it right now. Anyhow--

Diphtheria.

--and as I went in there, there was a woman-- they had them segregated in men's barracks and women's. And there was a young woman standing out inside, helping women. She was in pretty healthy condition. She was helping some of the less fortunate bathe and perform their ablutions, something or another. And I went over to her.

And she was fearful, of course, another military person, whatever they were American or German. She was very fearful. And with a few words-- I understand Yiddish pretty good, but I don't speak too well. But I was able to say the word, [YIDDISH]. And with that, chaos broke out in the Jewish camp. I could have been elected anything that day. She threw her arms around me. It was lovely, a young woman, lovely.

You were a hero.

And she cried, tears coming down. And she had nothing. She ushered me into the women's buildings, where those poor souls were lying. And she introduced who I was, what I was there for, and pandemonium, and much hugging, and much loving up. It was just wonderful. And then I went over to the men's buildings, and the same thing went forth there. And that was one of the--

Highlights.

--major thrills of my life, which I will never forget and always grateful that I had that opportunity of performing that small service. Many of those poor souls did die soon, within a matter of days after that.

The irony of having gone through so much to survive and yet not having the strength to make it.

That's right, not make it. That's right.

I see you have a memo or something.

Yes. I think this might be of interest to future students of history. This is a three-page memo. I have the original, but it's very it's becoming frail. It's about 40 years old now. This is a Xerox copy of it. This was given to me. It was typed by a doctor who was a German, but had come to this country and practiced in New York City for about 10 years, then went back to Germany, and was captured in the course of the Nazi era. And he typed this up, just as like-- he had to discharge

himself of this knowledge. He gave me the original. And we made copies and disseminated it to others.

By that time, investigators from the War Crimes Commission had come to the camp. And they were assembling this material. That was their job. I gave them a copy, but I kept the original. But this man's principle, he narrates what happened from about '48 on down. But the important things that he harps on, and I think should be made clear to students of history what went on.

This is 1948 or 1938?

1938, I misspoke.

1938.

I'm sorry. It was open in '38.

Yes.

I'm going to give a copy of this to you for some attachment to the archives.

For the archives, yes.

Maybe in a weak moment, I'll give you the original. We'll see. But I want to read two or three extracts from this, the description--

Please.

--of the type of hell that these people went through. This is just not like an anti-discrimination situation. This is such horror that many people won't believe it. Long after I'm dead, people will say-- there are people about today that disclaim this whole thing. It didn't happen.

The revisionists, of course, yes.

It never happened. But here here's a man who was there. And he's reading. I interrupt his narrative. But if you read it, it's in context. In view of the fact that the number of prisoners amounted lately to 50,000, dash the number of the dead is equal to about 200,000.

This high mortality is explained by the circumstance that Mauthausen was a camp of the third category, that is to say, a camp where most cruel methods were applied for the aim to harass and exterminate prisoners represented in the last years mostly by working intelligentsia of suppressed nations. And now, he talks about Franz Ziereis, which we'll get to. I have a few charming pictures of him.

Oh, we do have some pictures of the-- this is the picture right here, Charles.

We'll come. This is Franz Ziereis. According to this murderous purpose, a special staff was selected. Standartenführer, Franz Ziereis, known as one of the most bloodthirsty German hangmen, was appointed commander of the camp. It is needless to say that each member of the staff from the office of the private was specially trained in the application of the most cruel methods.

It must be emphasized that the right to survive was granted only those prisoners who were fit for work. Others, exhausted from work and starved, were considered a ballast and deserved extermination. Now, we'll jump ahead to some of the numbers. In the period from April 1940 until April 1941, about 8,000 members of Polish intelligentsia were killed in Gusen camp, a branch of Mauthausen.

During the autumn of winter of 1941 and the spring of '42, over 3,000 Dutch Jews were killed, mostly in the quarry,

hurled from the rocks or drowned by plunging into a stream. Another, he talks about the Soviets. They were indiscriminate in who they were murdering. The total number of Soviet prisoners amounted to 5,000 in Mauthausen, and in Gusen, 5,000.

The majority perished of famine, flogging, or mass slaughter of prisoners who were employed in the quarry. Others were poisoned with cyanide of potassium, sulfate of magnesia, or benzene injections. This exterminating action was carried out by the SS staff with collaboration of general German criminal prisoners belonging to the barracks personnel.

In this way, i.e., weak or half frozen naked prisoners were deposited on the floor in heaps and bathrooms and kept for the night under a cold shower. The miserable victims who tried to escape were knocked down and killed with cudgels. All right. There's some more ways in which they entertained themselves. Well, he speaks of the killing and the gas chambers and so on.

Now, he talks on the day of 6/1/43, a group of 47 English, American, and Dutch prisoners arrived with labels attached to their chests and bags bearing the inscription Spy. All of these prisoners were murdered in most cruel way in the quarry on the 6th and 7th day of September. And the period of time from 7/4/45 and 3/4/45, a group of-- well, then he goes on and tells how they killed another couple thousand just poisoning them there and the gassing.

Now, here's another thing. Various methods of murder were applied. In this report, only the most commonly used will be described, one-- the talk of the plagues that we talk about during Passover.

At Passover.

One, by smashing the brains with cudgels. Two, by knocking the victim down and threading on his thorax and abdomen. Three, by plunging the victim's head in a cask of water. Four, pouring water into the victim's pharynx by means of a rubber pipe. Five, prisoners were knocked down, an iron pipe introduced on his pharynx and pressure was applied on his thorax, threading, and stamping.

Six, some victims were torn to pieces by dogs. Now, there, I'll digress. I remember, when I went in there, we found a small amphitheater, probably half the size of this room. Reminded me of a throwback to the old Roman Coliseum. And there were just walls in the circular area and posts in the center of it with big rings in it.

And I asked, I said, what was that for? They told me that they trained these dogs, vicious German Shepherds-- and I saw some of them, I saw, that were segregated out in the field. These are huge animals. And they were trained to kill. So by way of sport for the SS troopers, when they had nothing else to do on an evening, they chained these dogs onto these posts and run some of these poor inmates, Jews and others, in with them.

And they cut the dogs loose, the keeper cut them. And they'd go, and they'd attack these people, and literally tear them to pieces. So this is-- I saw where it was done. It was all bloodstained on the ground. This is truth.

Seven, others were drowned in latrines somewhere. I don't know about you, if you're getting sick about this, but just maybe--

It's hard to believe. It's impossible.

--maybe these young people reading this later will understand some of it. Hell, and then he concludes, the above-- I'm skipping pages here. Another thing he speaks about, Franz Ziereis, his favorite trick, when he'd load up, they had these vans, large vans. And they'd run the exhaust pipe into the van. And it was hidden. They couldn't tell. And they load up 200 or 300, he talks about. And at a total, at one period of time, 2,000 or 3,000 were killed. And they put them in the van, tell them they're transporting them to the next camp, down to Gusen or something.

So they were mobile deaths?

By the time they got to Gusen, they were dead. They were dead. And Ziereis thought this was great entertainment.



Here's another. A transport of 4,000 sick prisoners, where came to Mauthausen in March of '45-- that's two months before we got there-- 400 men were picked out, stripped, and kept outdoors for 14 hours, from 8:00 PM to 10:00 AM, the night hours.

While standing in the cold-- this was the wintertime-- the victims received several times a spray of cold water. Those who survived were murdered with cudgels. Conclusion, the above-described methods of destruction are entitled to be mentioned in this brief report as methods most commonly applied. A detailed elaboration requires time.

Whatever happened to this horrible commandant?

All right, now, we've got the picture. You can throw that back on of Franz Ziereis. How's the time?

We have a few more minutes.

All right. I'll tell this story. This is not a tale that should be narrated in polite company. I don't think I've ever told it since I've been home, except to closest friends. Franz Ziereis, you saw before. And this is like an after picture. He was the head man of all of about 50 camps in Austria, of which the headquarters were Mauthausen.

After we captured the camp, the inmates came to us. They were very well-organized. Here he is in-- he was still alive in that picture. The inmates were very well-organized, a lot better than we are in civilian life. They sent a deputation to see me. I was then in charge of Gusen. They had about 10 men, one from each group.

And they asked me, and they implored me to give them a truck, a two and a half-ton truck, which is a cargo truck, which we had laying around, and some weapons. And I said, that is a crazy request. What do you want? We want to go hunting. We want to go hunting in the hills. And there near where this-- Mauthausen is near some hill and mountain country.

And at first, I thought, there were joshing. I said, well, for food? I thought they were going to go out and shoot some cattle, or deer, or something to feed the-- I says, no, no. We just-- please, don't ask us too many questions. I says, no. I said, I can't do it. And I turned them down. They persisted. And they got to my emotions pretty good.

And so they says, all right, we'll tell you a little bit. The man we want to hunt is human game. The man we're after is responsible for the killing of over 200,000 people. This was now-- you don't have to have any part of it. We just want to bring him to justice. We want to bring him back here. And they had a great intelligence system. How the hell they did this?

He had escaped from the camp?

He had escaped. How they had this, I don't know. He says, we've got intelligence. We know where he is. And we'll get him. So I cut them loose. I won't say I did. There was a truck found by them on the road, fully gassed. The truck, somehow or other, in a manner in which I don't know how it happened, there were several carbines found in the truck.

They disappeared early in the morning one morning and came back late in the day with Ziereis in the back of the truck, kind of perforated about four or five times, with carbine rounds. But he wasn't dead. He was in bad shape. But he was alive.

So I made them promise that they would keep a guard on him-- and I put a couple of our guards-- until he could be turned over for interrogation to the war crimes people. They said, they did-- they would. The next morning, you come to the next picture, now.

Thank you.

Thank you very much. The next morning, I came down about 6:00 AM, daylight, to pick Ziereis up, and here-- this is where he was. Things had gotten out of hand, rightly or wrongly. They had given him some of his own medicine. And

they had hung him, fittingly enough, with barbed wire as the noose--

Oh, my.

--and painted what you see there.

You have Hitler.

You have love Hitler and the swastika. Now, this is probably very savage, very bad behavior, that's something I wouldn't recommend or condone today. But in May of 1945, I must confess, at the risk of sounding as bad as others, it did not bring any tears in my eye. That's the story of Franz Ziereis. So the wheel turned in the way it should in his case. Now, you might have some other thoughts. I just want to.

Did you ever have a reunion with your fellow liberators?

With who?

With the liberators, with your fellow liberators.

No, I met with them. The 11th Armored Division has-- they're probably the most active alumni group of any division in the army. They have conventions or reunions every year in different cities in the country. I attended two, but they're sparsely-- only 300 or 400 men come out of 14,000-15,000 men that went through the division. And it did not appeal to me. I didn't see too many of them. So I stopped going.

And now, one thing I want to touch on, though, that I think is important. I've spoken of the military aspect of this from the beginning, and through the Bulge, and through combat, and the services that men did here. And I'd like to take this opportunity again, historically, to put to rest a canard that is analogous to what the revisionists say today that there never were camps. There are groups of those.

There are people around today, I've met some, who deride the activity of the Jews in World War II. I did not serve at a high level. I don't know what went on in the Pentagon, Washington, Albany, Buffalo area. But I sure as hell know that what went on in one combat unit was the 11th Armored Division. We took a lot of casualties. We had over 700 KIAs, that's Killed In Action, and over 3,500 WIAs, Wounded In Action, in the 11th Armor. That's 4,200 men out of, probably, I'd say, about 14,000-- pretty heavy casualty rate.

I know, of my own personal knowledge, the usual statistic of Jewish population in this country is approximately 3%, plus or minus. There are far more-- double and better than double that number-- of Jewish men in the 11th Armor. Now, I don't know other outfits. The first man I saw killed in the Battle of the Bulge was a fellow named Heimann Silverstein from the Bronx. No more need be said. And he was killed after he bayoneted-- I was right with him-- he killed by bayoneting at least eight Germans of an SS division, of their tough outfit we were fighting. And there were many other.

So the Jews are not the money changers of yore. They're not all lawyers or doctors. Like many people when they ask me what I did in service, they say, I assume you were in the judge advocate court. When I tell them, they're shocked when I tell them I was in the infantry. And that irritates me to no end. There are a lot of Jews in the infantry, the artillery, in the tank corps, and the combat engineers fighting for their country, as Americans first and as Jews doing their job, like every other religion should.

And I take a very strong exception to any innuendo, any comments that try to conclude to the contrary. And the young people that hopefully, someday, will listen to this, or read this, a year from now, 10 years, 50 years from now, they can be damn proud that their forefathers fought for this country. They didn't sit back and just change shekels into dollars. They worked hard. And they gave of their life. And they took their wounds and didn't crab or cry about it.

Chuck, you've made the point. You've made it well.

I wanted. That's the end of that. And the last thing is that one thing I think they showed already about the memorials. We've seen those memorials.

No, we haven't seen that yet. Perhaps, you'll tell us about that.

They run those. This, for those that are doubting Thomases, this is evidence of the fact that the 11th Armored was really there. This was a memorial that was elected by the new generation of Austrians, hopefully of different [? wrath ?] than their forefathers. They had a big celebration in May 1980 at the Mauthausen camp, at which this memorial was erected. The bottom part speaks for itself. You can read it.

And I also-- it'd be of interest, I think, historically that the-- again, credit to the modern Austrians, or some of them, anyhow, they have maintained a goodly portion of the Mauthausen camp, the permanent structures, as a point of interest, like we have the [PLACE NAME], the park down at the lower Main Street that we have here, and other memorials. And they've maintained that so that future Germans and others will see what could go on. And when they honored us, was on the anniversary-- it wasn't quite 40 years. 40 years would have been this year.

'85.

But anyhow, in 1980, they put this up and threw a big soiree. And I'm sad to say, I did not attend. But the 11th Armored was there. And these tales I'm narrating, there's now evidence in a memorial form that we really were there and we did our job.

We can go and see for ourselves.

It's there, that's right.

When you came back, did you tell these stories? Did people believe you?

Well, not many people asked you about it. Those days, and properly so, I guess, people took it easy. I mean, they came home from a combat unit. No one asked too much. Or close members of the family may have said. And I told what was asked. I didn't volunteer much. But I'm sure they believed me because the most insane mind couldn't conjure up the story. Could be the craziest novelist alive and you couldn't write a story like this. No one would believe it. So it had to be true.

And of course, in later events, history, the Nuremberg trials proved to be true. And there is all overwhelming evidence, of course. But we talked about it sparingly until after I was home, I guess, a couple of years, it must have been-- 1946 or '47. I got home in '46. I did some speaking for the United Jewish Federation, at which time, I publicly for the first time--

Talked about it.

--told the story that we're telling about now. And if there were disbelievers, let's put it this way, they didn't voice their disbelief. I can't believe that they may have been aghast. But they had to believe. They had to believe.

And I guess, to wrap up in my view of the thing, as a former-- now, a retired lawyer, a trial lawyer, you get to the senses of that sustained evidence. I saw it. I felt it with my hands. I felt the bodies. I smelled it. I sensed it. It was there. I remember it. And I hope that the young folks, particularly, who view this in later years will remember it and tell their children about it. Everything, of course, we're all hopeful that this will never happen to any religion. I'm not talking of just of Jews.

Of course.

Jews, Arabs, anybody, that this should never happen again. But I don't think anybody can rest easy that it won't happen again as long as there's some evil, vicious minds at the top of governments in the country and the world, there's always a chance of it happening. I would strongly pray and hope that people, through education, will do everything to fight the

most remote chance of it happening.

And that's reason for your doing this interview, for which we thank you very much. I know it's difficult. We will use it for serious educational purposes. Thank you very much, Charles Sandler.

You're very welcome. And I appreciate the opportunity of this very small piece of narrating history as it was.

Thank you.

OK. Thank you.